



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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U.S. IMPOSES MORATORIUM ON IVORY IMPORTS FROM SOMALIA

The United States today imposed an emergency ban on the importation of raw and worked African elephant ivory coming from the African Democratic Republic of Somalia in order to protect threatened wild elephant populations, Frank Dunkle, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today. The Service's action is based upon evidence in a petition from World Wildlife Fund, U.S., alleging that Somalia is not effectively controlling the domestic take of elephants and that exported ivory does not meet the requirements of international control systems.

Dunkle said the moratorium on imports of Somalian ivory would remain in effect while the Fish and Wildlife Service considers public comments on the information contained in the World Wildlife Fund's petition.

"This action sends a clear message that the Fish and Wildlife Service will exercise its full authority under the African Elephant Conservation Act to prevent any further trade in African elephant ivory which does not comply with international agreements and regulations," Dunkle said.

(over)

The 1988 African Elephant Conservation Act calls for an immediate ban on imports of ivory from any country that fails to monitor effectively or control its native elephant populations or that imports ivory from a country that prohibits the taking of elephants. International trade is regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), of which Somalia and the United States are members.

The information submitted to the Fish and Wildlife Service alleges that in the last 3 years, Somalia exported over 21,100 tusks. Somalia's 1986 annual report to CITES declares that in 1986 alone, it exported 16,986 tusks, representing some 9,440 elephants. In this report and other statements, Somalia has declared all tusks to be confiscated items and of Somali origin despite the fact that Somalia's native elephant population in 1987 was estimated to be no more than 4,500 animals; and no more than 8,600 in 1985. Somalia has thus declared exports of domestic ivory during the last 3 years representing roughly three times the number of elephants estimated to have been living in that country during 1987.

Available information indicates that ivory is being imported into Somalia from Kenya and Ethiopia. Kenya prohibits the take of elephants and Ethiopia allows only a very limited number of trophy hunts.

Somalia is a coastal East African nation with a relatively small native elephant population. The country became a party to CITES in 1986.

CITES is an international conservation treaty designed to regulate trade in species whose populations are in trouble. Nearly 100 countries have become members of CITES since its inception in 1975. In order to regulate trade in African elephant ivory, CITES developed an extensive computerized ivory quota system whereby legal exports of raw ivory must be marked, tracked, and reported.

The African elephant is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and is listed in Appendix II under CITES. Populations of the African elephant have fallen dramatically during the last decade, from an estimated 1.5 million in 1979 to no more than 750,000 presently. The illegal ivory trade has been blamed for much of this decline.

The moratorium became effective upon publication Friday, February 24, in the Federal Register. Public comments will be received for 60 days after the publication date. Comments should be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Management Authority, Division of Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, 18th and C Streets, NW, Washington, DC, 20240. The Service will render a decision on the petition within 90 days after the close of the comment period.