

Black Rhinoceros Conservation and Trophy Hunting in Southern Africa: Implications of Recent Policy Changes



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Abstract

The black rhinoceros, *Diceros bicornis*, is one of the most endangered species of terrestrial mammals in the world, with an estimated 3,600 animals remaining across a range that once covered most of sub-Saharan Africa. The principle cause of black rhino endangerment and decline during the past 30 years has been trade in rhino horn in the Far East and Arabian Peninsula. As a result of the threats posed from this trade, black rhinos have been listed on Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) since 1977, making all trade in rhino horn illegal. This trade ban has had limited impact in achieving its objectives of reducing the trade in rhino horn and protecting and recovering black rhino populations in Africa. Black rhino populations continued to decline in the late 1970's and 1980's, driven by the lucrative black market trade in horn and ineffective range state law enforcement practices. Several countries in southern Africa, principally South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, possess the most successful record of rhino conservation in sub-Saharan Africa; in South Africa and Namibia, black rhino populations have more than doubled since 1970. Rhino management in these countries has emphasized strong law enforcement and intensive monitoring in state protected areas, coupled with policies that enable private landholders and rural communities to capture economic benefits from rhinos. As a result of black rhino population recoveries in South Africa and Namibia, as well as the success of their market-based management strategies and desire to further expand black rhino ranges on private lands, those two countries submitted a proposal at the thirteenth CITES Conference of Parties (CoP) in October 2004, to initiate limited trophy hunting of black rhinos. Despite significant international resistance to rhino hunting among some conservation groups and animal welfare advocacy organizations, the proposal to hunt black rhinos in South Africa and Namibia was approved and quotas of five black rhinos per year for each of the two countries. This decision represents a watershed change in international approaches to black rhino conservation, with potentially important implications for the management and recovery of this critically endangered species.

About the Author

Fred Nelson is a Master's student in the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan. Prior to that he worked for seven years in Tanzania on community-based natural resource management, policy analysis, and enterprise development.