



August 7, 2015

## Status of the African Lion and Sport Hunting

### The Killing of Cecil the Lion

An American citizen was accused of illegally killing a popular lion named Cecil near the Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe in July 2015. The citizen reportedly paid some \$50,000 to conduct the hunt. The hunt reportedly was illegal because the owner of the land on which the lion was killed did not have a quota to hunt a lion and the local hunting guide did not have an appropriate permit. Zimbabwean authorities are seeking to extradite the U.S. citizen to face charges associated with funding an illegal hunt and have confiscated the lion's severed head (i.e., the trophy). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is conducting an investigation into the incident.

The incident has stimulated debate on sport hunting and raised questions about the relative importance of sport hunting versus other threats to the species. Further, it has raised questions about the status of the African lion under the Endangered Species Act (ESA; P.L. 93-205). Some in Congress cite this incident to contend that protections for the African lion should be enhanced in U.S. conservation laws. The incident also has highlighted ongoing federal and congressional efforts to address global wildlife trafficking in general.

### Status of the African Lion (*Panthera leo leo*)

The range and population of the African lion has declined in recent decades. Although it once ranged across most of the African continent, scientists estimate that the African lion now resides in 22% of its historical range. Recent estimates suggest that the wild lion population in Africa falls between 23,000 and 39,000, with most of the population living in 10 regional strongholds—primarily in protected and game management areas in Eastern and Southern Africa. Nearly 40% of all African lions are in Tanzania.

FWS has stated that habitat loss and degradation, largely caused by the expansion of agriculture and ranching in Africa, are the main threats to the African lion. Associated with this expansion is an increase in human-lion conflicts. The most significant form of this conflict is the retaliatory killing of lions that prey on livestock and, to a lesser extent, that harm humans. FWS also concluded that sport hunting was not a primary threat to African lion populations.

### Selected Regulations and U.S. Laws That Address Sport Hunting

Sport hunting is addressed internationally through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Under CITES, species are categorized into one of three appendixes corresponding to how threatened their population is due to trade; Appendix I consists of species most threatened with

extinction. Although commercial trade in Appendix I species generally is prohibited under CITES, sport hunting is not considered a commercial activity. Sport-hunted trophies of Appendix I species require both an export permit from the country in which the animal was hunted and an import permit from the trophy's destination country. Some countries have quotas for sport-hunted trophies. For example, Tanzania has an annual quota is 50 lions per year and Zimbabwe has one of 70 lions per year.

In the United States, laws related to international sport hunting are governed by ESA, which implements CITES and is administered by FWS. If a species is listed as endangered, import of a sport-hunted trophy is prohibited unless an *enhancement of survival permit* is obtained and used. Enhancement of survival implies that the import of endangered animals or their parts or products will provide incentives for increasing the survival of the species in its native habitat. If a species is listed as threatened, the same rules apply unless there is a special rule, which may allow for a limited number of trophies to be imported.

The illegal killing of a foreign species (according to U.S. or foreign law) also could be a violation of the Lacey Act. Under the Lacey Act, it is unlawful for any person to import, export, transport, sell, receive, acquire, or purchase in interstate or foreign commerce any wildlife taken, possessed, transported, or sold in violation of any law or regulation of any foreign law.

### Protection of the African Lion

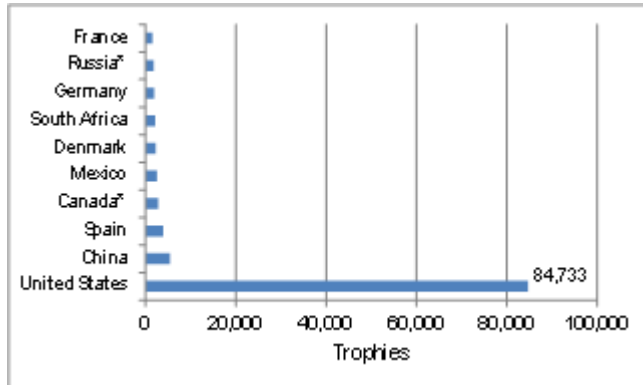
The African lion is listed under CITES as an Appendix II species, the second-most-stringent category of trade controls on protected species. Range countries are required to issue export permits for the outbound transport of an Appendix II species. Depending on domestic laws, a destination country may require an import permit for an Appendix II species. The permitting process aims to regulate and monitor the conservation and management of the animals, including those killed for sport.

In the United States, the African lion currently is not listed as a threatened or endangered species pursuant to ESA. However, FWS issued a proposal in October 2014 to list the African lion as threatened species under ESA. If listed, FWS could regulate the import of sport-hunted trophies of African lions into the United States. A listing under ESA would not prohibit the hunting or killing of lions in Africa; these activities are subject to the laws of the range country.

