

US hunters push for rhino trophy imports from Namibia

Two American hunters have applied to import black rhino hunting trophies from Namibia.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service requested comments with regards to the two applications - one from a hunter in Texas and another from a hunter in Florida. "We invite the [American] public to comment on applications to conduct certain activities with foreign species that are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act," a statement read. Comments must be received by 24 October.

The rhinos - Lippie and Willem, aged 28 and 31 - were hunted in Namibia.

Several countries worldwide have recently started to push for bans on the import of hunting trophies from southern African countries, including Namibia. The US Fish and Wildlife Service earlier this year already announced a final rule governing import permits for live African elephants and elephant hunting trophies. This effectively bans elephant hunting trophy imports from certain countries that serve as major destinations for trophy hunters.

Millions in hunting fees

With regards to the import of the rhino trophies, the international legal director at the Centre for Biological Diversity, Tanya Sanerib, said in a statement that it is tragic that trophy hunters pay vast sums of money for the luxury of killing such highly imperilled animals when the focus should be on recovering species.

"This pay-to-play system perpetuates rarity, which suits wealthy hunters out to bag exotic kills, but doesn't help critically endangered animals like Lippie and Willem."

Both rhinos were killed in 2022 — one on the Erindi Private Game Reserve and the other in the Mangetti National Park. According to applications, the hunters paid around US\$250 000 (about N\$4.3 million at yesterday's exchange rate) each in hunting fees. This money went to anti-poaching activities in Namibia, documents on the US Fish and Wildlife Service website read.

The hunters reportedly requested permits to import the sport-hunted trophies from Namibia "for the purpose of enhancing the propagation or survival of the species".

The applications and supporting materials were disclosed in accordance with legislation, which requires the American public to receive notice of and an opportunity to comment on import applications for endangered species such as black rhinos.

To issue the permits, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has to not only find that trophy hunting is not detrimental to the species' survival, but that it 'enhances' or benefits its survival as well. The public has 30 days to submit evidence that such findings should not be made. The last black rhino hunting trophy import permit was issued in 2019 in the US.

Tourism minister Pohamba Shifeta has said that bans on the importation of hunting trophies from southern African countries, as proposed by several European countries, will destroy conservation in Namibia.



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