



**International Rhino Foundation
Comments on Dallas Safari Club Auction of a Permit to Hunt a Black Rhino**

29 October 2013

Much media attention has been directed this past week to the Dallas Safari Club's intention to auction off a permit to hunt a black rhino in Namibia, the proceeds to go towards preserving this magnificent and critically endangered species. The International Rhino Foundation does not condone the hunt, but recognizes that it is legal under Namibian and United States law, and under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). We respect Namibia's efforts to maintain a healthy rhino population as well as raise money for the important work of conserving the species. That said, we note that the fate of one hunted rhino pales in comparison to the nearly 800 rhinos lost to illegal poaching in South Africa alone this year and to escalating poaching losses in Namibia and other range countries where rhinos once thrived but now are barely hanging on.

The International Rhino Foundation is an apolitical, scientifically-oriented conservation organization that funds and operates rhino conservation programs in Africa and Asia. The sale of a critically endangered species for a trophy hunt has brought forth a range of emotions and arguments. It is a complex and multi-faceted issue with the following points to consider.

We believe that the facts pertaining to intra-species fighting as a justification for the permit auction are overstated. Young bulls naturally displace old bulls without human intervention (in normal, viable rhino populations) to maximize the ratio of effective male breeders in those populations. The issue is more about what happens to the naturally displaced old bulls that no longer are breeding. In a strictly genetic sense, they can be considered non-essential to population survival and, in situations where the rhinos are stocked at or near an area's ecological carrying capacity (which ideally they should not be), then these bulls may be eating browse that younger animals need to maintain reproduction and to minimize loss of genetic diversity in the population.

Old bulls that lose body condition are sometimes gored in interactions with younger bulls when there is a high level of competition for food resources. The argument for hunting is that it is more humane to use a safari hunter's bullet on such geriatric rhinos to avoid a lingering death and to generate funds for rhino conservation (assuming that a mechanism to return such income to conservation is in place).

A rationale for safari hunting of such animals must be clearly and accurately presented with clear criteria to identify which rhino bulls are geriatric and truly not essential for the population's survival. The International Rhino Foundation recognizes that, if they are not poached or killed due to other reasons, black rhino bulls eventually reach an age at which they are marginalized in their population and do not contribute reproductively. If such bulls can be objectively identified, then an argument could be made that the safari hunting of these animals will have no negative biological impact on the rhino population and in specific circumstances may alleviate problems such as overstocking and fighting within species, although these should not be common problems in well-managed rhino populations. What is essential is that inviolate rules be in place to ensure that income from hunts is returned to rhino population sites to meet conservation needs such as protection and biological management.

There has recently been an increasing willingness within the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to allow for trade in products from well-managed populations of endangered species. Trophy hunting of black rhinos in Namibia is not new; CITES issues Namibia an export quota of up to five hunter-taken black rhinos per year. This, however, is the first time that a permit has been offered outside of Namibian borders, and the first time that such hunts have received this level of international attention.

But let's talk about the issue that is being sidelined by the uproar over the Dallas Safari Club auction: rhinos are under siege. To-date this year, at least 793 rhinos have been poached in South Africa, including many reproductive or pre-reproductive females. We stand to lose a century of rhino conservation success in Africa in the next few years if we can't stop, or slow, rhino poaching now.

Poachers typically operate as small, but well-armed gangs, sometimes backed by international organized crime syndicates. Their automatic weapons can take down a rhino as readily as a ranger, and they are not averse to murdering anyone who stands between them and their payday. Some professional poachers prefer heavy caliber sporting rifles, which have a greater knockdown effect on rhinos than AK-47s.

The high-stakes black market trade in rhino horn has been linked to international terrorism, specifically to the recent mall attack in Nairobi. In July, US President Obama signed an executive order to combat wildlife trafficking, recognizing illegal wildlife trafficking as an escalating international crisis and establishing a task force to deal with the issue.

Sadly, all wild populations of rhinoceros are at serious risk from poaching. Namibia lost one rhino to poaching in 2012 and, to-date in 2013, has lost four. This low poaching rate is most likely due to a combination of proactive protection and management, a law-abiding society, inaccessibility of rhino sites, and luck. Experience has shown that

situations in Africa can change on a dime. It is a valid question to ask if it is worth sacrificing one rhino to contribute financially to the conservation and protection of a larger population.

The International Rhino Foundation has funded and operated rhino protection and conservation programs in Africa and Asia for 20 years. Rhino conservation is expensive. Every year we scramble to raise enough funds to support our work. The political and economic realities in the range countries (national commitment versus corruption, wildlife-based land-use versus subsistence farming, etc.) are the factors that really determine the fate of rhinos. National contributions to conservation budgets, in countries such as Namibia, considerably exceed contributions from the international donor community. It is inevitable that hunts such as the one proposed would generate confusion and concern among many members of the public who are aware of the plight of the world's rhino species. But, it is also a reality that financial constraints and land-use challenges within the rhino range countries compel the authorities in those countries to consider various income-generating opportunities even if they involve limited, sustainable hunting of endangered species such as rhinos. It will not be possible for international conservation agencies to engage with and positively influence such countries in their rhino conservation endeavors unless objective consideration and respect is shown for their rhino management decisions, even those that are internationally controversial.

