



SIERRA CLUB

Connecticut Chapter
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Dear Environment Committee Chairs Cohen and Demicco, Vice-Chairs Gresko and Kushner, Ranking Members Harding and Miner, and distinguished members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB-5104.

HB-5104: An Act Prohibiting the Import, Sale, and Possession of African Elephants, Lions, Leopards, Black and White Rhinos and Giraffes

Sierra Club Connecticut supports HB-5104, with some notable concerns. The concerns pertain to the grandfathering causes in Section 1(d), and certain exemptions in Section 1(h) – 1(j).

We support this bill with the hopes that it will achieve the goal of protecting these animals and stopping trophy hunting. The United States is the world's largest importer of animal trophies, which includes elephants, lions, leopards, and the rest of the big six, whose populations are in decline. Trophy hunting exacerbates the pressures on these imperiled species and also negates the money spent on conserving at-risk species and combating wildlife trafficking and poaching.

The Remington Research Group has shown in a poll that 80% of respondents opposed both the hunting and importing of African lions, elephants and other wildlife (and their parts) into the US. This included 80% of Republicans, 84% of Democrats and 76% of nonpartisan voters.

Other pressures on these animals include the climate crisis, which is already affecting Africa with problems such as drought. Recently in Zimbabwe more than 200 elephants and other animals died due to lack of water. The human population there has been growing rapidly and with this growth is the need to expand agriculture. Animals are increasingly pushed into smaller areas, and when they wander into human occupied areas, conflict ensues. In addition to the above, Botswana has decided to lift the hunting ban on elephants starting in April of this year. Out of the 272 permits have been issued, 202 of the permits are going to foreign hunters mostly from the US.

Research has shown that very little of the revenue generated by trophy hunters goes toward conservation or to help the local people. Most goes to safari outfitters, associated foreign businesses and governments.

At this time, the world is experiencing its sixth mass extinction. We lose dozens of species everyday. By 2050, it is predicted that between 20-50% of all species will be extinct. It is extremely imperative that as humans that we protect all other creatures that inhabit the earth with us - no exceptions.

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The bill exempts a ban on the trafficking and sale of ivory, and possibly rhino horn, from Africa to Connecticut. After the decimation of countless elephants and rhinoceros through the 1970s up to 1989, Africa enacted anti-poaching bans, which have been a failure. Poaching continued to escalate.

Prior to the 1970s there had been approximately 1.4 million elephants on the African continent. Currently, only 500,000 remain in the wild. Counts show that approximately 38,000 are killed each year. It is estimated that at this rate the elephant in the wild will go extinct within a dozen or so years. The rhino is suffering the same fate as the elephant since the population has been reduced by 97% of what it used to be. At the present time, the Northern White Rhino is extinct and all other types of rhinos are severely endangered. It should be noted that the rate of reproduction for both these species is less than the rate at which they are poached. In addition to the killing of these animals, there is also a loss of human life. Approximately one hundred rangers have been killed by ambush each year trying to protect these animals in wildlife parks. At this point about 1000 rangers have lost their lives. Also, civilian populations that live near or in areas that support elephant and rhino ranges are frequently subjected to poaching-related violence.

Passing this bill can make a major difference to put an end to both trophy hunting, poaching and illegal wildlife trafficking. Further, Connecticut has an opportunity to stand in solidarity with other states that have passed similar laws: California, New Jersey, New York and Washington. In addition, bills such as ours have been filed in Maryland, Massachusetts, Vermont and other states. Removing the exemption for ivory will go even further in helping to save these iconic animals from extinction.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue and consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Ann Gadwah, Chair
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