

by Gerhard Damm

Us Court Overturns Bid To Stop Importation Of Namibian Rhino Trophies

The Washington DC District Court has ruled that American hunters can import endangered black rhino trophies from Namibia into the United States despite opposition from two groups which argued that allowing the export of the trophies would encourage rhino poaching in Africa.

Delivering judgement in the joint lawsuit filed in the Washington DC District Court in April 2014 in which US-based Friends of Animals and the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force (ZCTF) sought a court interdict against the two black rhino hunts conducted in Namibia, Washington DC District Court Judge Amy Berman Jackson ruled that there was no legal basis for the challenge. Conservation Force acted as legal representative of the Republic of Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism and Dallas Safari Club.

Judge Jackson said the importation of rhino trophies did not constitute a threat to the preservation of the black rhino because they were issued by the Namibian government after considering the possible impacts on conservation.

Earlier, Namibian Information minister Hon. Tjekero Tweya announced that his government had resolved to reject all calls by groups opposed to its policy of allowing hunting of animals which include rhinos. "Cabinet directed the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to actively campaign against any attempt to ban or restrict hunting and the export of wildlife products from Namibia. Cabinet took note that a code of conduct for conservation hunting is being developed, accompanied by improvements in the regulation of hunting and strengthening the link between hunting and conservation," Tweya said. In line with the policy, Namibia has directed all government ministers and agencies to campaign against the ban on trophy hunting.

In 2012 the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organization (NACSO) were awarded the prestigious CIC Markhor Award for the introduction and supporting of the Communal Conservancy Program in Namibia, which allows rural communities to facilitate the sustainable use of wildlife on communal land. As self-governing entities, the Namibian Communal Conservancies enjoy the same rights over wildlife and tourism that private farms do; as collectives they earn money on conservancy lands from hunting tourism and game sales as well as from joint ventures with lodge operators. As a consequence wildlife numbers increased dramatically.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded on extensive assessments of the conservation and management programs of black rhinos in Namibia, that the import of two sport-hunted black rhinoceros trophies from Namibia will benefit conservation of the species. The black rhino hunts associated with the imports of two sport-hunted trophies are consistent with the conservation strategy of Namibia, a

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country whose rhino population is steadily increasing, and will generate a combined total of \$550,000 for wildlife conservation, anti-poaching efforts and community development programs in Namibia. According to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service director Dan Ashe U.S. citizens make up a large share of foreign hunters who book trophy hunts in Africa and he concluded that “gives us a powerful tool to support countries that are managing wildlife populations in a sustainable manner and incentivize others to strengthen their conservation and management programs.” Ashe also said that “the future of Africa’s wildlife is threatened by poaching and illegal wildlife trade, not [by] responsible, scientifically managed sport hunting”, and that “the Service remains committed to combating wildlife crimes while supporting activities that empower and encourage local communities to be a part of the solution.”

In response to the judgment of Judge Jackson, the Namibian Minister of Environment and Tourism, Hon. Pohamba Shifeta pleaded with environmental lobby groups against hunting to put an end to what he explained would be detrimental to the conservation of rhinos and elephants. He said “the NGOs jointly applied to ban the importation of black rhino products which was dismissed, not on merit but on legal standing.” Making a case for hunting, Shifeta argued, “our programs are known to be good projects. Our species of both black and white rhino are on an increase and there is nothing to worry about. Our conservation efforts are clearly known. We have ethical hunting programs.” He added, “conservation programs will be harmed if hunting stops,” explaining that hunting supports 82 conservancies and accounted for 60% of income. “Imagine if you take that away. In accordance with our legislation and policies, the proceeds generated by means of trophy hunting should be reinvested into the conservation of that species. This fund pays for black rhino conservation projects approved by the Fund’s board, such as law enforcement and anti-poaching units, community benefits and surveys. Our story has been hailed across the globe as it also seeks to empower Namibian citizens, particularly those in rural areas through employment creation and income generating activities” Shifeta concluded.

For further information on the rhino hunts please read the following articles

- Black rhino hunter 100% certain he’s helping survival of the species African Indaba 06-2015 Vol 13-3
- African Indaba interviews Corey Knowlton African Indaba 06-2015, Vol 13-3
- Can rhinos profit from trophy hunting? African Indaba 02-2014, Vol 12-1