

Public Hearing – March 3, 2021
Environment Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner Katie Dykes

Senate Bill No. 925 – An Act Prohibiting the Import, Sale and Possession of African Elephants, Lions, Leopards, Black Rhinoceros, White Rhinoceros and Giraffes.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding Senate Bill No. 925 – An Act Prohibiting the Import, Sale and Possession of African Elephants, Lions, Leopards, Black Rhinoceros, White Rhinoceros and Giraffes. The Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) welcomes the opportunity to offer the following testimony.

We support the Committee’s interest in advancing the conservation of rare and imperiled wildlife, including those beyond our borders. We have concerns with this proposal as it could have negative impacts on conservation by limiting how local communities in the countries of Africa and other continents benefit from the sustainable use and conservation of species. Legal and sustainable use provides both an incentive and a funding source for conservation.

Several African countries, including seven Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries,¹ rely on hunting as part of their conservation strategies. The benefits of regulated hunting in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, among other countries, is well-documented. Among these is critical support for anti-poaching programs. Without funding, those programs would collapse and be replaced by illegal hunting/trade.

The bullets below discuss some of the conservation implications for many African countries, if states like Connecticut adopt hunting related importation and possession bans.

- SADC countries have objected to trade restrictions related to wildlife at the federal and international levels. State or provincial restrictions on import or possession of lawfully harvested wildlife is expected to reduce the benefits generated by regulated hunting to support continued conservation of these species. The world’s largest populations of elephant, leopard, lion, black and white rhino, and many other species inhabit the SADC countries where they are hunted. For example, almost all rhinoceros (black and white), over 80% of elephants, and most lions inhabit these seven SADC countries. Legal hunting has supported wildlife conservation through the revenue it has generated.
- Habitat conservation also depends on revenues from hunting. Hunting revenues fund government efforts to protect habitat and conduct anti-poaching efforts; they also incentivize the dedication of private and communal lands to wildlife. The wildlife authorities of SADC countries depend on funding from hunting for their law enforcement, anti-poaching operations, habitat protection, research, and other management activities. For example, in Tanzania, hunting revenues historically comprised 80% of the Tanzania

Wildlife Management Authority's budget. In 2014, this exceeded \$16 million, with over \$7 million invested in anti-poaching. The remainder was used for habitat improvement, research, compensation for wildlife damages, and similar purposes. The same is true of the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and other country wildlife authorities that are government enterprises and do not receive national funding.

Proposed importation and possession bans aim to obstruct regulated hunting. Hunting is essential because it secures and successfully grows large amounts of the habitat for both hunted and non-hunted species, provides funding for anti-poaching programs, provides operating revenues for wildlife management departments, and incentivizes local communities to conserve wildlife.

The U.S. is a signatory to the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). CITES established a legal framework and procedures for the effective regulation of international trade in some species while prohibiting trade in others. CITES uses scientific and trade information to make these informed decisions. For example, trade, including hunting, is prohibited for four of the five species of white rhinoceros. Conversely, science has shown that regulated and limited international trade is not detrimental the survival of one subspecies of the white rhinoceros or the African lion. Consequently, trade in these species is both is legal and regulated, including hunting.

Concerning section 2 of the bill, which relates to repealing existing language and substituting new language in section 26-311(d) of the general statutes, please note that the language designated for substitution is the language that already exists in section 26-311(d).

In summary, while the Department supports measures to advance the conservation of rare and imperiled species, this proposal may have the unintended consequence of harming established conservation efforts. As such, DEEP urges caution when considering adoption of Senate Bill No. 925. Rather, we believe such issues are better addressed through CITES, sovereign self-determination, and federal law.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this proposal. If you should require any additional information, please contact James Albis at james.albis@ct.gov.