President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500  

August 12, 2015  

Dear President Obama,  

As scientists deeply concerned with the wildlife poaching crisis, we write to commend you on your recent steps to greatly enhance legal controls on U.S. commercial trade in elephant ivory.  

Over the past 30 years, Africa’s elephant population has been reduced from around 1.2 million to 420,000.¹ Scientists overwhelmingly agree that the illegal killing of elephants for their ivory is a primary cause of these declines. Central Africa’s elephants are being poached at a shocking and unsustainable rate of 9% per year. This is based on a new analysis indicating that between 2002 and 2013, 65% of the region’s forest elephants – 200,000 individuals – were killed, which amounts to one every twenty minutes.² The continental totals are much higher, as even this disturbing figure does not account for the savannah elephants of Eastern and Southern Africa or the forest elephants of West Africa. While exact numbers are notoriously difficult to gauge, mounting evidence points to annual African elephant losses of 35,000 or possibly higher, all slaughtered to meet the rising international demand for ivory.³ Elephants are iconic, awe-inspiring animals and perform critical ecological roles in the forests and savannahs they inhabit.⁴ Yet, unless this poaching trend is reversed, African elephants will be wiped out across large areas of their range within our lifetime.⁵  

Consumer demand, stimulated by the presence of legal domestic markets, is elevating the price of ivory and driving elephant poaching.⁶ Elephants are not the only ones to bear the costs of this trade. Brave park rangers are sacrificing their lives as they attempt to defend wildlife against groups of militarized poachers, some of whom have helicopters, night vision goggles, and automatic weapons.⁷ Transnational criminal networks are now behind much of the trafficking and likely participate in other illicit activities, including dealing in narcotics and weapons.⁸ Weak governance in many range, transit, and consumer countries provides the enabling environment for these criminals to thrive; and the illegal ivory trade, in turn, exacerbates conflict, corruption, and poverty in countries that are already struggling to defend their economic and national security.⁹  

In spite of the dire situation, hope is not lost. We commend your Administration for developing a National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, which identifies a multi-faceted approach to strengthen site-based enforcement, reduce trafficking and demand, and expand international cooperation. A critical component of the National Strategy is the decision to strengthen regulatory controls on U.S. imports, exports, and domestic commercial trade in elephant ivory. While the international commercial trade in ivory has been banned since 1990, individual countries, including the U.S., have maintained varying levels of legal domestic ivory trade.¹⁰ Studies of trade in elephant ivory indicate that legal markets provide a cover for trade in illegal products and render enforcement extremely difficult.¹¹ This is the case in the U.S. ivory market – one of the largest in the world – where traffickers exploit regulatory loopholes in order to misrepresent illegal ivory as legal ivory.¹² Given the scale of the current elephant poaching crisis across Africa, and the modus operandi of the trade, the U.S. must eliminate its parallel legal and illegal markets and the resulting opportunities for laundering illegal ivory.  

The improved regulations will help guarantee that the U.S. is not contributing to the global demand for elephant ivory. The actions also send important signals to other consumer countries: the protection of the earth’s wildlife is a global obligation that we all share, and wildlife crime is a serious transnational
crime. The scientific community is eager to aid in implementing the goals of the National Strategy. We, once again, thank you for your leadership in helping to ensure that wild elephants will continue to inspire generations to come.

Sincerely,

Susan Alberts, PhD  
Duke University  
Durham, NC

Allison Alberts, PhD  
San Diego Zoo Global  
San Diego, CA

Brian Allan, PhD  
University of Illinois  
Urbana, IL

Ricardo Antunes, PhD  
WCS—Ocean Giants Program  
Bronx, NY

Elizabeth Archie, PhD  
University of Notre Dame  
Notre Dame, IN

Vidya Athreya, PhD  
WCS—India Program  
Pune, India

Stephanie Awoyemi, MS  
Sagamu, Nigeria

Lauren A. Bailey, MS  
Society for Conservation Biology  
Washington, D.C.

