



# NEWS

*from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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## UNITED STATES TAKES INNOVATIVE ACTION TO SAVE IMPERILED RHINOS AND TIGERS

Imperiled wild rhinoceros and tigers now have a brighter future thanks to innovative legislation enacted by the U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Clinton on October 30, 1998. The Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act of 1998, which reauthorizes and amends the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act of 1994, includes an important new product labeling provision with the goal of stemming the sale of items labeled as containing rhino or tiger parts.

The new provision says that, "A person shall not sell, import, or export, or attempt to sell, import, or export, any product, item, or substance intended for human consumption containing, or labeled or advertised as containing, any substance derived from any species of rhinoceros or tiger."

"Continued commercial exploitation undermines all our best conservation efforts by putting a bounty on the heads of rhinos and tigers," said Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark. "Congress and the President have given us a forceful weapon to shut down this illegal trade once and for all."

The legislation supports other ongoing conservation measures such as the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

At latest count, there were no more than 5,000 to 7,000 tigers left in the wild. The total population of all three Asian rhino species is less than half the number of tigers and the African black rhino has suffered a 90-percent reduction since the 1960s.

The reauthorization of the Rhino and Tiger Conservation Act and its funding through FY 2002 ensures that the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service can continue to award grants to on-the-ground projects in countries where wild rhinos and tigers are found. Grants, which are matched with contributions from partners in those African and Asian countries, provide financial support to help them build the capacity to conserve the species and their essential habitats.

Congressional appropriations to the fund went from \$200,000 in FY 1996 to \$500,000 in FY 1999. Thus far, 56 projects in 12 nations have received \$970,000 in funding. This money has been tripled by matching funds, provided in most cases by the grant recipients, bringing the total to almost \$2.7 million.

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"These grants, though small, make a big difference to our partners in other countries," Clark said. "The simple act of providing boots, raincoats, radios, and basic training not only enhances the ability of rangers in India or Tanzania to undertake effective monitoring and anti-poaching patrols, but also boosts their morale."

The new product labeling provision of the Act gives Service law enforcement officers an important new tool for protecting rhinos and tigers against commercial exploitation. Although the U.S. has tried to stem the market for products purported to be made from rhino or tiger parts, these products are still available for sale in this country. If the accompanying label or advertisement says the package contains "rhino" or "tiger," law enforcement officers can now seize it at the port of entry or pull it from the store shelf. The prohibition also makes it easier to enforce existing laws that ban trafficking in endangered species and helps discourage the use of rhino or tiger parts in medicinal trade.

In the past, under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, the Service had to prove that the items actually contained parts or products from these species, a time-consuming and costly process involving laboratory analysis. Furthermore, the Endangered Species Act only prohibits the import, export, or interstate commerce in these products but does not specifically prohibit their sale.

Clark praised many members of Congress for their work in enacting this legislation. "In particular, I commend Senators Jeffords, Chafee, and Baucus and Congressmen Young, Saxton, and Miller for crafting such important legislation and for their steadfast leadership," Clark said.

The Service will emphasize educational outreach in its early implementation of the law in order to get the word out to shopkeepers and give them a chance to voluntarily remove these products from the marketplace. The Service will also be working with the United Kingdom and other CITES member countries at upcoming CITES meetings to encourage implementation of similar programs worldwide.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System comprised of more than 500 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands, and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered

Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies.