



AZA and U.S. Wildlife Trafficking Alliance Join the Elephant Protection Initiative

Silver Spring, Maryland (August 12, 2018) – The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is proud to announce that AZA and its program, the [U.S. Wildlife Trafficking Alliance \(USWTA\)](#), have partnered with the [Elephant Protection Initiative \(EPI\)](#) and joined the pledge to conserve elephants by confronting the illegal ivory trade.

The surging demand for ivory tusks has driven poaching to unsustainable levels, with tens of thousands of elephants killed in Africa each year, according to the Elephant Protection Initiative. Between 2002 and 2013, Central Africa's forest elephant population declined by two-thirds, with heavy poaching continuing to this day. At this rate, forest elephants could be extinct in the wild within a decade.

"AZA and its members have long been leaders in protecting elephants through research and fieldwork, educating millions of guests, and supporting relevant legislation," said AZA President and CEO Dan Ashe. "Joining the EPI signifies our commitment to saving species and builds on the millions of dollars AZA and its member facilities have already dedicated to support elephant conservation."

By joining EPI, AZA and USWTA support the calls for immediate and longer-term funding for the implementation of the African Elephant Action Plan. The plan calls for domestic ivory markets to be closed, for all stockpiles to be put beyond economic use, and for a moratorium on any consideration of future international ivory trade for at least 10 years and after that until African elephant populations are no longer threatened.

"Wildlife trafficking is one of the largest threats facing African elephants, with an estimated 96 elephants per day being killed solely for their ivory," said AZA Senior Advisor on Wildlife Trafficking Sara Walker. "AZA and the U.S. Wildlife Trafficking Alliance recognize the immediate need to address the illegal ivory trade to assure the future of these magnificent animals."

AZA-accredited facilities provided \$10.5 million in support of elephant conservation projects over the last five years. In 2013, the AZA joined The Wildlife Conservation Society as a partner in the [96 Elephants campaign](#) – an effort focused on securing a U.S. moratorium on illegal ivory, bolstering protection of African elephants, and educating the public about the link between ivory consumption and the elephant poaching crisis. Through the 96 Elephants campaign, millions of visitors to AZA-accredited facilities took action to stop the demand for ivory in the United States and around the world.

In early 2018, AZA acquired USWTA in a joint effort to combat wildlife trafficking around the world. In addition to AZA's [Saving Animals From Extinction® \(SAFE\)](#) program, USWTA offers AZA-accredited facilities another opportunity to join a broader coalition to protect animals in the wild via three main pillars: (1) leverage expertise and influence to strengthen legislation, regulation, policy and enforcement; (2) help to change individual behavior to eliminate purchasing and consumption that drives illegal trade of wildlife; and (3) enhance the visibility and effectiveness of AZA institutions as leaders in combatting wildlife trafficking.

You can learn more about the Elephant Protection Initiative at <https://www.elephantprotectioninitiative.org/>, and about the USWTA at <http://www.uswta.org>.

About AZA

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and eight other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit www.aza.org.

About the U.S. Wildlife Trafficking Alliance

The United States Wildlife Trafficking Alliance is a coalition of nonprofit organizations, companies, foundations and media interests working closely with the U.S. government to combat wildlife trafficking by raising public awareness, reducing consumer demand for wildlife and wildlife products, and mobilizing companies to adopt best practices stop wildlife trafficking. To learn more, visit www.uswta.org.

About the Elephant Protection Initiative

The Elephant Protection Initiative is a global initiative which brings African Elephant range States, non-range States, NGOs, IGOs, the private sector and private citizens together to work in partnership to protect elephants and stop the ivory trade. Elephant Protection Initiative was started by the Governments of Botswana, Ethiopia, Chad, Gabon and Tanzania at the London Conference in 2014; and has since been taken up by Malawi, The Gambia, Uganda and Kenya, Liberia, Congo, Angola, Somalia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Mali.

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