

**Testimony of Shervin Hess, conservation committee member  
In Support of Senate Bill 913  
House Committee on Judiciary  
May 20, 2015**



Chair Barker and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony on behalf of Metro and the Oregon Zoo.

We're at a historic moment, both for the survival of elephants and in the global effort to save them.

In the past 20 years, we've lost two-thirds of the world's African elephants. About 35,000 elephants are killed each year for their ivory — that's one elephant every 15 minutes. At this rate, they could completely disappear within two decades.

In February, the White House launched a plan for combating illegal wildlife trade, focused largely on reducing the demand for illegally traded wildlife.

Two weeks ago, the United Arab Emirates destroyed 11 tons of ivory, following in the footsteps of the United States, China and African and European nations. These efforts aim to shut down a terrorism-funding industry that will drive one of our most iconic species to extinction.

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

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service states that it is extremely difficult to differentiate legally acquired ivory from ivory derived from poaching today. Their criminal investigations and anti-smuggling efforts have shown that legal ivory trade can serve as a cover for illegal trade.

It is time for Oregon to do its part by ensuring that poachers and terrorists can not find a safe haven for laundering ivory in our state.

Oregon has had a special connection with elephants for more than half a century — going back to the birth of Packy in 1962. The Oregon Zoo has 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.

Our zoo's goal is to create a better future for wildlife, and this legislation gives Oregon an effective tool for protecting these iconic animals. This bill does not prohibit possession or ownership — only sales. The bill also makes exemptions for certain guns, knives and musical instruments.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and for your 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.

Let's make sure future generations don't look back and say we allowed elephants and rhinos to disappear because we wanted to profit from their body parts.