What Should Be Done with Stockpiles of Captured Elephant Ivory?

For the complete video with media resources, visit: http://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/tanzanias-ivory-stockpile/

In 2012, investigative journalist Aidan Hartley was granted unprecedented access to what is considered the largest known cache of raw ivory in the world. Hartley’s report is part of the National Geographic film *Battle for the Elephants*, which explores the brutal slaughter of African elephants for their tusks.

In this clip from the film, Hartley meets with Khamis Kagasheki, minister of natural resources for Tanzania, who agreed to allow Hartley and a camera crew to take the first-ever footage of the stockpile. The vast warehouse stores thousands of tusks accumulated over the last 23 years—90 metric tons valued at $50 million. You will follow Hartley into the “ivory room”—a grim memorial to the dramatic decline of Africa’s elephant population.

In July 1989, Kenya issued a call-to-action to alert the world to a poaching crisis. Then President Daniel arap Moi, together with then Executive Director of Kenya Wildlife Service Dr. Richard Leakey, burned 12 tons of ivory stock.

In September of that year, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) secured an agreement among its member states to ban all
international trade in ivory. But, under pressure from countries in Asia and southern Africa, CITES sanctioned two sales of ivory, in 1999 and 2008—stimulating poaching across the elephant range and ivory smuggling across the world.

In 2011, Kenya again drew attention to poaching deaths when President Mwai Kibaki set fire to more than 5 tons of ivory tusks and trinkets.

Unlike Kenya, Tanzania, one of the poorest countries in the world, has not agreed to burn its stockpile of ivory, arguing that the money from a sale could support conservation efforts. However, Tanzanian officials say that if an international agency were to buy the tusks with the intention of burning them, they would eagerly sell them. Tanzania asked CITES for an exception to the ivory ban for such a sale, with proceeds used only for conservation efforts, but they withdrew their request in early 2013.

Questions

- Why is the burning of poached ivory stockpiles such a powerful statement against elephant poaching? What message does this action send to the world?

Answers will vary. Elephants are among the Earth’s most charismatic and majestic land animals, yet most people are either not aware of the plight of the elephants or feel they cannot make a difference in the fight to stop elephant poaching. Pictures of burning ivory tusks create a strong image of the brutality of the poaching of this much-loved animal. Supporters of a burn feel that this image would ignite public sentiment in a call to enforce the ban on ivory sales and increase the apprehension of poachers. The action would also send the message that the country is serious about taking action against poaching and the illegal ivory trade.
• What are the key factors in the conflict over stockpiled ivory and how might the conflict be resolved?

Key factors include the fact that the ivory ban is still in place and, therefore, the stockpiled ivory cannot be sold legally. The Tanzanian government sees this stockpile as a potential source of great revenue—money that could help this developing country in its efforts to conserve remaining elephant populations. On the other side of the conflict are those who see the stockpiles as a grim testament to the decimation of Africa's elephant population. They oppose the sale of the ivory because they feel it would only increase the demand, spur more illegal trade in ivory tusks, and increase poaching.

Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CITES</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>(Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) international agreement whose aim is &quot;to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>conservation</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>poach</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>to hunt, trap, or fish illegally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>sanction</td>
<td>verb</td>
<td>to allow, authorize, or approve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trade</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>buying, selling, or exchanging of goods and services.</td>
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Articles & Profiles

• National Geographic News: Ivory Trade Ban May Be Overturned This Month (November 2002)
• National Public Radio: U.N. Eases Ban on Elephant Ivory Trade
• WildLifeDirect: Ban Ivory Trade—Ivory Burn
• African Wildlife Foundation: Tanzania’s Elephants Receive a Reprieve As Ivory Trade Proposal is Withdrawn