



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ANNOUNCES THAT THE UNITED STATES
IS CONSIDERING NEW MEASURES TO END ILLEGAL TRADE IN
AFRICAN ELEPHANT IVORY

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan, Jr., today announced that the United States is seriously considering additional trade restrictions to halt the importation of African elephant ivory.

"We have already banned ivory imports from more than 70 countries, including Somalia, and are on the verge of extending the import ban pursuant to the Elephant Protection Act," Lujan said. "I am outraged over the illegal poaching of African elephants and the level of ivory imports into certain countries. I urge others to do as the United States is doing in banning importation of ivory from countries that do not have elephant populations. We have reason to believe that some of this ivory is from illegal trading and that the commercial trading is out of control."

Lujan said the Department of the Interior is extending the import ban on specific countries and working with the Departments of Commerce and State to seek international cooperation in an effort to protect the species.

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On May 9, Lujan announced that the United States will support the international ban on commercial trade in African elephant ivory at the October meeting of the 101-member-nation Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

"We are considering all the options for halting illegal ivory trade," Lujan said. "Our concern is that no solution to the elephant problem can be effective without the full participation of the African nations that have elephants. We must also work with other countries interested in bringing to a halt the massive illegal destruction of the African elephant populations. We are reviewing this issue carefully and meeting with representatives of African countries to be sure that any actions taken by the United States are in fact helpful and constructive."

In that regard, Lujan said the Department is providing \$15,000 to send African representatives to a July meeting of the CITES Elephant Working Group to assist them in developing elephant conservation plans.

According to current available information, African elephant numbers have declined drastically in the last decade, from an estimated 1.5 million in 1978 to perhaps 700,000 currently. Poaching for the illegal ivory trade is the major cause of the decline.

"If, prior to the October 10 meeting, the Department receives new information to indicate an emergency ban of all commercial imports is appropriate and necessary for the conservation of the African elephant, we will move expeditiously to review that information and determine whether current regulations need to be amended," Lujan said.

This announcement comes on the heels of a May 9, 1989, announcement by Lujan on a finding to accept a petition to reclassify the African elephant as endangered. The Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service is proceeding with a full status review of the species, including an opportunity for public comment.