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Report for Congress

African Elephant Issues: CITES and CAMPFIRE

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Summary

The conservation of African elephants has been controversial recently on two fronts: the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES, to which the United States is a party), and a Zimbabwean program for sustainable development called CAMPFIRE, which is partially funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The members of CITES recently voted to down-list elephant populations in three African nations, thereby allowing limited trade in elephant products from those countries. The United States voted against the change. USAID's role in CAMPFIRE is supported by some conservation and hunting organizations and opposed by some animal welfare organizations, which also claim violations of U.S. laws prohibiting lobbying by recipients of federal grants. Opponents are asking Congress to restrict appropriations for CAMPFIRE in the foreign operations bill.

Two controversies have sprung up recently about the African elephant. One is the changing status of this species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), of which the United States is a signatory. The other is over a program in Zimbabwe called "CAMPFIRE." The partial funding of this program by the U.S. Agency for International Development has been criticized by animal welfare groups and some conservation groups, though it has been supported by other conservation groups as well as many hunting organizations. ([See Endnote 1.](#))

Elephants in CITES

African elephants' tusks have been used in jewelry, piano keys, and hanko, the personalized signature seals required on official documents in Japan. Their hides and other parts are a minor component of trade, but their meat is used by local people, and the species is highly prized among big game hunters. Elephants are, however, a severe agricultural pest in many areas. Where they are not hunted (and therefore not conditioned to avoid humans), their effects on subsistence farmers may be devastating. For many years, intense poaching of elephants for their ivory was a serious conservation problem, and many

countries faced serious declines in elephant populations. Between 1979 and 1989, the species' population was estimated to have dropped from 1.2 million to 600,000.

The species ([See Endnote 2.](#)) is listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act as threatened. In 1978, it was listed under Appendix II of CITES. Commercial trade in Appendix II species is allowed if it is not detrimental to the species. The enormous disparity in the success of African countries in managing their large mammals has contributed to the heat of this debate. Many African countries lacked the means (and in some cases, the will) to control the taking of the species. At the same time, some countries, including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia, have had a history of firm control over their elephant populations, and a surplus of elephants. They have generally allowed controlled hunting, often integrating it into village economies and securing revenues for conservation and park programs.

In 1989, in a vote supported not only by most nations of the northern hemisphere, but also by many in Africa, CITES members voted 76 to 15 to reclassify African elephants under Appendix I. The more protective Appendix I listing means that virtually no trade is permitted between two nations if either is a signatory to the convention. Since the prime markets for ivory are in Europe, North America, and particularly Japan, all of which are parties to CITES, even those countries with well-managed, abundant populations found that their markets had disappeared.

As a result of the ivory ban, populations in some countries rose. Careful management combined with aggressive anti-poaching measures led to increasing elephant populations. Many African countries were well-pleased to see poaching decline domestically, but those with abundant populations began to claim a rise in agricultural losses, a decrease in hunting revenue flowing into parks and conservation, and greater antagonism to wildlife among local people. They also resented what they viewed as unwarranted international interference in programs they viewed as well-run. These nations, primarily in southern Africa, began to push for at least a partial lifting of the trade restrictions.

Tenth Conference of Parties. In June 1997, Zimbabwe hosted the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) of CITES. Before the member nations were three proposals (one for each country) to list the elephant populations of Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia on Appendix II, thereby allowing a managed trade in elephants and elephant parts (including ivory) from those countries. The proposals would have allowed individual export quotas for each country to Japan only, trade in hunting trophies, and trade in live animals to appropriate and acceptable destinations. When the proposals were offered at COP10, they were initially tabled (with U.S. support). But after intense lobbying by the three nations as well as by South Africa, the proposals were modified (a) to impose strict quotas for a one-time sale; (b) to lift the ban only after 18 months; and (c) to limit exports of hunting trophies to non-commercial purposes. On a secret ballot, these modified proposals passed, with strong support of many countries in South America which view themselves as facing similar problems. The United States voted against the amended proposals as well. African delegates reportedly celebrated, viewing the vote as a mark of respect from developed countries for the success of wildlife management programs in these three countries. In the United States, animal rights groups were deeply disappointed, while conservation and hunting groups were largely supportive.

As a result of the vote, sometime after December 1998, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe will be allowed to sell 25.3, 13.8, and 20.0 metric tonnes of ivory respectively to purchasers in Japan. Resources from these sales will help local people, the countries' wildlife programs, and their national treasuries. Critics counter that resumption of the ivory trade will also lead to resumption of poaching in other countries and a return to declining elephant populations, as poachers try to take advantage of the legal

market by disguising the illegal origin of their ivory products. Other critics feel, quite simply, that the killing of these animals is immoral, and should be stopped.

