

September 1, 2017

Statement from Mari Snyder Johnson, board member, Defenders of Wildlife

My name is Mari Snyder Johnson and I serve as a board member for Defenders of Wildlife in Washington, D.C. I wish I could have delivered this statement in person. I support thoughtfully protecting species and their habitats because it provides balance in their natural world that ultimately protects us as humans. I appreciate your acceptance and consideration of my statement supporting an ivory ban to protect some of the greatest and most majestic of earth's creatures before they are gone.

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities.

Founded in 1947, Defenders of Wildlife is a science-based major conservation organization focused solely on wildlife and habitat conservation and the safeguarding of biodiversity throughout North America. We believe in the inherent value of wildlife and the natural world, and this singular focus defines our important niche in the environmental and conservation community and serves as the anchor for our organizational values.

Defenders' approach is direct and straightforward - We protect and restore imperiled species throughout North America by transforming policies and institutions and promoting innovative solutions – and this approach makes a lasting difference for wildlife and its habitat:

- On the ground at the state and local level, developing practical, innovative programs that protect and restore key species and habitats and inform our national policy work.
- With state, national and international policy makers to secure laws and policies that protect animals and their habitats. We are widely recognized by our peers and policymakers for the effectiveness of our advocacy work, particularly with the Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture and are known for being the most effective advocate for wildlife funding in the federal appropriations process.
- In the courts establishing legal safeguards for native wildlife and fighting efforts to roll back environmental protections. We act as legal counsel on behalf of a population segment that cannot act for itself, North America's wildlife.

As such, Defenders of Wildlife and its nearly 1.2 million members and supporters demands an immediate end to illegal ivory trading worldwide. Between 2010 and 2012, poachers slaughtered an estimated 100,000 elephants for the ivory. That's roughly one elephant butchered every 15 minutes. There are estimates that only 29,500 rhinos remain in the wild, down from several hundred thousand in Africa before the 1800's. These dwindling numbers are under serious threat from poachers who feed the illegal trade of ivory. Governments across the world can and should do much more to end this senseless killing.

Rhinos rank among the most endangered species on Earth. Valued for their horns, they face a dire threat from poaching, which is rapidly pushing them towards extinction. Their horns are used in traditional Chinese medicine, as well as carved into jewelry, dagger handles and other trinkets. Rhino horns have become so valuable on the black market that thieves are stealing them from museums and game trophies shot long ago.

Adding to the problem is the fact that for some species, like the Sumatran rhino in particular, over-hunting has occurred for so long that the remaining population is broken into disconnected groups, unable to breed and to continue adding to the species genetic diversity.

The biggest threat to rhinos is poaching – they are killed for their horns, which are sold in the illegal wildlife trade. One way to confront this threat is to decrease the demand for these products. The U.S. is the second largest consumer of illegal wildlife products in the world, so decreasing the demand here at home can have a great impact for wildlife on the ground, even half a world away. Defenders is working on Capitol Hill to fight legislative efforts to weaken the Endangered Species Act and the protections for rhinos that come with it. We also advocate for more funding for law enforcement to keep poached rhino horns from being smuggled into the U.S.

In addition, we work on Capitol Hill to lobby for increased funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which oversees the inspection of wildlife shipments at our borders. Because this agency is underfunded, the U.S. does not have enough dedicated personnel to inspect shipments at every port of entry. As a result, a significant number of shipments each year – containing all manner of illegal wildlife products – make their way into the U.S. Our goal is to ensure the agency has sufficient resources to carry out their responsibility to prevent illegal wildlife products from entering or leaving the U.S. Defenders also raises awareness about this issue in order to reduce consumer demand for these products here in the United States

It's easy for illegal ivory to blend in with the legal ivory for sale in U.S. markets. Because it is legal to sell African ivory that was imported before 1989, and because legal ivory is often sold without certification, illegal ivory is often sold under the guise of a legal sale. And since many wildlife products made from hippo teeth, walrus teeth, warthog tusks, etc. look very much like elephant ivory, it can be difficult for law enforcement officials to determine what is legal and what isn't without the use of expensive and destructive testing. Right now, products are considered legal until proven otherwise. Law enforcement officers must prove that the seller knew that their ivory was illegally obtained before they can pursue a conviction. Current U.S. law is outdated, confusing, and full of loopholes.

Defenders of Wildlife is committed to protecting endangered and threatened wildlife and their habitat. We have a responsibility to be good stewards of our environment and ensure that wildlife remains strong now and for future generations to come.