

Zimbabwe: Conservation Leaders in Partnership with the United States

Zimbabwe's hunting industry represents best practice in how tourism can drive wildlife management and community development – in partnership with American hunters, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regulations, and the United States' international conservation mandate.

Global Leadership in Sustainable Use

- The following Southern African Development Community countries that use hunting tourism as a wildlife management tool have already achieved the Global Biodiversity Framework target to protect 30% of land by 2030: Namibia (40%), Tanzania (40%), and Zambia, (41%). Botswana (29%), Mozambique (29%), and Zimbabwe (28%) are also very close to reaching the target from inception¹.
- Hunting tourism secures more than 3x the amount of habitat than all of Zimbabwe's national parks, including on communal lands, safari areas, and private conservancies².
- Zimbabwe is recognized as a top performer in relative efforts to conserve biodiversity – ranked 5th out of 152 countries in a 'Megafauna Conservation Index' (7 of the top 10 are in Southern Africa)³.
- Private sector safari operators invest in conservation and community development outside formally protected areas – funding anti-poaching units, human-wildlife conflict mitigation, and food security where there are limited alternatives.
- Hunting areas provide critical buffer zones to national parks without public funding or mainstream philanthropy, and operators are a major revenue source for ZimPark's management budget.

Community Benefits through the CAMPFIRE Program

- Zimbabwe pioneered community-based natural resource management in the late 1980s through the CAMPFIRE program⁴, which has been adopted across Southern Africa (e.g., Namibia's communal conservancies, Botswana's community trusts).
- CAMPFIRE delivers income generation and social empowerment to rural areas, supporting more than 800,000 households or about 25% of Zimbabwe's total human population⁵.
- This model is 90% funded by international hunting tourism, 70% of which historically comes from elephant hunting alone⁶.
- Without American hunting clients, safari operators would not be able to build schools or health clinics, drill water boreholes, or provide a variety of social services to local communities.

Wildlife Conservation Success

- Zimbabwe's elephant population is the second largest in the world⁷ estimated to be about 90,000 individuals pending new data.
- A new 10-year Elephant National Management and Action Plan is in preparation building on ZimPark's past leadership.
- The hunting industry led efforts to self-regulate and establish a novel, sustainable age-based lion quota-setting system that has been replicated in other countries and hunting areas.

- Private conservancies (e.g., Bulyebe and Save Valley) funded by hunting tourism also protect critical populations of endangered species such as black rhino and African wild dog.

Need for Partnership with the United States

Zimbabwe's successful model depends on a robust American hunting market and a stable, science-based wildlife trade policy. Restricted U.S. VISAs for tourism professionals would prevent operators, specifically members of the Zimbabwe Professional Guides Association, from marketing at events such as the Dallas Safari Club Convention & Sporting Expo, effectively limiting their business potential. Overregulation and trophy import bans, including legislative proposals, Administrative rules, and transportation restrictions, have already negatively impacted Zimbabwe's hunting industry, local community benefits, and the country's legacy of conservation leadership⁸.

U.S. foreign policy should recognize Zimbabwe's safari operators as key partners in advancing the Fish & Wildlife Service's international conservation mandate under the Endangered Species Act and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Zimbabwe's government, operators, and community organizations want a real partnership reflected in U.S. support for private sector-led conservation through American hunting tourism. We therefore ask U.S. policymakers to support Zimbabwe's successful model by making VISA exemptions for tourism professionals demonstrating conservation value and to maintain the legal, science-based import of hunting trophies.



-
- ¹ UNEP-WCMC and IUCN. (2024). Protected Planet: The World Database on Protected Areas. Cambridge, UK. Available at: www.protectedplanet.net.
- ² Conservation Force. (2020, October 10). *Hunting Secures the Most Habitat for Wildlife and Biodiversity Integrity* (Factsheet). New Orleans, USA.
- ³ Lindsey, P.A., Chapron, G., Petracca, L.S., Burnham, D., Hayward, M.W., Henschel, P., Hinks, A.E., Garnett, S.T., Macdonald, D.W., Macdonald, E.A., Ripple, W.J., Zander, K., and Dickman, A. (2017). Relative efforts of countries to conserve world's megafauna. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 10, 243–252. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2017.03.003>.
- ⁴ Taylor, R. (2009). Community based natural resource management in Zimbabwe: the experience of CAMPFIRE. *Biodiversity and Conservation*, 18(10), 2563–2583. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-009-9612-8>.
- ⁵ Booth, V. (2016). *The Role of Trophy Hunting in Support of the Zimbabwe CAMPFIRE Program*. CAMPFIRE Association. Harare, Zimbabwe.
- ⁶ Bond, I. (1994). The importance of the sport-hunted African elephant to CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe. *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, 14(3), 117–119.
- ⁷ Zimbabwe National Elephant Management Plan 2021-2025. Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. Harare, Zimbabwe.
- ⁸ Nyamayedenga, S., Mashapa, C., Chateya, R.J., and Gandiwa, E. (2021). An assessment of the impact of the 2014 US elephant trophy importation ban on the hunting patterns in Matetsi Hunting Complex, north-west Zimbabwe. *Global Ecology and Conservation*, 30, e01758. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2021.e01758>.