Controversy over the CAMPFIRE Program

A major controversy over U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funding for the "CAMPFIRE" (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) Program in Zimbabwe has emerged following a campaign over the past year by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) to oppose elements of the program. The HSUS, and other organizations that have endorsed the campaign, object to elements of the program that include the licensing of trophy hunting for big game, including elephants, and alleged illegal lobbying efforts to "down-list" protected species, especially elephants, under CITES and to allow trade in products from these species. USAID officials contend that USAID money supports the broad program, which does include trophy hunting, but that U.S. funding is not being used directly for these purposes.

How CAMPFIRE Works

USAID began funding the CAMPFIRE Program in 1989. The CAMPFIRE program aims to build the capacity of local authorities to manage natural resources and wildlife in order to increase incomes of rural people and to help them provide for basic needs of their communities.

USAID reports that the program is implemented through grants to non-governmental organizations and some local authorities. These include grants to participating Rural District Councils for training and capacity building such as improving nature-based tourism infrastructure; to the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) for ecological and biological research and training in wildlife and habitat management and other activities, such as natural resource inventories and environmental impact assessments; to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management for research, establishing carrying capacity and allowable hunting quota proposals; to the Zimbabwe Trust (Zimtrust) for activities such as training at district, ward, and village level in management and planning skills, monitoring growth and development of technical and financial capacities at the district level, and providing environmental education and public information services; and to other organizations.

Since the inception of CAMPFIRE, USAID notes that land in Zimbabwe dedicated to conservation has more than doubled, to over 30% of the country, and that the elephant population has increased from under 50,000 to over 65,000. This period also saw the banning of the ivory trade under CITES, which is also credited with curtailing the killing of elephants not only in Zimbabwe, but in all of Africa.

USAID notes that some 90% of revenues generated by CAMPFIRE in 1995 were from leasing sport hunting concessions to commercial safari operators. Sport hunting involves a wide array of animals; according to USAID officials, some 100 to 150 licenses to hunt elephants are issued per year for hunting in the communal lands under the CAMPFIRE program. (Zimbabwe issues a total of about 300 licenses to hunt elephants on all lands annually). About two-thirds of this sport hunting revenue is from the licenses to hunt elephants. A license to hunt an elephant is priced at \$10,000 to \$15,000, compared to the roughly \$800 to \$1,500 for lions, for example. USAID also says that such sport hunting licenses are strictly controlled and monitored by local authorities, and that revenues go directly to Rural District Councils, who decide both how the money is to be raised (whether to allow and manage sport hunting, for example), and how it is to be spent.

As part of USAID's Natural Resource Management Program in Zimbabwe, the agency provided approximately \$7 million to the CAMPFIRE program over the period 1989-1994, with another \$20

million from 1995 through 1999. The \$2.9 million appropriation requested for FY1998 would complete the \$28.1 million USAID had planned for its participation in CAMPFIRE, and USAID does not expect that additional funding would be provided by the United States after FY1998.

Controversial Issues: Elephant Hunting and Allegations of Lobbying. Critics of CAMPFIRE argue that U.S. tax dollars should not be used to support hunting of elephants in any way. They also argue that USAID money should not be given to any organization involved in lobbying for reduced protection for species that U.S. policy protects, such as the African elephant.

Proponents of the program argue that by providing local communities with the means to participate in the benefits of wildlife management, including sport hunting, it gives local farmers incentives not to kill animals that eat or damage their crops. Thus, they argue, the program is an important means of addressing the conflicts between growing human populations practicing agriculture on communally owned lands, and wild animals that have destroyed crops and sometimes killed humans--conflicts that have led to the killing of elephants and other animals.

USAID argues that the CAMPFIRE program does not directly support elephant or wildlife hunting, which is legal in Zimbabwe, and which would be licensed by the government anyway. The CAMPFIRE program, they say, enables local communities to develop the ability to manage activities taking place on their lands--which may include limited elephant hunting--as well as to receive the financial benefits from these activities.

The controversy over lobbying activities has centered on activities of the Africa Resources Trust (ART), a Zimbabwe-based non-governmental organization that received funding under the CAMPFIRE program. The HSUS objected to activities of ART that, it asserted, involved lobbying outside Zimbabwe, including at the CITES COP10 meeting to change some wildlife designations and allow trade in wildlife products, including elephant ivory.

