

Southern African leaders seek ways to manage elephant populations

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An elephant splashes at sunset in the waters of the Chobe river in Botswana
Chobe National Park

Leaders from four southern African countries held talks in Botswana on Tuesday to better manage the world's largest concentration of elephants,

amid growing concerns over poaching, loss of habitat, and conflict with humans.

Botswana President Mokgweetsi Masisi, whose country has Africa's largest elephant [population](#), told his fellow leaders that it was time the region comes up with a common strategy to manage the huge mammals.

"We cannot continue to be spectators while others debate and take decisions about our [elephants](#)," Masisi said in opening remarks in the northern town of Kasane.

"Conflict between elephants and people is on the rise as the demand for land, for agriculture and settlements is growing," he warned alongside the presidents of Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

It is "indisputable that the abundance of elephants comes with numerous management challenges for our region".

Landlocked Botswana has more than 135,000 elephants roaming freely in its unfenced parks and wide open spaces.

The government says populations have become unmanageably large in parts—placing the animals on a [collision course](#) with humans.

The southern African region is also experiencing drought spells, which Masisi said were "placing even more pressure on our fragile ecosystems".

"This in turn requires us to adopt more active measures to manage our wildlife in order to secure the resources that they are dependent on for their continued survival."

Around two-thirds of the world's elephant population is found on the

continent.

Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe are home to some of the largest populations of elephants, with ivory poaching leading to a [drastic decline](#) in some countries.

Over the past decade, the number of elephants on the continent has fallen by around 111,000 to 415,000, according to figures from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Ivory from elephant tusks is illegally traded as part of a multi-billion dollar industry that extends from Africa to Asia and beyond.

The Botswana government is lobbying to end a strict ban on wildlife hunting which was imposed five years ago to protect wildlife in the country.

The controversial proposals, which must be debated by cabinet before becoming law, would overturn a hunting ban that was introduced by former president Ian Khama, who was an ardent conservationist.

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