

Media Release

Illegal wildlife trafficking occurs in nearly 30 per cent of world's most protected areas

Gland, Switzerland – A new WWF report published today urges for additional and immediate measures to halt the worrying trend in illegal trafficking for international trade of CITES-listed species in the world's most ecologically important places, including World Heritage Sites.

Known for their iconic beauty, geology, ecology and biodiversity, natural World Heritage sites across the globe support large populations of rare plant and animal species, including almost a third of the world's remaining 3,890 wild tigers and 40 per cent of all African elephants, and function as the last refuge for critically endangered species such as Javan rhinos in Indonesia and vaquitas, the world's smallest porpoise, endemic to Mexico's Gulf of California.

Yet despite their recognised value and protected status, the report found that illegal poaching, logging and fishing occur in nearly 30 per cent of natural and mixed World Heritage sites, driving endangered species to the brink of extinction and putting the livelihoods and wellbeing of communities who depend on them at risk.

“Natural World Heritage sites are among the most recognised natural sites for their universal value. Yet many are threatened by destructive industrial activities and our new report shows that their often unique animals and plants are also affected by overexploitation and trafficking. Unless they are protected effectively, we will lose them forever. Governments must redouble their efforts and address the entire wildlife trafficking value chain, before it's too late.” says Marco Lambertini, Director General at WWF International. “We urgently need more collaboration and integration between CITES, the World Heritage Convention and national authorities to lead a more coordinated, comprehensive response to halt wildlife trafficking - from harvesting of species in source countries, transportation through processing destinations, to sales in consumer markets.”

Illegal harvesting of species in World Heritage sites degrades vital social and economic benefits. More than 90 per cent of natural World Heritage sites support recreation and tourism as well as provide jobs. Many of these benefits are dependent on the presence of CITES-listed species. Illegal harvesting also alters the natural ecosystem. Around five per cent of the Sumatran tiger population was killed in 2016 alone and if current levels of poaching and trade continue, tigers could disappear from the wild on Sumatra and lead to a reduced incentive to protect forests and result in further wide-scale deforestation for palm oil plantations.

“This report provides a range of options to further enhance coordination between CITES and the World Heritage Convention, focused around World Heritage sites” says John Scanlon, CITES Secretary-General. “It is essential that CITES is fully implemented and that these irreplaceable sites are fully protected. In doing so, we will benefit our heritage and our wildlife, provide security to



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people and places, and support national economies and the rural communities that depend on these sites for their livelihoods.”

“Illegal wildlife trafficking robs the world of its natural heritage, threatens local communities and hampers global efforts to reduce poverty,” says Inger Andersen, Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). “This report is a sobering reminder of just how far this type of organized crime can reach, extending even into the supposed safety of World Heritage sites. This is a global challenge that can only be tackled through collective, international action.”

The report stresses that enhanced protection and monitoring at the World Heritage site level must be accompanied by greater action to curb demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products through education, enforcement and prosecution. “The governing bodies of CITES and the World Heritage Convention recognize the need to continue improving interactions between the two conventions, and in order to halt illegal trafficking in World Heritage sites, all stakeholders must unite and take the immediate action required to prevent irreversible damage the world’s most iconic places and species” Lambertini said.

Last year, WWF launched a global campaign, *Together saving our shared heritage*, working with governments and businesses to safeguard World Heritage sites for present and future generations by strengthening the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and pushing businesses to comply with the highest standards of responsible business conduct in or near sites. A WWF report found nearly half of all natural World Heritage sites were under threat from harmful industrial activities like mining, oil and gas drilling, and construction of large-scale infrastructure, with millions of people impacted.

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Notes to Editors:

Photos are available for download [here](#).

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About WWF

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