Paul E. Bartelt, PhD  
Waldorf College  
Forest City, IA

Elizabeth Beck, MS  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Canada

Adam Beh, PhD  
New Mexico State University  
Las Cruces, NM

Elizabeth L. Bennett, PhD  
WCS—Species Conservation Program  
Bronx, NY

David J. Berg, PhD  
Miami University  
Oxford, OH

Joel Berger, PhD  
University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

Rene Beyers, PhD  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Eliza Bliss-Moreau, PhD  
University of California, Davis  
Davis, CA

Steve Boyles, PhD  
Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology  
Cape Town, South Africa

Paul Boyle, PhD  
Association of Zoos & Aquariums  
Silver Spring, MD

Claire Bracebridge, PhD  
WCS—Tanzania Program  
Iringa, Tanzania

James J. Breheny, MS  
WCS—Zoos and Aquarium  
Bronx, NY

Linda Brent, PhD  
Wildlife Impact  
Portland, OR

Sarah Brook, MS  
WCS—Cambodia Program  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
L. Anathea Brooks, MS
UNESCO
Paris, France

Janine L. Brown, PhD
Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute
Front Royal, VA

Thomas M. Butynski, PhD
Sustainability Centre Eastern Africa & Eastern
Africa Primate Diversity and Conservation
Programme
Nanyuki, Kenya

Kenneth N. Cameron, DVM
WCS—Wildlife Health & Health Policy
Program
Brazzaville, Republic of Congo

Merry Camhi, PhD
WCS—New York Seascape Program
Brooklyn, NY

Claudio Campagna, MD, PhD
WCS—Argentina Program
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Cathi Campbell, PhD
Gainesville, FL

Mark Campbell, DVM
Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens
Cincinnati, OH

Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, PhD
University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Carlos M. Cañas, PhD
WCS—Peru Program
Lima, Peru

Daren C. Card, PhD Candidate
University of Texas at Arlington
Arlington, TX

Kathy Carlstead, PhD
Honolulu Zoological Society
Honolulu, HI

Isabel Carrera, MS
University of Washington
Evanston, IL

Miriam Castillo, MBA
WCS—Guatemala Program
Ciudad Flores Peten, Guatemala

Malu Celli, PhD
Calgary Zoological Society
Calgary, Canada

Joshua Charlton, MSES, MAIS
WCS—Bronx Zoo
Bronx, NY

Jane Chimungeni-Brassington, PhD
Samaki Eco-Systems
Sydney, Australia

Ingeborg Hegemann Clark, MRP
Stow, MA

Jamie Rappoport Clark, MS
Defenders of Wildlife
Washington, D.C.

Shari Cohen, DVM
Melbourne, Australia

Kenneth J. Conley, DVM
WCS—Zoological Health Program
Bronx, NY

Peter Coppolillo, PhD
Working Dogs for Conservation
Bozeman, MT

Leslie A. Cornick, PhD
Alaska Pacific University
Anchorage, AK

James M. Corven, PhD
Bristol Community College
Fall River, MA
Cathleen Cox, PhD
Los Angeles Zoo
Los Angeles, CA

Rob Craig, MA
WCS—Afghanistan Program
Kabul, Afghanistan

Kenneth P. Currens, PhD
Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
Olympia, WA

Joshua Daskin, PhD Candidate
Princeton University
Princeton, NJ

Sarah Dawson, PhD
Lancaster, PA

Yvonne A. de Jong, PhD
Eastern Africa Primate Diversity and Conservation Programme & Lolldaiga Hills Research Programme
Nanyuki, Kenya

Shermin de Silva, PhD
Trunks & Leaves
Somerville, MA

Elyse DeFranco, MS
University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA

Maria del Carmen Fleytas, MS
WCS—Paraguay Program
Asuncion, Paraguay

James C. Deutsch, PhD
WCS—Global Conservation Program
Bronx, NY

Karl Didier, PhD
Wildlife Conservation Society
Gainesville, FL

Alex Diment, PhD
WCS—Cambodia Program
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Frito Dolisca, PhD
Orange, NJ

