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By Mark Molloy

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Donald Trump reverses ban on elephant trophy imports into US

Donald Trump has agreed to allow legally hunted elephant trophies to be imported to the United States from two African countries.



about / Africa's elephant problem

President Trump's administration has reversed a Barack Obama-era ban on the remains of elephants killed in Zimbabwe and Zambia entering the US, arguing it can actually boost conservation efforts.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determined that "the hunting and management programs for African elephants will enhance the survival of the species in the wild".

“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 the species and by putting much-needed revenue back into conservation,” a spokesperson said.

African elephants are listed as threatened under the US Endangered Species Act with their population declining by 111,000 in the last decade due in large part to poaching, the WWF says.



Donald Trump's administration has agreed to reverse the ban Credit: AP

The ban on imports of sport-hunted African elephant trophies from Zimbabwe was initially imposed by the Obama administration in 2014 as part of a national strategy for combating wildlife trafficking.

“Additional killing of elephants in these countries, even if legal, is not sustainable and is not currently supporting conservation efforts that contribute towards the recovery of the species,” they said at the time.

The change in policy was announced by Safari Club International, who filed a lawsuit challenging the ban, along with the National Rifle Association, in 2014.

“These positive findings for Zimbabwe and Zambia demonstrate that the FWS recognises that hunting is beneficial to wildlife and that these range countries know how to manage their elephant populations,” said SCI President Paul Babaz.

“We appreciate the efforts of the Service and the US Department of the Interior to remove barriers to sustainable use conservation for African wildlife.”

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However, critics have called the move “jarring”, with The Humane Society (THS), an international animal protection organisation, citing a “lack of information about how money derived from trophy hunting by US hunters is distributed within Zimbabwe”.

“Let’s be clear: elephants are on the list of threatened species; the global community has rallied to stem the ivory trade; and now, the US government is giving American trophy hunters the green light to kill them,” said THS President Wayne Pacelle in a blog post.

“What kind of message does it send to say to the world that poor Africans who are struggling to survive cannot kill elephants in order to use or sell their parts to make a living, but that it’s just fine for rich Americans to slay the beasts for their tusks to keep as trophies?”

Zambia’s elephant population has dropped from 200,000 in 1972 to just a little over 21,000, he adds. While Zimbabwe’s elephant population has declined six per cent since 2001, Mr Pacelle says.