Enhancing rhino horn stockpile management: database now available for range states

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Following several years of documenting rhino horn accumulation dynamics and best stockpile management practices, TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa has recently developed the Wildlife Stockpile Register Database (WSRD). WSRD version 1.0 is designed for rhino horns. This work was funded by the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation. This tool, which is also adaptable for elephant ivory stockpiles, is specifically designed to help range states optimize the management of rhino horn stockpiles while helping to answer key field management questions including results-based patrol monitoring.

Why is effective rhino horn stockpile management so important?

The illegal trade in rhino horn continues to be rhinos' greatest danger globally. While the focus of preventing illegal trade has traditionally been on ensuring adequate field protection and infiltrating illegal trade syndicates, it is increasingly clear that the potential for illegal trade involving horn stockpiles—including both horns held within strong rooms and horns moving en route from field recoveries—could undermine ongoing conservation efforts.

Through the action of field and law enforcement personnel in range states, consumer markets and elsewhere, stocks of rhino horn are now found throughout the world. Among other causes, horns accumulate from natural mortalities, dehorning exercises, trophy hunting, pre-CITES specimens and seizures. Existing horn stockpiles are not only substantial but are accumulating rapidly where wild populations increase. For example, rhino horn stocks in eastern and southern Africa are accumulating at the fastest rate in the world with over 12 tonnes now officially registered in private and government sectors.

To minimize the risk of horn reaching the illegal market, it is essential to ensure first that existing stockpiles are adequately registered, marked and secured, and second, that the collection and centralization of all horns from the field is optimized. It is vital that such measures are improved before horn volumes get too large to handle. Indeed, the need to mark, register, store and secure rhino horn stockpiles has been recognized by parties to CITES in the context of Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev.), 'Conservation of and trade in African and Asian rhinoceros'. Further, adequate stockpile management must be a vital precondition for any country wishing to pursue limited legal options for horn trade.

How the Wildlife Stockpile Register Database can strengthen stockpile management and conservation efforts

What are the trends in accumulating horn and does the stockpile register meet audit requirements? Are rhino mortalities being detected fast enough and collected horns stockpiled in a timely manner? These are just some of the many questions commonly asked by conservation managers but whose answers normally lie beneath piles of paperwork in different localities. WSRD puts an end to this challenge by maximizing the use of information already routinely collected, while moving beyond existing data storage spreadsheets to an interactive management-level database. WSRD runs on Microsoft Access with a simple user interface that does not require any specialized computer knowledge or training. At the touch of a button, WSRD produces sorted lists and information summaries that facilitate audits; it responds to specific queries and searches, securely and permanently stores all records; and produces numerous automated reports to provide answers to key management questions.

Summary information:

- Where are horns coming from and what are the general trends in accumulation?

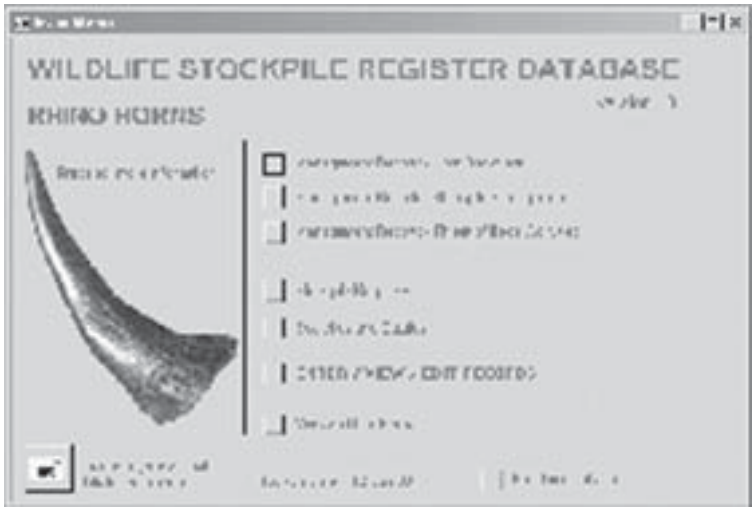
- Which species are the horns coming from and what are horn measurements?

Stockpile administration, checks and balances:

- Are all the horns from discovered natural mortalities actually being stockpiled?
- Are all the horns seized by law enforcement agencies being stockpiled?
- Are both horns being collected when possible?
- Are all the horns being marked and identified adequately and where are they stored?
- Is there an effective registration process and does it meet audit requirements?
- Is there a record of horns removed from the stockpile?

Results-based field monitoring:

- Are mortalities being detected fast enough?
- What level of understanding do we have of rhino mortality causal factors?
- Are field patrols collecting acceptable levels of horn?
- Are all the horns collected being stockpiled in a timely manner?
- What is the law enforcement success rate through recovery of illegally sourced horns?



The Wildlife Stockpile Register Database main menu.

TRAFFIC is the world's largest wildlife trade monitoring programme, a joint programme of WWF, the World Wide Fund for Nature, and IUCN, the World Conservation Union, working in close cooperation with the secretariat of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. TRAFFIC has over 25 years of experience working on rhino horn and elephant ivory trade issues including over 10 years of focusing on stockpile management. Interested range states should contact TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa at traffictz@raha.com regarding the software and to obtain assistance to strengthen stockpile management practices.

AfRSG's training course in rhino monitoring revised and training courses for instructors held

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The AfRSG's revised Sandwith training course for field rangers in rhino monitoring techniques has recently been revised by Keryn Adcock and Richard Emslie with primary funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (USF&W RTCF), and some additional funding from the Italian-funded SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation (SADC RPRC).

The trainer's manual has also been extensively revised and desktop published and is now produced in .pdf format, greatly cutting down file sizes. The structure of the modules has been modified, so that with little modification the course can be made a South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) accredited course. At the start of each module a number of text boxes outline 1) the rationale behind the module,