In order to respond to critics of the CAMPFIRE program, USAID reports that it initiated investigations of how its money has been spent in the CAMPFIRE program. The USAID Office of General Counsel investigated allegations that the Washington office of ART had engaged in lobbying on CITES and the Endangered Species Act; the General Counsel reported that it established that ART's activities involved allowable information development and dissemination that did not fall within the legal definition of lobbying. ART reportedly has amended its USAID contract to explicitly disallow use of USAID funds for its activities outside Zimbabwe. Attempts to influence decision-makers outside the United States in forums such as the CITES meeting do not fall within the scope of U.S. legislation prohibiting lobbying of the U.S. Congress or within the United States, and ART argues that it acted in these forums only facilitate the participation of African officials and community spokespersons. It was those African participants who voiced opinions in favor of down-listing elephants and allowing some resumption of ivory trading, according to ART.

The ambassadors from four African countries--Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe--have sent joint letters of support to USAID for continued funding of natural resources programs, and disputing the HSUS opposition to the limited trophy hunting they allow. They support the CAMPFIRE program, and point to broad benefits to rural Africans.

Environmental groups are somewhat at odds among themselves about the CAMPFIRE program. While some have joined the HSUS in opposing aspects of the program, several other major groups strongly support the program without modification, arguing that wildlife will be best protected when the people living in the same area reap economic benefits from them through tourism or hunting, and that CAMPFIRE as it currently operates has been very successful in this regard.

A position endorsed by both the Humane Society and the Africa Resources Trust, as well as USAID, has emerged in amendments to U.S. foreign operations appropriations, which would approve USAID funding for CAMPFIRE, but would explicitly ban the use of USAID dollars from supporting or promoting trophy hunting or actions to promote trade in animal products from endangered or threatened species. This position recognizes the value of the over-all program, but would dissociate USAID funding from the trophy hunting element and activities outside Zimbabwe on influencing international policy.

Some observers who support the CAMPFIRE program express concern that banning U.S. aid dollars from supporting or promoting trophy hunting could in effect limit U.S. support for the broader goals of the CAMPFIRE program which include strengthening the capacity of local authorities to monitor and enforce hunting licenses; they point out that these governments will continue to allow such hunting whether or not USAID is involved in the CAMPFIRE program. A ban on U.S. support for one element of the program would, they argue, be hard to separate from the total program, and might result in curtailing beneficial aspects of the program.

CAMPFIRE Legislation in the 105th Congress. When the Senate approved the Foreign Operations appropriation (S. 955), it included the "Boxer Amendment," offered by Senator Barbara Boxer, which allowed up to \$2.9 million for CAMPFIRE, provided that "none of the funds appropriated by this Act may be used to directly finance the trophy hunting of elephants or other endangered species as defined in . . . (CITES) or the Endangered Species Act: Provided further, That the funds appropriated by this Act that are provided under the CAMPFIRE program may not be used for activities with the express intent to lobby or otherwise influence international conventions or treaties, or United States government decision makers..." Both USAID and the HSUS agree that this language is an acceptable solution to the controversy over CAMPFIRE.

The House Committee on International Relations, in House Report 105-176 on H.R. 2159, the Foreign Operations appropriation bill, acknowledged the concerns that have been raised about the CAMPFIRE program, but expressed satisfaction with the accomplishments and the approach of the program. The Committee endorsed an explicit ban on activities that would lead to renewed ivory trading, and on USAID funding for non-governmental organizations that conduct lobbying activities.

The Fox-Miller amendment pending in the House of Representatives, introduced by Representatives Jon Fox and George Miller, is similar to the Boxer Amendment. However, wording that includes a ban on activities that both support and "promote" elephant trophy hunting remains a problem, according to USAID, because they argue that it would be difficult to interpret in the field and would probably produce unworkable limits on U.S. participation in CAMPFIRE. Opponents of this amendment include sport hunting interests that argue the program as constituted has been very successful in elephant conservation, and could be less successful if these limitations were enacted.

ENDNOTES

(1) There are two distinct schools of western thought on animal protection that affect the debate over management of African elephants. In the older school, the species or population is the unit of conservation, and organisms may be used or killed, provided that the population as a whole remains stable and healthy. In the newer school, individual organisms have value, and are to be preserved for their own sakes, regardless of the health or even abundance of the population. Where a species is rare, the interests of these groups converge; where it is common, they conflict. Thus, groups from the two schools could work harmoniously on conserving elephant populations in Kenya or Burundi, while opposing each other in Zimbabwe or South Africa.

(2) The African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is the only elephant found in Africa. The Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is found only in southern and southeastern Asia, and is also on Appendix I. Legalization of some African elephant ivory could affect poaching of the Asian elephant.