

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Director Dan Ashe
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1840 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

October 9, 2015

Dear Director Ashe,

We are writing to express our support for the provisions of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (FWS) proposed rule for the African elephant related to the import, export, and foreign and interstate commercial use of ivory.

As you know, African elephants are in the midst of a disastrous poaching crisis due to demand for their ivory tusks. A study published last summer found that 100,000 African elephants were illegally killed between 2010 and 2012 – an average of 96 elephants per day or one every 15 minutes – and some scientists estimate that the number could be significantly higher. For example, poaching has devastated the population of forest elephants in Central Africa, with studies showing a decline of two-thirds between 2002 and 2013. Heavy poaching in this region continues and, at this rate, forest elephants could be extinct in the wild within a decade.

Wildlife trafficking is worth an estimated \$8 to \$10 billion annually, making it one of the world's largest illicit industries alongside trafficking in drugs, weapons and human beings. Enormous profits have attracted transnational organized criminal syndicates that are increasingly facilitating large-scale shipments of poached elephant ivory out of Africa and into markets in Asia, Europe and the United States. There is also evidence that the illegal ivory trade is a source of funding for extremist groups, including the Lord's Resistance Army, Sudan's Janjaweed militias, and others accused of human rights atrocities and terrorism.

The United States is one of the world's largest ivory consumers, with a legal commercial ivory market that serves as cover for smuggled ivory. A comprehensive study in 2008 of more than 650 retail stores in 16 cities in the U.S. and Canada found that of the 24,000 pieces of ivory for sale, as many as one-third were potentially illegal and warranted further testing. A follow-up study by one of the report's original authors last year found that more than half of the ivory items for sale by more than 100 ivory vendors in California could have been illegal under federal law. Other investigations have found millions of dollars' worth of undocumented ivory available online through internet auction houses, the classified ad site Craigslist.org, and other venues. All of this illegal commerce continues to stimulate the market and leads to more elephant poaching. Existing regulations are clearly inadequate to prevent illegal, smuggled ivory from being purchased by unwitting American consumers.

FWS's proposed rule on African elephant ivory would close loopholes that have allowed illegal ivory to penetrate the U.S. commercial market – most notably by taking the common-sense step of shifting the burden of proof of age and provenance to the person seeking to sell an item containing

ivory – while continuing to allow our constituents to buy and sell items like firearms, knives, musical instruments and furnishings that are either bona fide antiques or contain only a small amount of legally-imported ivory that does not constitute the item’s primary source of value. Furthermore, the proposed rule would also tighten the existing restrictions on the exportation of manufactured ivory to stop the disturbing trend of the United States serving as a transit country for shipping illegal ivory from source countries to markets in Asia. We appreciate that nothing in the proposal would make possession, bequests or gift-giving of ivory illegal.

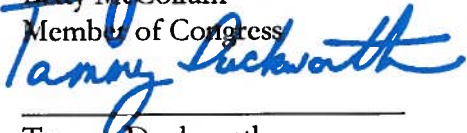
We urge the Administration to complete work on this rule without further exemptions or delay to ensure that the United States no longer serves as a destination or transit country for poached ivory, and to stop the inadvertent support of extremist groups by American consumers that have unwittingly purchased illegal ivory. Further, we believe that final action on the rule will have a significant impact in other countries, such as China, the world’s largest consumer of ivory, which has noted publicly that its own actions to halt domestic commerce in ivory are greatly influenced by actions taken by the United States.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and thank you for your continued efforts.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



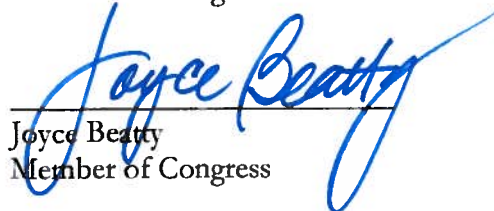
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Member of Congress



