

**Testimony of Grant Spickelmier, Curator of Education
In support of Senate Bill 913
Senate Committee on Judiciary
March 24, 2015**



My name is Grant Spickelmier. I am the curator of education at the Oregon Zoo. As you may know, the zoo is a service of Metro, the regional government of the Portland metropolitan area.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony on behalf of Metro and the Zoo in support of Senate Bill 913, which will help to close loopholes that allow the black market in elephant ivory and rhino horn to go unchecked within our state's borders.

Oregon and the Oregon Zoo have had a special connection with elephants for more than half a century — from the birth of Packy in 1962 to the discovery of elephant infrasonic communication in the 80's to the opening of the zoo's new publicly supported Elephant Lands exhibit later this year. The Oregon Zoo has also been supporting conservation across elephant range countries for decades — and in 2013, we joined the Wildlife Conservation Society's 96 Elephants campaign to help bring an end to the trade that kills elephants for their tusks.

In 1980, there were approximately 1.2 million African elephants. By 2012, that number had been reduced to 420,000. About 35,000 elephants are killed each year — that's one elephant every 15 minutes. At this rate, they could completely disappear within two decades.

My father lived and worked in Tanzania for two years in the 1960's as part of the Peace Corps working on education and community development projects. Dad loved the wildlife around him and when he returned to the US he purchased several items made from ivory as mementos of his time there. When he made these purchases, elephants were relatively plentiful and he knew that money he spent on ivory artifacts was going back into the local communities that harvested elephants for food.

Things have changed dramatically in Africa since that time. Well-financed and heavily armed poaching rings target an ever dwindling population of elephants. Elephants are killed primarily so that their tusks can be turned into ornamental objects, jewelry and trinkets that are quickly shipped overseas. This provides huge profits for international crime and terrorism and very little for local communities. Al-Shabab is one of the organizations that profit from this activity.

China is often blamed for driving the poaching of elephants, but the United States is a major contributor to the crisis. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service states that it is extremely difficult to differentiate legally acquired ivory like the items my dad brought home in the 60's from ivory derived from poaching today. Their criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts have clearly shown that legal ivory trade can serve as a cover for illegal trade. A 2014 study in California showed that roughly 50 percent of ivory being sold there was illegal under federal law.

A federal ban now prohibits nearly all commercial imports, exports and interstate sales of elephant ivory. That law leaves ivory sales within states uncontrolled, enabling a black market for newly poached ivory.

We believe that bringing an end to the sale of ivory will help bring an end to the illegal killing of elephants. State legislation would strengthen regulation and complement federal law to stop the underground trade and protect these species from extinction.

Our goal is to create a better future for wildlife, and this legislation gives Oregon an effective tool for protecting these iconic animals. I know that if my dad was still alive today, he would be happy to forgo any profit he could get from the sale of his legal ivory artifacts so that his grandkids and eventual great grandkids have the chance of living in a world where Africa continues to be home to thriving herds of wild elephants.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and for your support of Senate Bill 913.