Finding middle ground between the different perspectives on rhino hunting is very difficult. Our position is therefore based purely on the optimization of conservation advantage for rhino species within their wild populations. The International Rhino Foundation will work with its international partners to regularly review the front-line conservation outcomes of safari hunts of rhinos in South Africa and Namibia and will draw attention to any negative outcomes or irregularities.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

State of the Rhino

Five living rhino species – white, black, greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran – can still be found in Africa and Asia, and it's conceivable that they once numbered in the millions. Unfortunately, the global population has plummeted to less than 30,000 animals due to poaching, trophy hunting and habitat loss. Two species, the Javan and the Sumatran, now number less than 150 individuals combined, and could easily disappear within our lifetime. www.rhinos.org/state-of-the-rhino

Black Rhinos

During the last century, the black rhino suffered the most drastic decline in total numbers of all rhino species. Between 1970 and 1992, the population of this species decreased by 96%. In 1970, it was estimated that there were approximately 65,000

black rhinos in Africa – but, by 1993, there were only 2,300 surviving in the wild. Intensive anti-poaching efforts have had encouraging results since 1996. Numbers have been recovering and still are increasing very slowly through targeted conservation management, including strategic translocations to consolidate isolated populations, active management and in some countries, de-horning. The wild population of black rhinos is now approximately 5,055. Namibia’s black rhino population of approximately 1,800 animals is the second largest next to South Africa’s, followed by Kenya and Zimbabwe. www.rhinos.org/black-rhino

The black rhino was listed in Appendix I of CITES in 1977 and under the Endangered Species Act by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 1980, and is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The International Rhino Foundation’s Black Rhino Program

The International Rhino Foundation was founded in response to the black rhino poaching crisis in Zimbabwe in the 1990s, when black rhinos were nearly wiped out by large-scale, organized poaching, leaving only 370 animals by 1993. By 2000, the population recovered to approximately 450 individuals, and as of today, Zimbabwe’s black rhinos still number around 450 animals, representing the fourth largest black rhino population in Africa. These rhinos are spread over private and state-owned lands, with almost 400 black rhinos and 227 white rhinos in the South–East Lowveld private conservancies, where we work through our partner, the Lowveld Rhino Trust. www.lowveldrhinotruster.org

Conservation efforts in the Lowveld have helped increase the region’s black rhino population from 4% of the national total in 1990 to 88% at present, which represents about 7% of the continental total. This incredibly significant increase has been achieved through biological management, strategic translocations of rhinos, support for anti-poaching activities, informant systems, community benefits schemes, working with authorities to track, apprehend, and prosecute poachers, and other non-consumptive means. Our team in Zimbabwe operates under difficult and often unpredictable economic and political conditions.

In South Africa, a myriad of factors have combined to create the poaching crisis we face today. It has developed over a period of time, with an increased presence of Chinese and other Asian business interests. The International Rhino Foundation recognizes that dealing with the complexities of the poaching crisis in South Africa is well beyond the manageable interests of a small organization like ours. We have focused on a small niche: providing training and equipment to rangers in under-represented areas, and exploring the use of tracker dogs to combat poaching.

Rhino Horn Trade

Rhino horn has been used in China for traditional medicine for centuries, and later spread to Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia. The newest market for rhino horn is

Vietnam, where it is used as a high-value gift item, as a purported hangover preventative, and tragically, sold as a “cure” for cancer.

Vietnam has been the world’s leading rhino horn consumer since 2005. Vietnam joined CITES in 1994 and while the country prohibits domestic trade, there is no meaningful enforcement. China joined CITES in 1981 and prohibited all domestic trade in rhino horn and registered and sealed all stockpiles in 1993. However, China is still the second-largest destination for illegal horn. Approximately 100 white rhinos have been imported by China from South Africa; TRAFFIC helped to expose a plan to farm rhino in 2010.

Rhino horn markets have been shut down in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. All three countries joined CITES and then subsequently banned rhino horn from their pharmacopoeia. Korea and Taiwan were threatened with Pelly Amendment sanctions by the United States prior to banning rhino horn use.

According to TRAFFIC, rhino horn has been classified as a “heat-clearing” drug with detoxifying and fever-reducing properties, and typically was typically combined with other medicinal ingredients for treatment of a wide range of conditions. Studies in China, where rhino horn is permitted to be used in research only to identify viable substitutes for it, found statistically significant pharmacological effects for rhino horn: anti-pyretic, anti-inflammatory, analgesic, pro-coagulant, among others. In contrast, studies done in the United Kingdom and South Africa found no pharmacological effects at all. www.traffic.org

CITES

CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is a multilateral treaty to protect endangered plants and animals. Species are proposed for inclusion in or deletion from the CITES Appendices at meetings of the Conference of the Parties (CoP), which are held every 3 years. The most recent CoP was held in Bangkok in March. Namibia joined CITES in 1990.

There has been a recent, increased willingness within the Parties to allow for trade in products from well-managed populations. CITES issues Namibia an export quota of up to five hunter-taken black rhinos per year. www.cites.org

US Fish and Wildlife Service

The USFWS Division of Management Authority has not yet issued a permit to the Dallas Safari Club to return a rhino trophy to the US. It is our understanding that if a permit were to be issued, the individual hunter would first have to pass certain background checks and in order to have USFWS approval for import of the trophy, the “take” of the animal chosen for the hunt would have to be approved as being beneficial to the conservation of the species.

In March 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) issued a permit for the importation of a sport-hunted black rhinoceros trophy taken in Namibia in 2009. According to its statement, the USFWS “granted this permit after an extensive review of Namibia’s black rhino conservation program, in recognition of the role that well-managed, limited sport hunting plays in contributing to the long-term survival and recovery of the black rhino in Namibia.”

<http://www.fws.gov/international/permits/black-rhino-import-permit.html#2>