

Suspension of Import of Elephant Hunting Trophies Taken in Tanzania and Zimbabwe in 2014

Questions & Answers

On April 4, 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced a suspension of imports of sport-hunted African elephant trophies taken in Tanzania and Zimbabwe during calendar year 2014.

Why has the Service made this decision?

Tanzania's and Zimbabwe's elephants face an uncertain future.

Questionable management practices, a lack of effective law enforcement, and weak governance have resulted in uncontrolled poaching and catastrophic population declines in Tanzania. For example, the Selous, Africa's largest protected area, has lost 66 percent of its elephants in the past five years.

In Zimbabwe, available data, though limited, indicate a significant decline in the elephant population, while anecdotal evidence, such as the widely publicized poisoning of 300 elephants last year in Hwange National Park, suggests that Zimbabwe's elephants are also under siege. Recent information on the status of Zimbabwe's elephant population, management plans, hunting policies and regulations is limited. However, the information that is available raises significant concerns about the long-term survival of elephants in Zimbabwe.

Sport hunting, as part of a sound management program, can provide benefits to conservation. Yet, given the current situation in Tanzania and what is known of the situation in Zimbabwe for elephants, the Service does not believe that the benefits of sport hunting will be realized. Further, the Service is concerned that additional killing of elephants in both Tanzania and Zimbabwe, even if legal, is not sustainable at this time.

Does the Service plan to shut down all sport-hunting of African elephants?

No. Legal, well-regulated sport hunting, as part of a sound management program, can benefit the conservation of listed species by providing incentives to local communities to conserve the species and by putting much-needed revenue back into conservation. At this time, the Service does not have conservation concerns with sport hunting of African elephants in Namibia, South Africa, or Botswana; though it should be noted that Botswana is not currently open to sport hunting.

Hunters should choose to hunt in countries that have only strong governance, sound management practices, and healthy elephant populations.

I hunted an elephant in Tanzania/Zimbabwe prior to 2014, but have not yet imported the trophy. Will I be able to do so?

Yes. The decision to suspend the import of sport-hunted trophies from Tanzania and Zimbabwe applies only to elephants taken in calendar year 2014. If you plan to import an African elephant sport-hunted trophy from either of these countries, you will need to provide documentation that the elephant was taken prior to 2014.

I have already purchased a hunt in Tanzania or Zimbabwe. How do I get my money back?

We encourage you to contact your hunting outfitter to discuss options. While you can still participate in a hunt in 2014, you would not be able to import the trophy. In addition, given the conservation concerns for elephants in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, we strongly advise that you reconsider taking part in an elephant hunt in either of these countries.

When will the Service reevaluate the suspension on imports of sport-hunted African elephant trophies from Tanzania and Zimbabwe?

These findings are made on an annual basis. We will reevaluate the situation in Tanzania and Zimbabwe for elephant trophies taken in calendar year 2015. If the Service receives information that indicates a significant improvement for elephants in these countries, we could reevaluate the suspension prior to 2015.

An import permit is not required to import an elephant trophy from Zimbabwe into the United States. What authority does the Service have to restrict imports and how would the restriction be enforced?

African elephants from Zimbabwe are included in CITES Appendix II for the purpose of non-commercial trade in hunting trophies, among other things. As with all CITES Appendix II specimens, an import permit is not required. However, the listing of African elephants under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) contains a provision that requires the Service to make a determination that the import of an elephant trophy would enhance the survival of the species. The Service must make this enhancement finding to be able to clear the elephant trophy at the time of import. With the 2014 suspension of imports, the Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement would either refuse entry or seize any specimen that was taken in 2014 at the time of import. By announcing this suspension before trophies are sent to the United States, the Service hopes to avoid having to refuse or seize shipments upon importation.

Where should I send additional questions? If you have specific questions regarding the import of sport-hunted trophies, please send an email to managementauthority@fws.gov or call 1-800-358-2104.