

Anti-poaching war to cost a billion

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THE Ministry of Environment and Tourism projects to have spent over a billion dollars in anti-poaching operations by the end of this year since the operation started two years ago.

The anti-poaching operation started in December 2014.

Of this amount, the ministry has spent about N\$600 000 on food for the police patrols and N\$30 million on overtime payment since 2015.

Despite this, environment minister Pohamba Shifeta yesterday said seven rhinos had been poached this year in Etosha National Park, while six elephants were killed by poachers in the Bwabwata National Park.

Shifeta said the 34 carcasses found last month at Etosha and Kunene region are old cases that go back to about two years. The carcasses, he said, were found in areas only seen from the air or accessible on foot. He further said the ministry still has to verify whether they were poached or died of natural causes.

On Wednesday, Shifeta told The Namibian that some areas were not accessible because of manpower shortages and that the operation only uses one army helicopter.

"The park is huge. Some of the areas that need to be covered are mountainous and we use a helicopter. Same as in the Kunene. Some of our people are old and only young ones can move up and down the rough terrain," the minister noted.

For now, he said although the operation uses planes which make it difficult to manoeuvre compared to helicopters, the ministry had ordered choppers that could be delivered as early as in the next three months.

"Drones will also be considered but we have to comply with aviation laws. We also spoke to the community because they need to be made aware of the presence of drones since they will invade privacy," Shifeta said.

He further said the ministry did not have a separate anti-poaching budget but used the annual budget allocated to them and that the operation is costly.

The ministry was allocated N\$582 million in the 2016/2017 budget.

Shifeta said the ministry is working on raising funds for the anti-poaching operation. He expressed concern about rhino poaching suspects who are released on bail because they get back to continue where they left off.

"Evidence collected tells us that these are the same people. We are trying to see how we can change the strategy. If someone is re-arrested for poaching, the prosecutor should object to granting of bail again," he asserted.

Shifeta said the ministry will continue to provide community education on the importance of wildlife and national parks because they cannot do it without the community cooperation.

The reward for anyone who provides information leading to the arrests of poachers remains at N\$60 000.

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