Roarke Donnelly, PhD
Oglethorpe University
Atlanta, GA

Candice Dorsey, PhD
Association of Zoos & Aquariums
Silver Spring, MD

Catherine Doyle, MS
Performing Animal Welfare Society
San Andreas, CA

Lori S. Eggert, PhD
University of Missouri
Columbia, MO

Donald P. Eaton, PhD
WCS—Brazil Program
Campo Grande, Brazil

Tom Evans, PhD
WCS—REDD+ and Forest Conservation Program
Oxford, UK

Valeria Falabella, MS
WCS—Argentina Program
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Donna M. Fernandes, PhD
Buffalo Zoo
Buffalo, NY

Amanda E. Fine, PhD, VMD
WCS—Wildlife Health & Health Policy Program
Hanoi, Vietnam

Vicki Fishlock, PhD
Amboseli Trust for Elephants
Nairobi, Kenya
Charles Foley, PhD  
WCS—Tanzania Program  
Arusha, Tanzania

Ian Gordon, PhD  
BirdLife International; National Museums of Kenya  
Nairobi, Kenya

William Foster, DVM  
Birmingham Zoo  
Birmingham, AL

Varun R. Goswami, PhD  
WCS—India Program  
Bangalore, India

Martín C. Funes, MS  
WCS—Argentina  
Junín de los Andes, Argentina

Laura H. Graham, PhD  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, Canada

Anthony Gachanja, PhD  
Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology  
Nairobi, Kenya

Zoe Greatorex, BVetMed, MS  
WCS—Lao PDR Program  
Vientiane, Laos

Tamara Gagnolet, MEM, MF  
Harrisburg, PA

Stephanie Boyles Griffin, MS  
The Humane Society of the United States  
Washington, D.C.

Joseph Gaspard, PhD  
Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium  
Pittsburgh, PA

Sarah Guindre-Parker, MS  
Columbia University  
New York, NY

Michael P. Ghiglieri, PhD  
OARS, Inc. and Tropical Ice, Ltd.  
Flagstaff, AZ

John Hadidian, PhD  
The Humane Society of the United States  
Washington, D.C.

Martin Gilbert, BVMS  
WCS and University of Glasgow  
Glasgow, Scotland

Christopher Hallam, PhD Candidate  
University of Melbourne  
Melbourne, Australia

Francis Gilbert, PhD  
Baltimore, MD

Robert Hanner, PhD  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, Canada

Michale Glennon, PhD  
WCS—Adirondack Program  
Saranac Lake, NY

Amanda Hardy, PhD  
WCS—North America Program  
Bozeman, MT

Kathleen S. Gobush, PhD  
University of Washington and Vulcan, Inc.  
Seattle, WA

Guillermo Harris, DVM  
WCS—Argentina Program  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Rachel Golden, MS  
George Mason University  
Silver Spring, MD

Terese Hart, PhD  
Lukuru Wildlife Research Foundation  
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo
Nancy C. Hawkes, PhD
Woodland Park Zoo
Seattle, WA

Blair Hayman, MS
Gainesville, FL

Michelle Henley, PhD
Save the Elephants - South Africa;
ElephantsAlive
Hoedspruit, South Africa

