

WESSA: How To Enhance Value Of Legal Rhino Horn

The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) thinks out of box to enhance funding for the rhino anti-poaching battle: rhino-horn-infused wine, rhino horn massages, additional hunts with the original rhino horn trophy replaced by a mouldings are just some of the suggestions WESSA has come up with in its innovative action to grow the legal value of rhino horn in South Africa.

Already in March 2015 WESSA said in a submission to the Department of Environmental Affairs “the promotion of alternative income sources from rhinos can offset the costs incurred in stocking and managing them. WESSA suggested at that time that the society intends to show that by allowing an increased (genuine, sustainable) hunting industry (but without permitting the export of trophy horns or other rhino body parts), as well as other non-exportable uses of rhino products. We hold that increasing the sustainable utilization by hunting can deliver significant economic benefits to rhino stock holders, will generate significant indirect, local economic returns (principally through tourism related jobs and services); and which can be effectively regulated”.

If the present initiative is successful, WESSA environmental governance manager Morgan Griffiths submits, the various actions could provide crucial funding for anti-poaching work and rhino conservation. Under the present scenario the rapidly increasing cost of rhino protection has little or no incentive for public and private protected areas and game reserves to maintain or even increase their rhino populations.

The government recently reported a slight decline in rhino poaching, but Griffiths said that anti-poaching cost are unsustainable and urgent innovative thinking is needed. “The government budget for this work is diminishing and international money is propping it up, but there are also signs of donor fatigue. So how do we protect the conservation estate and the jobs it supports?” Griffiths said.

One important WESSA suggestion focuses on trophy hunting. “We should encourage additional hunts, generating legal, taxable value, with the money going into conservation enforcement instead of the black market. In terms of this model, the horn would be destroyed to ensure it was not laundered into the illegal market”, Griffiths said.

“Instead of taking the horn home as a trophy the hunter would receive an artificial horn moulded of the original horn, and taxidermists can use this replica horn in a shoulder or full mount to take home. “Alternatively, photographs and 3D printing could be used,” Griffiths said. “It will take a change in mindset - but so did tag-and-release fishing.”

WESSA’s two other suggestions could be marketed as high-end novelty products for spas or reserves, he said. “Instead of hot rock massage why not rhino horn massage? “A limited number of registered horns could be made available to certain spas,” Griffiths said. “Likewise certain reserves could be

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licensed to produce and sell rhino-horn-infused wine, whisky or tea.”

Due process needs to ensure no unintended loopholes for criminals were created, Griffiths added. “In the end, the best place for a rhino horn is on the animal itself, but we have to find ways to achieve this end”, he said

On its Rhino-Page WESSA says that “every day we are learning more about the current rhino situation and thus, whilst being proactive, we need to be flexible and innovative in our selection of interventions. We also need to continue to work with a number of other credible and like-minded organisations to prevent duplication and to achieve maximum conservation benefit.”

WESSA (Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa) has a remarkable history of almost 90 years and a proud track record of enabling individuals and organizations to use natural resources sustainably and effectively, through our strategic partnerships. We are driven by the key focus areas of our work, which are aimed at the conservation of life-supporting ecosystems such as water and biodiversity.