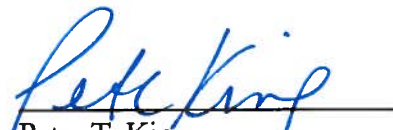
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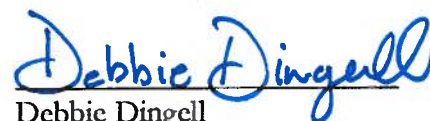
Joyce Beatty
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Peter T. King
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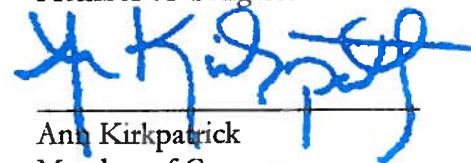
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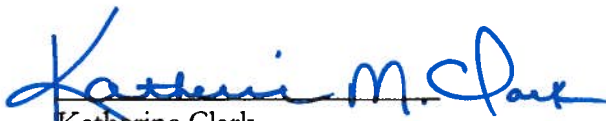
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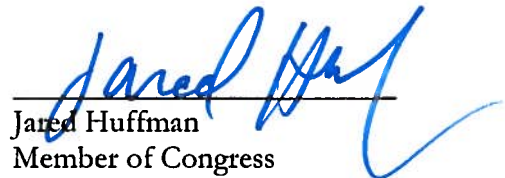
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Sean Patrick Maloney
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Donald Norcross
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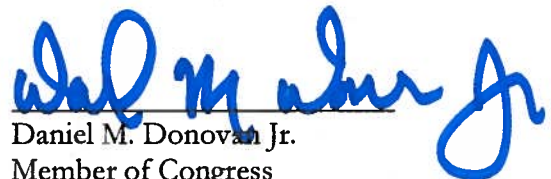
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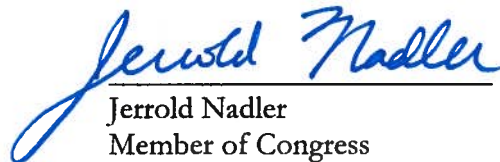
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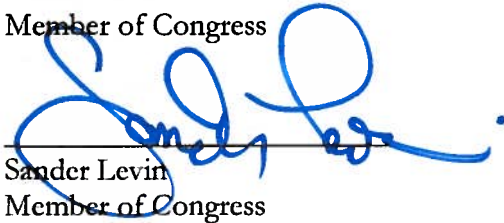
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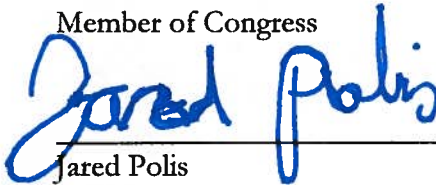
Susan Davis
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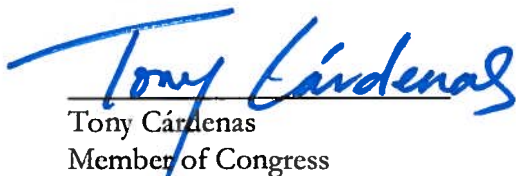
Sander Levin
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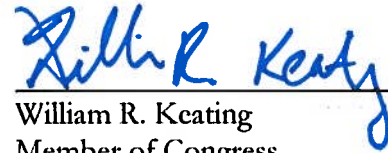
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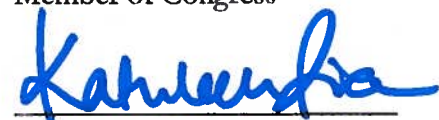
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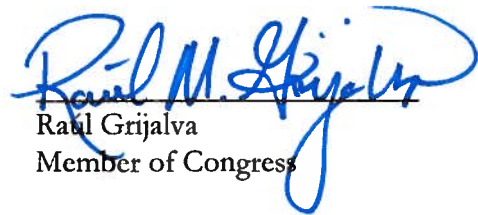
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