Katherine Holmes, MS
WCS—Marine Conservation Program
Bronx, NY

Michael Hutchins, PhD
World Safaris
Silver Spring, MD

Lynne A. Isbell, PhD
University of California, Davis
Davis, CA

Aerin Jacob, PhD
University of Victoria
Victoria, Canada

Shivani Jadeja, MS
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE

Devcharan Jathanna, MS
Centre for Wildlife Studies
Bangalore, India

Deborah B. Jensen, PhD
Woodland Park Zoo
Seattle, WA

Trevor Jones, PhD
Southern Tanzania Elephant Project
Iringa, Tanzania

Paula Kahumbu, PhD
Wildlife Direct
Nairobi, Kenya

K. Ullas Karanth, PhD
Centre for Wildlife Studies; WCS—India Program
Bangalore, India

Krithi Karanth, PhD
WCS—India
Bangalore, India

Winnie Kiiru, PhD
CHD Conservation Kenya
Kenya

Lucy E. King, PhD
Save the Elephants
Nairobi, Kenya

Margaret Kinnaird, PhD
Mpala Research Centre and WCS
Nanyuki, Kenya

Robert D. Klemm, PhD
Sunset Zoological Park
Manhattan, KS

Fred W. Koontz, PhD
Woodland Park Zoo
Seattle, WA

Jason Koontz, PhD
Augustana College
Rock Island, IL

Daniel Boyd Kramer, PhD
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI

Heidi Kretser, PhD
WCS—Adirondack Program
Saranac Lake, NY

Indah Eni Kuchambi, MS
WCS—Cameroon
Limbe, Cameroon

N. Samba Kumar, PhD
WCS—India Program
Bangalore, India
Danielle LaBruna, MA  
WCS—Conservation Support  
Bronx, NY

Eric Larsen, PhD  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, IL

Mike Lawes, PhD  
Charles Darwin University  
Darwin, Australia

Phyllis C. Lee, PhD  
Amboseli Trust for Elephants and University of Stirling  
Nairobi, Kenya and Stirling, UK

Susan Lieberman, PhD  
WCS—International Policy  
Washington, DC and New York, NY

Keith Lindsay, PhD  
Amboseli Trust for Elephants  
Nairobi, Kenya and Oxford, UK

Susan Lyndaker Lindsey, PhD  
Mesker Park Zoo & Botanic Garden  
Evansville, IN

Jean-Paul Kibambe Lubamba, PhD  
WCS—DRC Program  
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Debborah E. Luke, PhD  
Association of Zoos & Aquariums  
Silver Spring, MD

Anna M. Lyles, PhD  
Bio-Gist-Ventures, LLC  
Princeton, NJ

Antony J. Lynam, PhD  
WCS—Asia Program  
Bangkok, Thailand

Malcolm R. MacPherson, PhD  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Fiona Maisels, PhD  
WCS—Africa Program  
Edinburgh, UK

Sarah Maisonneuve, PhD Candidate  
Wildlife Connection  
Fort Collins, CO and Iringa, Tanzania

Sue Manasse, MS  
Wildlife Conservation Society  
Bronx, NY

Khyne U. Mar, PhD  
University of Sheffield  
Sheffield, UK

Karen McComb, PhD  
University of Sussex  
Sussex, UK

Alastair McNeilage  
Wildlife Conservation Society  
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo

Jana McPherson, PhD  
Calgary Zoological Society  
Calgary, Canada

Jill D. Mellen, PhD  
Orlando, FL

Vivek Menon, BS, PgD  
Wildlife Trust of India  
Noida, India

Adina M. Merenlender, PhD  
University of California, Berkeley  
Berkeley, CA

Alisse Metge, MS  
Spokane Valley, WA

Rachel E. Metz, MA  
Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center  
Virginia Beach, VA

Darren Minier, MAIS  
Oakland Zoo; University of California, Davis  
Oakland, CA

Dale Miquelle, PhD  
WCS—Russia Program  
Bozeman, MT
Robert P. Moore, DVM, DABVP-Avian
WCS—Zoological Health Program
Bronx, NY

Cynthia Moss, DSc
Amboseli Trust for Elephants
Nairobi, Kenya

John Mull, PhD
Weber State University
Ogden, UT

B.M. Mutayoba, PhD
Sokoine University of Agriculture
Morogoro, Tanzania

Elizabeth N. Muthiani, PhD
Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
Makindu, Kenya