FWS also is proposing a rule to accompany the listing, referred to as a Section 4(d) rule. This rule would create a permitting mechanism to regulate the import of sport-hunted African lion trophies into the United States. The proposed rule states that trophies may originate only from

countries that are implementing a scientifically sound management plan for African lions. If the rule is finalized, FWS would monitor lion conservation in countries where sport hunting is allowed. If sufficient management and conservation practices were not being followed, FWS could suspend the import of trophies to the United States, an action that FWS took against sport-hunted elephant trophies from Zimbabwe and Tanzania in 2014.

**Figure 1. Top 10 Importers of all Mammal Trophies (2008-2014, as reported by importing country)**



Source: CITES Trade Database at <http://trade.cites.org/>.

Notes: Trophies compiled for countries with an asterisk are reported by exporting countries.

### International Sport Hunting

The killing of Cecil the lion has sparked a general controversy over the practice of sport-hunting iconic species in foreign countries. Proponents of sport hunting contend that if hunting-related profits are used for the conservation and management of animal populations, these funds could support conservation goals. Further, they state that sport hunting is an important contributor to regional economies in some range countries. Critics argue that in some range states where wildlife management practices may be poorly implemented and where the profits associated with sport hunting are not directly linked with conservation efforts, species' populations may continue to be threatened by hunting. Sport hunting could be used to conceal illegal wildlife trafficking, or the revenue sport hunting generates may be lost to corruption. When species are threatened by habitat loss, human-animal conflict, and poaching, sport hunting could exacerbate a species' decline.

The United States plays a dominant role in the sport hunting of CITES-listed species, representing roughly 40%-70% of the annual global trade. (See **Figure 1**.) However, in recent years, European and other hunters have increased their share in trophies. The United States is also a leading country for importing sport-hunted lion trophies, accounting for 64% of all lion trophies imported (See **Figure 2**).

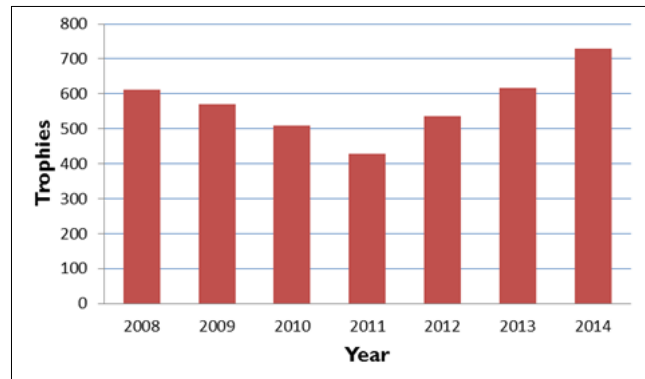
### Congressional Responses

Several Members have responded to the reported killing of Cecil the lion by issuing public statements on the incident and urging FWS to finalize the proposed rule on listing the African lion under ESA. Several bills have been introduced in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress to address wildlife trafficking,

including one specifically in response to Cecil's death. S. 1918, the Conserving Ecosystems by Ceasing the Importation of Large (CECIL) Animal Trophies Act, would amend ESA to prohibit the import or export of any species proposed to be listed as threatened or endangered. Other bills include the Rare Cats and Canids Act of 2015 (H.R. 2697), which would establish a separate account within the Multinational Species Conservation Fund that could provide assistance for the conservation of African lions, among other specified wildlife.

**Figure 2. African Lion Trophy Imports to the United States**

(captive bred and wild imports)



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The killing of Cecil the lion may spark further interest in legislation seeking to address global wildlife trafficking generally, including the Global Anti-Poaching Act (H.R. 2494) and the Wildlife Trafficking Enforcement Act of 2015 (S. 27).

Advocates against sport hunting call for implementing wholesale bans on the import of popular sport-hunted species from Africa, expanding ESA's extraterritorial reach, prohibiting transport of game trophies of threatened and endangered species through certain U.S. airports, and addressing funding for FWS to expedite the endangered species listing process. Advocates of sport hunting, however, have questioned whether the focus on hunting African lions would be better directed toward other priorities, since FWS concluded that sport hunting was not a threat to African lions.

Congressional reactions also may generate further interest in evaluating the Obama Administration's progress toward implementing the February 2014 National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking. Among several objectives, the strategy states that the Administration will use administrative tools to address the poaching of African elephants and rhinos by limiting the number of sport-hunted trophies an individual can import. A key question for policymakers will be the scope of U.S. anti-trafficking efforts and which species, if any, require enhanced policy attention.

**Pervaze A. Sheikh**, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy  
**Liana W. Rosen**, Specialist in International Crime and Narcotics

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