

Testimony of
John F. Calvelli
Executive Vice President, Public Affairs
Wildlife Conservation Society
submitted to the
Hawai'i State Senate
COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, AND AGRICULTURE
COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND LABOR
February 10, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 2647, a bill that takes direct aim at wildlife trafficking and the toll it takes on charismatic animals across the globe. Passage of this bill will mean putting in place strong trade protections for elephants, rhinos, tigers, orangutans, sea turtles and several other endangered wildlife species threatened by the burgeoning and lucrative illegal wildlife trade. In addition, as the host of the upcoming IUCN World Conservation Congress in September, Hawai'i has a unique opportunity while the world is watching to take a stand against the illegal wildlife trade and serve as a model for other key consumer countries to follow.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. To achieve our mission, we harness the power of our Global Conservation Program in more than 60 countries and the world's oceans, and in our five New York City-based wildlife parks, including our Bronx Zoo headquarters. WCS combines its expertise in the field, zoos, and aquarium to achieve its conservation mission.

As one of the world's most lucrative criminal activities, the estimated \$8 to \$10 billion illegal wildlife trade ranks fourth globally in terms of value, behind the trafficking in drugs, people, and arms. Wildlife trafficking is a serious crime conducted by organized criminal syndicates, some with links to terrorist networks, that threaten some of our most iconic species with extinction. It is essential to put protections in place to ensure that the U.S. and the international community can continue to fight against trafficking to protect the remaining elephants, rhinos, tigers and other endangered species.

In the 2014 National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, President Obama clearly outlines that reducing demand for wildlife products will be crucial in making strides against the illegal wildlife trade. He states that poachers will continue to slaughter and traffic wildlife as long as there are high potential profits and low deterrence to the crimes. The National Strategy further points out that the U.S. plays a major role in the world's markets for both legal and illegal wildlife. Within this context, Hawai'i must pass strong legislation to end wildlife trafficking and deter continued poaching.

One example of the toll taken by this devastating trade is the African Elephant. The African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is the largest land animal extant in the world today, and a critical part of our natural heritage. African elephants also act as ecosystem engineers, opening pathways through the landscape, maintaining mineral-rich clearings on which gorillas and many other species depend, and maintaining the diversity of the plant community by their browsing and seed dispersal activities. In addition, they are a major part of the tourist draw to many countries in Africa, so are important for local economies and jobs.

Yet African elephants are being killed illegally at an enormous rate for their ivory. All international commercial trade in ivory has been illegal since 1989, when the African elephant was transferred from Appendix II to Appendix I under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). African elephants are also protected in the U.S. under the Endangered Species Act and the African Elephant Conservation Act.

Following the 1989 CITES ban, illegal killing of elephants declined and populations started to recover. In recent years, however, illegal killing and ivory trade have increased dramatically due to the rise in disposable income in East Asia, coupled with increasing global economic and transportation links, and the involvement of highly armed and organized criminal syndicates.

In 2012, some 35,000 African elephants were killed, an average of 96 elephants per day, representing the worst mass slaughter of elephants in any year since the 1989 international ban. African forest elephants (*L. a. cyclotis*) in particular have been devastated by poaching and have declined by about 65 percent since 2002 according to our scientists. At this rate, African forest elephants could effectively be extinct over the next 10 to 15 years.

A major challenge to halting the illegal wildlife trade and thereby the slaughter of elephants and other species is the lack of effective law enforcement controls along the trade chain from range countries through transit countries, and to the end consumer markets. Furthermore, only 10% of illegal wildlife products are seized at a country's borders. In the case of ivory, once it is inside those borders, it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish from legal ivory, especially worked ivory such as jewelry and trinkets which comprise a significant portion of the illegal ivory trade. In addition, it is extremely difficult for consumers, sellers and often law enforcement officials to visually distinguish elephant ivory from other species of ivory such as mammoth.

Within the U.S., research has shown Hawai'i to have one of the top three markets for ivory along with New York and California. While the new U.S. federal ivory ban makes it illegal to import, export and trade ivory between states with only a few exceptions, state level bans are still essential to stop the ivory trade at the point of retail sale within

a state. During the last two years, New York and California passed strong ivory bans, leaving Hawai'i as the largest remaining market for ivory in the U.S.

As many of our iconic species face devastating declines, Hawaiians and Americans are looking to the actions of this legislature to take a stand and conserve these species. Through SB 2647, Hawai'i has the opportunity to close the U.S.'s largest remaining ivory market and take a meaningful stand against the illegal wildlife trade while the world is watching.

We would like to make clear that WCS supports an updated version of SB 2647 that reflects the amendments to the House companion that were made last Friday by the House Committee on Water & Land. However, we advocate that you not to include the exemption clause that the House proposed at (d)(5) on page 6 of their draft, which would explicitly create a loophole for guns and knives. Many of these items would already be permitted by the broader antiques exemption. Moreover, some manufacturers are believed to utilize illegal or undocumented ivory in their gun grips and knife handles. It is imperative to eliminate such illegal use of ivory in this legislation.