Nyawira Muthiga, PhD
Wildlife Conservation Society
Mombasa, Kenya

Tarun Nair, MS
Researchers for Wildlife Conservation
Bangalore, India

Grace Nangendo, PhD
WCS—Uganda
Kampala, Uganda

Paul K. Ndang’ang’a, PhD
BirdLife International
Nairobi, Kenya

Aaron Nicholas, MS
WCS—Tanzania Program
Iringa, Tanzania

Amy Noddings, MESM
Goleta, CA

Katarzyna Nowak, PhD
Durham University and University of the Free
State, Qwaqwa
Hogsback, South Africa

Matthew Nuttall, MS
WCS—Cambodia Program
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Philip Nyhus, PhD
Colby College
Waterville, ME

Timothy G. O’Brien, PhD
Mpala Research Centre and WCS
Nanyuki, Kenya

Colleen O’Donnell, MS
Las Vegas, NV

Darcy Ogada, PhD
The Peregrine Fund
Nairobi, Kenya

Jackie Ogden, PhD
Walt Disney Parks
Orlando, FL

Sarah H. Olson, PhD
WCS—Wildlife Health & Health Policy Program
Bozeman, MT

Steven A. Osofsky, DVM
WCS—Wildlife Health & Health Policy
Washington, DC

Michael Painter, PhD
WCS—Conservation & the Quality of Human Life Program
Bronx, NY

Katy Payne, BA
Elephant Listening Project, Cornell University
Ithaca, NY

John Payne, PhD
WCS—Pacific West and Alaska Program
Seattle, WA

Linda M. Penfold, PhD
South-East Zoo Alliance for Reproduction & Conservation
Yulee, FL
Renee Petipas, MS
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY

Alex Piel, PhD
University of Cambridge
Cambridge, UK

Craig Piper, MS
WCS—City Zoos; The National Elephant Center
New York, NY and Fellsmere, FL

Robert Scott Placier, MS
Hocking College
Nelsonville, OH

Michaela Plein, PhD Candidate
University of Melbourne
Parkville, Australia

Andy Plumptre, PhD
WCS—Albertine Rift Program
Kampala, Uganda

Johanna F. Polsenberg, PhD
WCS—Marine Conservation Program; and University of Queensland
Washington, DC and Brisbane, Australia

Joyce Poole, PhD
ElephantVoices
San Francisco, CA and Nairobi, Kenya

David Powell, PhD
WCS—Bronx Zoo
Bronx, NY

Mary Powell-McConnell, MS
Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
Tucson, AZ

Jennifer B. Pramuk, PhD
Woodland Park Zoo
Seattle, WA

Yolanda Pretorius, PhD
University of Pretoria; Elephant Specialist Advisory Group - South Africa
Pretoria, South Africa

Budhan Pukazhenthi, PhD
Beltsville, MD

Tom A. Ranker, PhD
University of Hawaii at Manoa
Honolulu, HI

Justina Ray, PhD
WCS Canada
Toronto, Canada

Killivalavan Rayar, MS
WCS—India Program
Bangalore, India

Richard P. Reading, PhD
Denver Zoological Foundation
Denver, CO

Evan Reimondo, MS
Western Sense
Lander, WY

Melinda Rekdahl, PhD
WCS—Ocean Giants Program
Bronx, NY

Thomas Rooney, PhD
Wright State University
Dayton, OH

Terri L. Roth, PhD
Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens
Cincinnati, OH

Andrew Rowan, D.Phil.
Humane Society International
Washington, DC

Matthew Rubino, MS
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC

Elena Rubino, PhD Candidate
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL
Kathleen P. Rudolph, PhD
University of Florida
Tucson, AZ

Periann Russell, MS
Raleigh, NC

Gerard Ryan, MEnv
University of Melbourne
Melbourne, Australia

Anthony B. Rylands, PhD
Conservation International; IUCN SSC Primate Specialist Group
Washington, DC

Jennifer Schieltz, PhD Candidate
Princeton University
Princeton, NJ

Jerry R. Schubel, PhD
Aquarium of the Pacific
Long Beach, CA

Carrie Schuman, PhD Candidate
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL

