



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE IMPOSES MORATORIUM ON AFRICAN ELEPHANT IVORY IMPORTS FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES

Secretary of the Interior Don Hodel, taking initial steps to implement the African Elephant Conservation Act of 1988, has announced an immediate ban on all imports of raw and worked elephant ivory from countries not party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Frank Dunkle said, "We are totally committed to doing our part to stop the alarming decline of African elephant populations. The Secretary's action is just a first step in plans to fully implement the African Elephant Conservation Act." Population estimates for the species have declined by as much as 50 percent in the last decade, due largely to poaching for the illegal trade in ivory, and the continuing decline in suitable habitat.

The African elephant is listed as a "threatened" species under the Endangered Species Act and is listed in Appendix II under CITES. Regulations promulgated under these two measures and the new African Elephant Conservation Act govern international trade in elephant ivory.

The Service is in the process of finalizing amendments to current special rules governing the import and export of African elephant ivory in order to implement the provisions of the Act, which was signed by President Reagan October 7 as Title II of the Endangered Species Act 1988 amendments.

In addition to calling for the moratorium on ivory imports from non-CITES countries, the Act requires the Service to review the elephant conservation and protection programs of all ivory-producing countries. Those countries which do not have adequate programs under criteria outlined in the Act also may be subject to an ivory import moratorium until their programs are improved.

During the next year, the Service will be reviewing these programs for information such as current population status; amount of available elephant habitat; annual elephant reproduction and mortality; current wildlife management practices impacting elephants; effects, if any, of adjacent countries' wildlife management programs on resident populations; control and monitoring of the taking of wild elephants;

and the country's compliance with the CITES ivory quota system, under which legal exports of raw ivory from ivory-producing countries are marked and tracked from country to country until the ivory is carved or worked.

In 1985, CITES established this marking and quota system for raw ivory exported from ivory-producing countries (i.e., countries whose boundaries include any part of the range of a population of African elephants). Permits issued for these legal exports are tracked through a CITES office in Switzerland. Computer entries check for duplicate tusk numbers and permits. That office notifies importing countries, which verify shipments upon arrival. Raw ivory is thus tracked from country to country until it is converted to worked ivory. This system makes identification of illegal (i.e., unmarked) ivory much easier, and, although relatively new, is thought to have already decreased some of the demand, and thus the price paid, for illegal ivory.

Elephant populations in Africa have fallen from an estimated 1.5 million in 1979 to a current estimate of no more than 750,000. In some countries, native populations have been all but extirpated. It is believed that illegal poaching to supply the tremendous international demand for ivory is largely to blame for the African elephant's dramatic decline. Many African countries are eager to put a stop to this killing, but are hard-pressed to find the funds required to combat well-armed poachers reaping huge profits from the illegal ivory trade.

The African Elephant Conservation Act authorizes appropriations of up to \$5 million for the next 5 fiscal years to be deposited into a special African Elephant Conservation Fund. If funds are appropriated, they will be used to support approved projects for research, conservation, management, or protection of the African elephant.

Last year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service committed \$50,000 to assist African elephant conservation efforts. Also, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a private organization, has approved a grant of \$100,000 to support elephant protection activities in Tanzania.

The Asian elephant, a different species, is listed as "endangered" under the Endangered Species Act, and in Appendix I of CITES. All commercial trade in Asian elephant ivory is already illegal.

The moratorium became effective upon publication of a Federal Register notice Tuesday, December 27.