



TO: Co-Chair Kennedy, Co-Chair Albis, Members of the Joint Committee on Environment
FROM: Christina Manto, Government & Community Affairs, Wildlife Conservation Society
DATE: March 9, 2016
RE: Support for House Bill 5578

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the plight of African elephants due to ivory demand and the important role of HB 5578 to improve their conservation status in the wild.

My organization, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. To achieve our mission, we harness the power of our Global Conservation Program in more than 60 countries and the world's oceans, and in our five New York City-based wildlife parks, including our Bronx Zoo headquarters. WCS combines its expertise in the field, zoos, and aquarium to achieve its conservation mission. Our organization includes more than 40,000 members and activists in Connecticut.

One major aspect of our work includes addressing the elephant crisis in Africa. We work to stop the killing of elephants on the ground; stop the trafficking of the ivory; and stop the demand of the ivory in markets in the US and across the globe. To support this work, we launched the 96 Elephants campaign, which has hundreds of partners, working to ensure there are strong state bans and a national ban on the sale of ivory.

The African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is the largest land animal extant in the world today, and a critical part of our natural heritage. African elephants act as ecosystem engineers, opening pathways through the landscape, maintaining mineral-rich clearings on which gorillas and many other species depend, and maintaining the diversity of the plant community by their browsing and seed dispersal activities. In addition, they are a major part of the tourist draw to many countries in Africa and are important for local economies and jobs.

Yet African elephants are being killed illegally at an enormous rate for their ivory. All international commercial trade in ivory has been illegal since 1989, when the African elephant was transferred from Appendix II to Appendix I under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). African elephants are also protected in the U.S. under the Endangered Species Act and the African Elephant Conservation Act.

Following the 1989 CITES ban, illegal killing of elephants declined and populations started to recover. However, in recent years, increasing demand in the ivory trade due to the rise in

disposable income in East Asia has led to a dramatic increase in the illegal killing of elephants. The demand is also coupled with increasing global economic and transportation links, and the involvement of highly armed and organized criminal syndicates.

In 2012, some 35,000 African elephants were killed, an average of 96 elephants per day, representing the worst mass slaughter of elephants in any year since the 1989 international ban. African forest elephants (*L. a. cyclotis*) in particular have been devastated by poaching and have declined by about 65 percent since 2002 according to our scientists. At this rate, African forest elephants could effectively be extinct over the next 10 to 15 years.

As one of the world's most lucrative criminal activities, the estimated \$8 to \$10 billion illegal wildlife trade ranks fourth globally in terms of value, behind the trafficking in drugs, people, and arms. Wildlife trafficking is a serious crime conducted by organized criminal syndicates, some with links to terrorist networks, that threaten some of our most iconic species with extinction. It is essential to put protections in place to ensure that the U.S. and the international community can continue to fight against trafficking to protect the remaining elephants, rhinos, tigers and other endangered species.

A major challenge to halting the ivory trade and thereby the slaughter of elephants is the lack of effective law enforcement controls along the trade chain from Africa, through the transit countries, and to the end consumer markets. This challenge is compounded by the high levels of corruption at many points in the trade chain. Given the involvement of criminal enterprises along the whole commodity chain, from elephant range countries to the main ivory consumer countries, corruption enables the laundering of illegal ivory into legal or potentially legal markets.

Furthermore, only 10% of illegal ivory is seized at a country's borders and once it is inside those borders, it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish from legal ivory, especially worked ivory such as jewelry and trinkets which comprise a significant portion of the illegal ivory trade. It is also extremely difficult for consumers, sellers, and often law enforcement officials to visually distinguish elephant ivory from other species of ivory such as mammoth. CITES only regulates international trade—it is up to individual countries to control their domestic markets in protected species.

While the new U.S. federal ivory ban makes it illegal to import, export and trade ivory between states with only a few exceptions, state level bans are still essential to stop the ivory and illegal wildlife trade at the point of retail sale within a state. During the last two years, New York, New Jersey, Washington and California have all passed strong ivory bans. Let Connecticut be the next state to take a stand against ivory and wildlife trafficking.

By passing HB 5578, Connecticut can take a stand and shut down this illegal trade locally and lead the way during this critical time for elephants. Connecticut needs to take action now if we hope to save elephants for future generations and serve as a model for other states.