

Year in Review: Highlights from Implementing the U.S. National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking

Forging New Partnerships & Engaging New Audiences

Government action alone cannot solve this issue. Under the U.S. National Strategy, we are enlisting new partners from local communities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to help our cause. We are also finding new ways to connect with and inform broader audiences.

- Throughout the year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) supported awareness-raising efforts and demand reduction campaigns in Africa and Asia, including rhino-focused environmental education programs in northern Tanzania and tackling demand for tigers, rhinos and other endangered wildlife in Vietnam.
- Building on 2014 program assessments of the ivory and rhino horn trade, in January 2015 USAID convened transportation and logistics companies, which are increasingly exploited by wildlife traffickers, to discuss the issue. At this industry-led event, representatives from airlines, industry associations, logistics and courier companies, and customs agencies jointly prioritized collaborative actions to curtail this illegal trade.
- On January 13, 2015, U.S. Ambassador to Kenya Robert Godec hosted the first Kenyan tweet event on promoting wildlife conservation using the hashtag #Tweet4Elephants. Prominent figures in elephant conservation joined leading Kenyan social media personalities in the tweet event. The event facilitated an interactive, free-flowing conversation about the protection of elephants with audiences outside of the conservation community through social media.

Wildlife trafficking is a serious crime that undermines security across nations and fuels instability. The poaching of protected species and illegal trade in wildlife are pushing iconic species, such as pangolins, rhinos, and tigers, to the brink of extinction, robbing people not only of their natural heritage, but also economic opportunities.

Recognizing the urgent need for a coordinated response to this growing global crisis, on July 1, 2013, President Obama issued an Executive Order that established an interagency Task Force on combating wildlife trafficking and charged it with developing a strategy to guide U.S. efforts on this issue. The National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, released on February 11, 2014, sets forth a robust, whole-of-government approach that focuses on key strategic priorities to stop wildlife trafficking. The agencies that comprise the Task Force are working closely to achieve the Strategy's objectives. Recognizing that this will require a significant and sustained commitment, on the first anniversary of the Strategy's release, the Task Force unveiled the Implementation Plan for the Strategy, which details the next steps that the United States will take to combat wildlife trafficking.



Photo credit: USFWS

Operation Crash is an ongoing, multi-agency criminal investigation led by USFWS addressing all aspects of U.S. involvement in the black market rhino horn trade. Thus far, the initiative has resulted in 26 arrests and 18 convictions.

Enforcement Operations & Noteworthy Prosecutions

Strong enforcement in the United States is critical to stopping those who kill and traffic in protected species. The Department of Justice (DOJ) works closely with federal enforcement agencies, including USFWS, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the U.S. Forest Service, to investigate and prosecute wildlife traffickers.

In 2014, the United States indicted, prosecuted, and secured convictions in numerous cases of trafficking in protected species. Some noteworthy cases from the past year include:

- *United States v. Zhifei Li*: Zhifei Li, the ring-leader of an international smuggling scheme, was responsible for smuggling more than \$4.5 million worth of illegal wildlife and wildlife products, including 30 rhinoceros horns and carved objects made from rhinoceros horn or elephant ivory. In May 2014 Li was sentenced to 70 months in prison, one of the longest sentences to be imposed in the U.S. for a wildlife smuggling offense.
- *United States v. Andrew Zaruskas*: In January 2015, New Jersey resident Andrew Zaruskas was sentenced to 33 months in prison for illegally importing and trafficking in narwhal tusks and associated money-laundering offenses. Zaruskas was also ordered to forfeit \$85,089, six narwhal tusks and one narwhal skull, and ordered to pay a fine of \$7,500.

Building Capacity to Combat Wildlife Trafficking

In 2014, the United States' international programs to combat wildlife trafficking focused on the provision of technical assistance and capacity-building activities to strengthen law enforcement and criminal justice systems and reduce demand for wildlife. For example:

- The State Department supported approximately 20 law enforcement investigative training sessions, benefiting nearly 30 countries through partners from INTERPOL and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).
- In December 2014, the U.S. Departments of State and Justice provided assistance to a UNODC-led workshop that resulted in the creation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Legal Task Force for Wildlife. This new task force will develop a legal handbook, toolkit, and training course for ASEAN government officials.
- NOAA and USFWS supported a Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) shark and ray workshop hosted by Colombia in November 2014, where representatives from over 20 countries learned new techniques for monitoring and controlling the trade of protected shark species.
- DHS Immigration and Customs Enforcement led investigator training courses in Thailand; participants were trained in post seizure investigative techniques, including interviewing, surveillance, controlled deliveries, and evidence collection.
- SMART software, along with equipment and procedures for more effective ranger-based monitoring, was rolled out in several conservation areas in Central Africa in 2014 with USAID support; in the 8,100-square-mile Maringa-Lopori-Wamba landscape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, patrols covered at least 55 percent of critical elephant and ape habitat and 68 poachers were arrested and subsequently prosecuted.

U.S. Leadership: Setting a Standard for Increased International Commitments

Since the release of our National Strategy, other nations have joined us in increasing their commitment and political will to combat wildlife crime. For example, in February 2014, shortly after the release of the U.S. National Strategy, the Prime Minister of Vietnam issued a directive instructing all ministries and local authorities to prioritize wildlife trafficking, and Tanzania and the European Union began developing their own strategies for combating poaching and illegal wildlife trade. In May 2014 China announced \$10 million in funding to support wildlife protection and conservation in Africa.

Strengthening U.S. Wildlife Trade Controls

This year, USFWS took several administrative actions to strengthen domestic controls over import, export, and sale of African elephant ivory, rhino horn and specimens of other protected species. This included a ban on all commercial imports of elephant ivory. We are encouraging our international partners to take similar steps to ban the commercial trade in ivory.

In November 2014, USAID sponsored the launch of the "**Give Peace to Elephants, Say No to Ivory**" campaign, which brings together leaders from Chinese business, culture, art, and religion to speak with one voice against the ivory trade. This campaign received overwhelming support from Chinese media and private corporations, and some of China's major online portals provided new technology to the campaign.



Photo credit: IFAW