

ORAL STATEMENT

DAN ASHE, DIRECTOR, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REGARDING THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR COMBATING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

February 26, 2014

Good morning Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking.

Spurred by President Obama's Executive Order, the strategy leverages resources and expertise across the federal government to crack down on poaching and trafficking of hundreds of species.

As recent events demonstrate, United States leadership is vital to this struggle. Since we crushed the United States' stock of seized illegal ivory in November, China and France have followed suit and destroyed illegal ivory. Hong Kong has also announced its intention to do so.

In addition, we concluded our most successful CITES Conference ever, with nine of the 10 proposals we sponsored or supported gaining approval by member nations.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will lead the strategy's implementation with the Departments of Justice and State, building on the foundation the Service has laid through decades of international conservation and law enforcement work.

We have a four-tiered approach to combat wildlife trafficking with our international partners.

First, we continue to work with international law enforcement agencies to disrupt and dismantle trafficking networks and arrest those responsible for the brutal slaughter of elephants, rhinos and other species in the wild.

We provide critical financial and technical support for on-the-ground conservation efforts, and to build the capacity of range states to protect wildlife and bring poachers and traffickers to justice.

We work here in the United States and with our partners in Asia, Europe and Latin America to reduce the demand for wildlife products.

And we continue to work with CITES member nations to support sustainable trade in wildlife products and well-managed wildlife management programs that provide jobs and economic development in range countries, thus reducing the allure of poaching and trafficking.

I now want to highlight some of the strategy's most significant actions and recommendations.

We are using use the full extent of our existing legal authority to stop virtually all commercial trade in elephant ivory and rhino horn within the United States and across its borders.

All commercial imports of African elephant ivory into the United States will be prohibited, without exception. Nearly all commercial exports of elephant ivory will also be prohibited, with the exception of a very small, strictly defined class of antiques with verified documentation of their antiquity. Domestic commerce will be prohibited, again with the exception of

documented antiques and other items clearly documented as legally imported prior to the protection of the species under CITES Appendix I.

I want to emphasize that possession of legally-acquired elephant ivory and rhino horn is not and will not be illegal.

The Strategy recommends that Congress consider legislation recognizing wildlife trafficking crimes as predicate offenses for money laundering. Doing so would give our special agents the same tools as other federal law enforcement agencies, and put an end the days of wildlife trafficking as a low-risk, high-profit crime. We would also like to work with Congress to ensure that funds generated through wildlife trafficking prosecutions are invested into conservation efforts or toward enhancing our ability to combat wildlife trafficking.

The Strategy also recommends the continued sale of the Save Vanishing Species Semipostal stamp, which has become a key part of our response to the global epidemic poaching and wildlife trafficking. The public has purchased more than 25.5 million stamps, generating more than \$2.5 million for conservation. Those funds, matched by an additional \$3.6 million in partner

contributions, have been used to support 47 projects in 31 countries, benefitting elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, marine turtles, and great apes.

I want to conclude by asking you to consider this moment in history. We have a chance here, and now, to take action and ensure that elephants, rhinos, and hundreds of other wild plant and animal species do not vanish from the wild. Decades from now, I want my grandchildren and yours to be able to see these iconic species – their heritage as global citizens – thriving in their natural habitat. I look forward to working with your Committee to make it a reality.