Nancy L. Scott, MS
Dallas Zoo
Dallas, TX

Nitin Sekar, PhD Candidate
Princeton University
Princeton, NJ

Thomas Selby, MS
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL

Stuart Semple, PhD
University of Roehampton, London
London, UK

Ravi Shankar, PhD
Centre for Wildlife Studies; WCS—India Program
Bangalore, India

Graeme Shannon, PhD
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO

Enkhtuvshin Shiilegdamba, DVM
WCS—Mongolia Program
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Scott Silver, PhD
WCS—Queens Zoo
Queens, NY

Melissa Nelson Slater, MA
WCS—Bronx Zoo
Bronx, NY

Thomas B. Smith, PhD
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA

Andrew Smith, PhD
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ

Jacob B. Socolar, MA
Princeton University
Princeton, NJ

Ralf Sonntag, PhD
International Fund for Animal Welfare
Hamburg, Germany

Stephanie Spehar, PhD
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI

Ellen Spencer, MA
WCS—New York Aquarium
Brooklyn, NY

Timothy Spencer, PhD
Nature Publishing Group
New York, NY

Vanjulavalli Sridhar, MS
Government of India
Dehradun, India
Alicia Srinivas, MS
WCS—Ecuador Program
Quito, Ecuador

Arjun Srivathsa, MS
WCS—India Program
Bangalore, India

Ruth Starkey, MS
WCS—Tanzania Program
Iringa, Tanzania

Julie Stein, MES
Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network
Nashville, TN

Samantha Strindberg, PhD
WCS—Conservation Support
Bronx, NY

Thomas T. Struhsaker, PhD
Duke University
Durham, NC

Robert Summerfelt, PhD
Iowa State University
Ames, IA

Marcy Summers, MWC
Alliance for Tompotika Conservation
Vashon, WA and Sulawesi, Indonesia

William Swanson, DVM, PhD
Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens
Cincinnati, OH

Elizabeth Swart, PhD, LCSW
Amboseli Trust for Elephants
Newburyport, MA

John M. Sykes, DVM
WCS—Zoological Health Program
Bronx, NY

Teresa Telecky, PhD
Humane Society International
Washington, DC

Mekbeb Eshetu Tessema, PhD
WCS—South Sudan
Juba, South Sudan

Patrick R. Thomas, PhD
WCS—Bronx Zoo
Bronx, NY

Roger K.R. Thompson, PhD
Franklin & Marshall College
Lancaster, PA

Jo Thompson, PhD
Lukuru Wildlife Research Foundation
Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo and
Marion, OH

Sandra Tranquilli, PhD
Berlin, Germany

Timothy Treuer, PhD Candidate
Princeton University
Princeton, NJ

Chris T. Tromborg, PhD
Sacramento City College; University of
California, Davis
Davis, CA

Andrea K. Turkalo, MA
Wildlife Conservation Society
Bangui, Central African Republic

Geri Unger, MS
Society for Conservation Biology
Washington, DC

Divya Vasudev, PhD
WCS—India Program
Bangalore, India

Maria Vorontsova, PhD
International Fund for Animal Welfare
Moscow, Russia

Robert Wallace, PhD
WCS—Bolivia Program
La Paz, Bolivia
Hans Walters, MS  WCS—New York Seascape Program  Brooklyn, NY

Samuel K. Wasser, PhD  University of Washington  Seattle, WA

Richard Watson, PhD  Boise, ID

Sarah Werner, MS  Wildlife Conservation Society  Bronx, NY

Dan Wharton, PhD  Chicago Zoological Society  Pelham, NY

Nathan Whitmore, MS  WCS—Papua New Guinea Program  Goroka, Papua New Guinea

Kirsten Wimberger, PhD  University of Cape Town  Cape Town, South Africa

Rosie Woodroffe, PhD  Zoological Society of London  London, UK

Steve Zack, PhD  WCS—Species Conservation Program  Portland, OR

Li Zhang, PhD  Beijing Normal University  Beijing, China

---


