



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE COMMITS \$50,000 FOR ELEPHANT CONSERVATION IN AFRICA

The Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today committed \$50,000 as the first donation in a national effort to raise up to \$4 million to support conservation programs for the African elephant, Director Frank Dunkle announced today in Washington, DC.

Dunkle said his agency will earmark \$50,000 toward a cooperative effort to bolster elephant conservation programs in Africa. He noted that the World Wildlife Fund, a private conservation organization, has pledged to match up to \$2 million in Federal funds for this purpose.

"We hope the Service's modest outlay will act as a catalyst to inspire contributions from the conservation community and private business to improve the prognosis for the African elephant, populations of which have declined by as much as 50 percent in the wild in the past decade," Dunkle said. Additional financial support may be available from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, he said. The Congressionally chartered foundation underwrites various wildlife management projects, including some by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

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In a June 22 hearing before the Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation and the Environment of the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, the World Wildlife Fund proposed to raise up to \$2 million for elephant conservation if Congress would authorize a similar amount in the next year. The Fund estimates that at least \$4 million per year in each of the next 3 years would be required from non-African sources to adequately support elephant conservation programs on that continent.

U.S. support for such programs would include direct financial aid to wildlife agencies of ivory-producing nations, providing equipment and technical assistance to those organizations, and strengthening the anti-poaching units of nations where illegal hunting of elephants continues.

An estimated 760,000 elephants remain in the wild in Africa, down from approximately 1.5 million 10 years ago. Ivory poaching and degradation and disappearance of habitat have been blamed for this decline.

As a Federally designated "threatened" species and an "Appendix II" species under the 95-nation Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), African elephants and their ivory and other products can be legally traded under certain controls. Under a CITES ivory trade control system, annual raw ivory export quotas are set and tusks must be marked in an effort to control poaching and verify the legality of ivory in international commerce.

Pending legislative proposals call for stronger controls on the trade in African elephant ivory, including a total ban on elephant products coming into the United States. The Fish and Wildlife Service has testified against such a ban at this time, suggesting that such unilateral action would have no significant effect on the international trade in ivory and could undermine the efforts of African nations to control poaching and illegal trade under existing CITES controls.

"We believe we can more effectively bolster the existing efforts of the various African nations with an immediate infusion of financial support and technical assistance, rather than erecting a trade barrier that may provide little incentive for those countries to manage elephants through limited harvesting," Dunkle said. "Most elephant trade experts and conservation groups agree that a ban could be counterproductive. That is why we believe a large-scale cooperative venture is the right way to begin."