

# Critics hit US over elephant trophy imports

November 17 2017, by Shahzad Abdul

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Elephants in South Africa photographed in September 2016

The administration of US President Donald Trump faced a barrage of criticism on Thursday from animal rights groups after it authorized the import of Zimbabwean elephant hunting trophies.

The move reverses a prohibition imposed under Barack Obama and is the latest rollback of Obama-era controls on a number of fronts.

It also came on the same day that the US State Department presented to Congress its first annual report on wildlife trafficking which, it said, "remains a serious transnational crime."

The US Fish & Wildlife Service said it "will begin issuing permits to allow the import of sport-hunted trophies from [elephants](#) hunted in Zimbabwe" between January 21, 2016 and December 31, 2018.

The statement on the service's website Thursday confirmed an announcement made this week at a South African pro-hunting forum.

Zambia will also be covered under the revised rule, which had been sought by the Safari Club International Foundation, based in Arizona, and the National Rifle Association.

An environmentalist group, the Center for Biological Diversity, said the new ruling will allow importation of the animals' heads, feet and tails, "legalizing the killing of endangered elephants."

According to the Great Elephant Census project, African savannah elephant populations fell by 30 percent between 2007 and 2014, while Zimbabwe saw a drop of six percent.

Despite an overall fall in poaching, Africa's elephant population has declined in part because of continued illegal killing, said a report this year by CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

African ivory, in particular, is highly sought in China where it is a status symbol.

"Reprehensible behavior by the Trump Admin. 100 elephants a day are already killed. This will lead to more poaching," The Elephant Project, a

group based in Florida that aims to protect the animals, said on Twitter.

The US decision takes advantage of a provision in the Endangered Species Act, which says the import of such trophies can be legal if accompanied by proof that the hunting benefits broader conservation of the species.

## **Tumult in Zimbabwe**

"Legal, well-regulated sport hunting as part of a sound management program can benefit the conservation of certain species by providing incentives to local communities" to conserve, and by putting revenue back into conservation, the Fish & Wildlife Service said.

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

Updated information from Zimbabwe led US officials to find "that African elephant trophy hunting in Zimbabwe will enhance the survival of the species in the wild."

It cited data showing the country has more than 80,000 elephants.

But the US-based animal rights group PETA on Thursday denounced the administration's reasoning.

"Selling a threatened animal's life to raise money for 'conservation' is like selling a child on the black market to raise money to fight child molestation," it said.

Presenting its [wildlife trafficking](#) report to Congress, the State Department said Trump has called for "a comprehensive and decisive

approach" to organized crime groups involved in the trade.

"The US government is combating this illegal trade at home and abroad," the department said in a statement.

It identified several countries which are either a "focus" of trafficking or a more serious country of concern, but Zimbabwe and Zambia were not among them.

Trump's sons are known to have a passion for hunting.

A photo widely shared on the internet shows Donald Trump Jr posing with a knife in one hand and an elephant tail in the other, the animal's corpse beside him.

The US decision follows tumultuous days in Zimbabwe, where President Robert Mugabe refuses to resign after the military seized control of the country.

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