

# Students help protect endangered species in Africa

April 2 2014, by Clifton B. Parker

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Tusks seized from poachers are displayed in Pokola, Congo, in 2013 by the Project for the Application of Law for Fauna, a wildlife conservation organization in central Africa.

Ivory trafficking is out of control – if it goes on unchecked, there will be no elephants or rhinos in Africa in 10 years.

That's the reason a professor and nine Stanford students have joined the fight against wildlife trafficking – and they are making a difference.

A winter quarter student practicum led by David J. Hayes, a visiting distinguished lecturer at the Stanford Law School, produced recommendations that will help the Obama administration implement a new approach to saving endangered wildlife. The 69-page document covers a range of issues, from the history of wildlife trafficking to legal tools to combat it.

The problem is serious. Armed gangs, organized by sophisticated criminal syndicates, slaughtered more than 30,000 elephants and 1,000 rhinos in Africa last year alone, according to Hayes and his students in an interdisciplinary Law and Policy Lab practicum titled Wildlife Trafficking: Stopping the Scourge.

## **'It's unbelievable'**

As Hayes described it, the president's National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking lays out a comprehensive plan to stop the killings that are destabilizing governments, financing terrorists and threatening the existence of some of the world's most iconic wildlife species.

Hayes, who has been chosen by President Obama to serve as vice chair of an advisory council on this issue, developed the recommendations with the assistance of his law and graduate students.

Examples of their recommendations include tightening up the U.S. ban on the commercial ivory trade, increasing the fines and penalties under U.S. law for wildlife trafficking, and using money-laundering enforcement tools to target traffickers. Other suggestions call for stepping up global collaborations and establishing an "African hub" to oversee anti-trafficking efforts.

Hayes, while serving as the deputy secretary of the Department of the Interior from 2009 to 2013, visited Africa and saw firsthand how serious the crisis was.

"It's unbelievable," he said.

He started advocating for stronger wildlife trafficking measures while in his federal post. After helping to develop the Obama administration's response to the African wildlife trafficking crisis, Hayes was appointed by the president to the White House Advisory Council on Wildlife Trafficking, which is in the first year of its three-year term.

So last fall when Hayes returned to Stanford Law School, where he earned his law degree, it was a natural fit for a classroom topic.

"It was a unique approach to work with students and focus on an ongoing policy issue that's happening in real time. They give you a fresh set of eyes on the issue," Hayes said.

Law student Laura Sullivan said Hayes' background gave students a bridge between the academic and policymaking worlds.

"Being taught by a practitioner," she said, "helps you to understand the practical applications of the issues being discussed. I learned how to think like a policymaker, how to frame and present the issues in a way that will maximize utility, and how to tailor my writing for the intended audience."

## **Student perspectives**

Hayes said the students – who came from diverse graduate and professional programs, though mostly law – offered up incisive analytical and historical analyses that helped frame the recommendations

in the strongest possible terms.

"We learned in the late 1980s and early 1990s," he said, "that when the world steps in and says, 'Stop the killing,' that people actually do listen, loopholes are closed and laws are enforced. Well, here we are again."

Patrick Freeman, a graduate student in the Earth Systems Program, said the practicum allowed him to create a "self-designed graduate curriculum in conservation communication."

And it changed his future plans. "Elephants really are my life, so I'm not going to stop advocating until there is some real serious change and implementation of the national strategy," he said.

As part of his contributions, Freeman studied the poaching crisis in the 1980s that decimated Africa's rhinoceros and elephant populations and the more successful techniques for curtailing it. He examined elephant and rhino status reports, economic analyses on trade bans on ivory and rhino horns, and strategies to bring trafficking under control.

One answer is to offer alternative economic incentives to African communities in lieu of wildlife trafficking, he said.

Other students like Sullivan from the law school examined what can be done under existing U.S. statutes to stop the flow of trafficked animal parts, especially the ivory from elephants and rhinos. She sought out ways the U.S. government can increase its enforcement tools to better target wildlife traffickers.

As Hayes acknowledged, "The U.S. needs to show countries in Africa and Asia how we can get control of this problem."

## **Toward a solution**

The challenge is three-fold, he said. One, the endangered animal killings in Africa must be stopped and other activities – such as tourism – be encouraged as economic incentives. Two, the criminal syndicates must be discouraged from pursuing wildlife trafficking profits in Asia and the West. Finally, consumer demand in Asia and the West for these products must be restrained.

As for the next step, Hayes said the advisory council is scheduled to hold a June meeting and then another meeting in October to coordinate with the White House on the implementation of the new strategy, which was announced in February.

"We'll be pushing forward for a number of recommendations," he said.

Hayes pointed to the success of a recent awareness campaign on shark fins in China involving former NBA star Yao Ming and a coalition of Chinese leaders. A group of celebrities and new government rules helped reduce the demand for shark fin soup. The same can be done for African animal trafficking, he said.

Still, it will not be easy, as the criminal groups involved in wildlife trafficking are every bit as dangerous and sophisticated as international drug cartels.

Time is of the essence.

"Our message is clear – when you're buying ivory, you're sealing the fate of elephants," Hayes said.

**More information:** The comments and recommendations paper is available online: [www.law.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/2014/03/2014%20Final.pdf](http://www.law.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/2014/03/2014%20Final.pdf)

Provided by Stanford University

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