

# Case Study: Elephant Trophy Trade Under Trump

During his first administration, President Trump called trophy hunting “a horror show” and put a hold on certain elephant trophy imports.

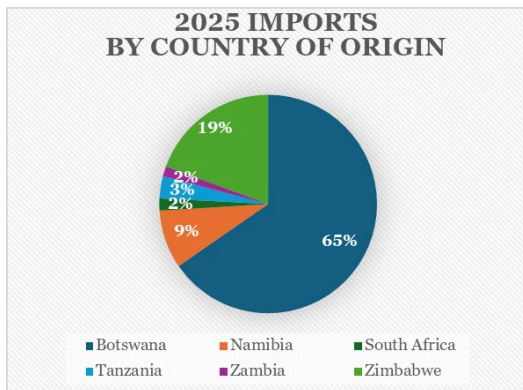
But during his second administration, the president has thrown open the door: Trump’s Fish and Wildlife Service issued more than 300 elephant trophy import permits in 2025 alone.

Beginning in mid-February 2025, the Service started pumping out the paperwork to allow this gruesome trade, kicking off even before a new agency director was in place. The permits allow U.S. hunters to import elephants killed in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



## MORE THAN 300 ELEPHANT TROPHIES WERE PERMITTED FOR IMPORT IN 2025

- Records released to the Center for Biological Diversity under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act show the Trump administration issued more than 300 elephant trophy import permits in 2025.
- By comparison, 114 elephant trophies were reported as imported in 2018 under the first Trump administration.
- 2025 breakdown:



To authorize trophy imports, the U.S. government must make detailed scientific findings (called enhancement findings and/or non-detriment findings) to justify the trade and ensure its sustainability, in accordance with U.S. and international law. These findings are made on a case-by-case basis and must be completed before an import permit can issue.

The legal findings for these trophies provide an important check on the trade. By requiring analysis by both the exporting and the importing governments, they help protect species from the most negative impacts of trophy hunting. And for many species with Endangered Species Act protections, the findings provide a way to enforce a higher standard: that trophy trade “enhances” the species’ survival, versus being “not detrimental.”

The pro-trophy hunting organization Safari Club International is asking the Trump administration to eliminate Endangered Species Act permitting for imports of trophies from threatened elephants, African lions, and Argali sheep. Abolishing these protections would remove an important check on this trade.



# BOTSWANA

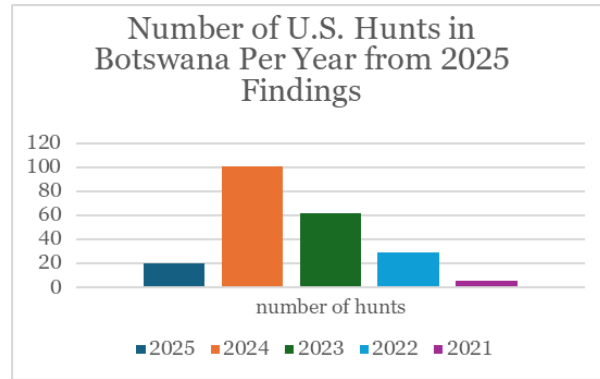
Botswana, home to approximately 140,000 elephants, had previously halted trophy hunting between 2014 and 2019. Following the resumption of trophy hunting, U.S. trophy hunters quickly flocked to Botswana.

The majority of elephant trophies permitted for import into the United States in 2025 originated from Botswana, with 219 findings issued compared to 65 from Zimbabwe and 29 from Namibia. Most elephants permitted for import in 2025 were killed in 2024.

Botswana's annual trophy quota allows for the hunting of over 400 elephants, representing approximately 0.3% of the population. Since trophy hunters generally remove large mature males who are also impacted by poaching and drought, these elephants could soon be depleted from the population enough to harm breeding and elephant social functioning.

Local scientists recommend taking no more than 0.2% of the population, or around 280 animals, to ensure the continuity of mature male elephants.<sup>[1]</sup>

Following the release of this recommendation to reduce the elephant quota for trophies, news stories in Botswana revealed the heavy role that trophy hunting organizations are playing in elephant management in the country.



