

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-717](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Illegal trade in wildlife—wildlife trafficking—continues to push some protected and endangered animal species to the brink of extinction, according to the Department of State. Wildlife trafficking undermines conservation efforts, can fuel corruption, and destabilizes local communities that depend on wildlife for biodiversity and ecotourism revenues. This trade is estimated to be worth \$7 billion to \$23 billion annually. In 2013, President Obama issued an executive order that established the interagency Task Force charged with developing a strategy to guide U.S. efforts on this issue.

GAO was asked to review U.S. government efforts to combat wildlife trafficking. This report focuses on wildlife trafficking in Africa, particularly of large animals, and examines, among other things, (1) what is known about the security implications of wildlife trafficking and its consequences, (2) actions Task Force agencies are taking to combat wildlife trafficking, and (3) the extent to which the Task Force assesses its progress. GAO analyzed agency documents and met with U.S. and host country officials in Washington, D.C.; Kenya; South Africa; and Tanzania.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretaries of State and the Interior and the Attorney General of the United States, as co-chairs, jointly work with the Task Force to develop performance targets related to the *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking Implementation Plan*. Agencies agreed with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-16-717](#). For more information, contact Kimberly Gianopoulos at (202) 512-8612 or [gianopoulosk@gao.gov](mailto:gianopoulosk@gao.gov).

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## COMBATING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

### Agencies Are Taking a Range of Actions, but the Task Force Lacks Performance Targets for Assessing Progress

#### What GAO Found

While criminal elements of all kinds, including some terrorist entities and rogue security personnel, engage in poaching and transporting ivory and rhino horn across Africa, transnational organized criminals are the driving force behind wildlife trafficking, according to reports GAO reviewed and agency officials GAO spoke with in the United States and Africa. Wildlife trafficking can contribute to instability and violence and harm people as well as animals. According to reports, about 1,000 rangers were killed from 2004 to 2014. Wildlife trafficking in Africa particularly affects large animals, with populations of elephants and rhinos diminishing at a rate that puts them at risk of extinction.

#### This Elephant Died in Northern Kenya Several Days after Sustaining Bullet Wounds



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-717

Agencies of the interagency Task Force leading U.S. efforts to combat wildlife trafficking are taking a range of conservation and capacity-building actions. The Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, for example, provides law enforcement assistance and supports global conservation efforts. The Department of State contributes to law enforcement capacity building and diplomatic efforts, while the Department of Justice prosecutes criminals and conducts legal training to improve partner-country capacity. Further, the U.S. Agency for International Development works to build community and national-level enforcement capacity and supports various approaches to combat wildlife trafficking. Several other agencies also contribute expertise or resources to support various activities outlined in the Task Force's *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking Implementation Plan*.

The Task Force provides some information about progress, but it lacks performance targets, making effectiveness difficult to determine at the strategic level. A fundamental element in an organization's efforts to manage for results is its ability to set specific targets that reflect strategic goals. Task Force officials identified a range of reasons why they do not have targets, including dependence on global partners, the long time periods needed to document results, and limited data availability. However, Task Force agencies have provided performance targets for other efforts that face similar challenges. Without targets, it is unclear whether the Task Force's performance is meeting expectations, making it difficult to gauge progress and to ensure that resources are being utilized most effectively in their efforts against wildlife trafficking.