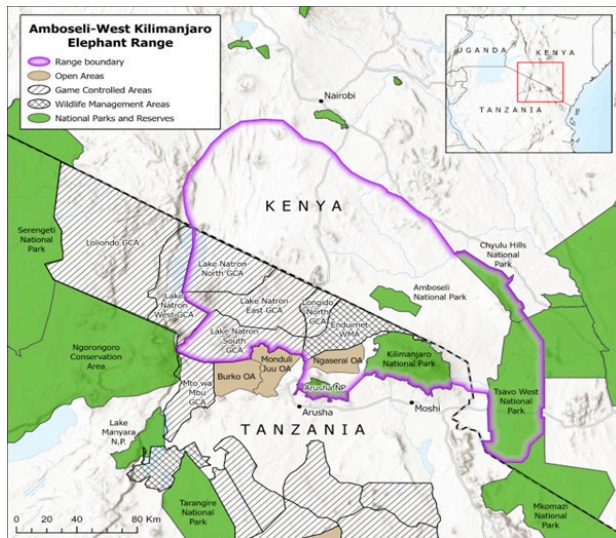
[1] Schlossberg & Chase, 2025. Scientific Review of Botswana's Hunting Programme. Available at: [https://elephantswithoutborders.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2025-EWB-Hunting\\_Report-Web-compressed.pdf](https://elephantswithoutborders.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2025-EWB-Hunting_Report-Web-compressed.pdf) (last visited April 15, 2026).

# SUPER TUSKERS

In 2024 elephant scientists sounded the alarm that elephants from the famed Greater Amboseli-West Kilimanjaro elephant population (the longest-studied elephant population on Earth) were once again being trophy-hunted in the Tanzanian portion of their range, for the first time since 1994. The population harbors one of the largest remaining collections of “super tuskers:” males with tusks weighing 100 pounds or more, also referred to by trophy hunters and others as “hundred pounders.”

At least five males were killed for sport in Tanzania over nine months in 2024, including several “super-tuskers,” based on the tusk weights as reported by the trophy hunters. Opening the population’s range to trophy hunting after decades of safety puts some 20-25 mature bulls at risk of being taken for trophies, as these males are thought to routinely use the area where trophy hunting is now taking place. Scientists think there are only around 50 super tuskers left in all of Africa, and it is critical they pass on their genes.





The Center for Biological Diversity is carefully monitoring Tanzania elephant trophy applications to learn whether U.S. hunters are responsible for these recent killings. So far, the permit applications from Tanzania are all for hunts outside the Amboseli-West Kilimanjaro range but are predominately from a hunting area next to the Serengeti. Scientists and the Center [petitioned](#) the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ban imports from the Greater Amboseli-West Kilimanjaro elephant population.

## TROUBLES WITH ELEPHANT TROPHIES

## METHODOLOGY

Trophy hunting has been shown to disrupt African elephant family groups and social stability, harming elephant survival.[1] Because trophy hunters target animals with particular physical characteristics (large tusks and big body size), trophy hunting removes these animals from the breeding pool, unnaturally selecting animals without those characteristics.[2] Unsustainably high hunting quotas have resulted in the loss of older bulls from elephant populations, skewed sex ratios, and declines in body size.[3]

[1] Milner J.M., Nielsen E.B., Andreassen HP, *Demographic side effects of selective hunting in ungulates and carnivores*, Conservation Biology Vol. 21:36-47 (2007), doi: 10.1111/j.1523-1739.2006.00591.

[2] Allendorf, F.W. & Hard, J.J. (2009). Human-induced evolution caused by unnatural selection through harvest of wild animals. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 106, 9987-9994.

[3] Selier, S. A. J., Page, B. R., Vanak, A. T., & Slotow, R. (2014). Sustainability of elephant hunting across international borders in southern Africa: A case study of the greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area. *The Journal of Wildlife Management*, 78(1), 122-132; Muposhi, V.K., Gandiwa, E., Bartels, P., Makuza, S.M., & Madiri, T.H. (2016). Trophy hunting and sustainability: temporal dynamics in trophy quality and harvesting patterns of wild herbivores in a tropical semi-arid savanna ecosystem. *PLoS ONE*, 11, e0164429.

We analyzed records released under FOIA in response to monthly requests. This analysis is based on FOIA records as of April 3, 2026. Many additional findings and/or permits may have been issued in 2025 but not yet released.

The records show that by mid-February 2025 the Trump administration was making findings and issuing permits for the importation of hunting trophies from elephants hunted in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Some trophy hunters apply for import authorization before departing on their hunting trip while others apply after the fact – sometimes even years later. Thus, not all elephants are killed in the same year that the hunter seeks import authorization. As a result, U.S. import authorizations for a given year do not necessarily equate with the number of elephants killed by U.S. hunters in any given country during that year.

**CONTACT: Tanya Sanerib, international legal director, Center for Biological Diversity**  
[tsanerib@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:tsanerib@biologicaldiversity.org)

