

GLOBAL CHALLENGE PROJECT: A CASE REPORT ON WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

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Executive Summary

1

The illicit wildlife trade (IWT) is undoubtedly a significant issue in developing African countries. It has severely impacted the wildlife population, with critically endangered species such as pangolin, African elephants and black rhinos being at the risk of extinction. The increased demand for ivory, rhino horns, pangolin, turtles and mountain gorillas in the main world destinations (China and Vietnam) remains a key driver of IWT. Africa loses more than 20,000 elephants and over 1,000 rhinos to poachers. The West African region is the continent's main trafficking point, with Nigeria being the world's wildlife trafficking hub. More than 50 percent of the world's seized wildlife products in transit have roots in Nigeria. DR Congo, Gabon, Zimbabwe and Cameroon are major suppliers in the IWT market. Theoretically, ineffective policies, corruption, poverty, rural development and urbanization are the common IWT drivers. Local poachers supply big dealers, who then use their social networks to traffick the wildlife. Species are targeted and trafficked due to high economic, cultural and political values. Some are trafficked for monetary gain, whereas others are smuggled to be used as traditional medicine, for decorative purposes, for drug testing and as a symbol of power and success. The dark web is the preferred IWT marketing platform because its anonymity feature conceals the identity of traffickers from law enforcers and prosecutors.

1. Global Challenge Project: A Case Report on Wildlife Trafficking

1.1 Background and Theoretical Concepts

The illicit wildlife trade (IWT) is a major concern affecting emerging African countries. The increased global demand for wildlife and wildlife products by Asian countries such as China has pushed up the rate of IWT among African countries. According to Price (2017), wildlife poaching and trafficking cause population reduction and impose extinction threats. This descriptive paper seeks to report the nature and scope of the world IWT, with particular attention given to the context of multiple wildlife species from multiple African countries. According to the IWT report released by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the IWT threatens the African continent's wildlife population. Merem et al. (2018) states that the most commonly trafficked wildlife species include elephant ivory, rhino horn, pangolin, sea turtles and mountain gorillas.

The pangolin, African forest elephants, and black rhinos are critically endangered on IUCN's red list. However, they are the most illegally traded wild animals in the African continent. The growing international demand for elephant ivory and rhino horns results in an annual loss of more than 20,000 elephants and over 1000 rhinos (Financial Times, 2015; Mukpo, 2021). Surprisingly, South Africa and Zimbabwe alone accounts for over 90 percent of the rhino poaching cases in the African continent. Over 60 seizures of ivory and rhino horns occurred between 2009 and 2014. According to Mukpo (2021), the seized ivories accounted for about 92 tonnes and rhino horns accounted for about 12 tonnes.

Wildlife conservationists estimate that poachers kill four elephants per hour in Africa. This justifies the staggering annual numbers of poached African elephants ranging between 20,000 and 25,000 (Mukpo, 2021; Financial Times, 2015). Although the eastern and southern African regions lead in the elephant population, the central and western regions lead in

elephant poaching. This is attributed to being close to Nigeria, Africa's largest wildlife trafficking hub. About 190,407kg of pangolin products were reportedly trafficked between 2010 and 2021 (Mukpo, 2021). This value represents about 900,000 living pangolin and shows Africa's contribution to pangolin IWT globally. *Figure 1* below shows the notable pangolin seizures in 2019.

DATE	VOLUME OF PANGOLIN SCALES SEIZED (TONS)	REPORTED ORIGIN	SEIZING COUNTRY	REPORTED DESTINATION
January	1.4 (with 100 kg ivory)	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–
January	8.3 (with 2.1 tons ivory)	Nigeria	China (Hong Kong SAR)	Viet Nam
March	8.3	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–
April	12.9 (with 175 kg ivory)	Nigeria	Singapore	Viet Nam
April	12.8	Nigeria	Singapore	Viet Nam
April	4 (with 3.4 tons ivory)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Viet Nam	–
May	5.3	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–
July	11.9 (with 8.8 tons ivory)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Singapore	Viet Nam
July	1.2	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Turkey	–
October	1.5	–	Nigeria	Malaysia
December	1.7 (with 330 kg ivory)	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–

Source: CITES

Figure 1: Significant pangolin and ivory seizures in 2019

Nigeria is also a major transit for the poached pangolin headed to Chinese and Vietnamese markets. According to Duffy (2016), the pangolin is currently the world's most illegally traded wildlife, with the main market being Asian countries. Pangolin poaching in Sierra Leone and Liberia is very common to the extent that some people trade in open markets (Merem et al., 2018). Elephant poaching in DRC is widespread, with the country leading in the illegal ivory trade on the African continent. About 3,745 kg of illegal ivory seized across various world regions were directly linked to DRC (Nguyen & Roberts, 2020). Additionally, the country recorded 590.8kg seizures of illegal ivory between 2015 and 2016.

DRC also leads in the illegal mountain gorilla trade, with the main targets being Asian markets.

In East Africa, huge amounts of illegal ivory and pangolin were seized in Uganda and Tanzania. Uganda is considered a major transit hub for the illegal ivory and pangolin heading to Nigerian port for shipping to Asian countries (Kassa et al., 2019). In Kenya, the trade is highly concentrated on ivory and rhino horns. The Kenyan government banned the ivory and rhino horns trade, with all other forms of illegal wildlife trade highly prohibited. Kenya even hosted the largest international ivory burning forum at Nairobi National Park to show its bold stance on the anti-ivory trade. However, this illegal trade has continued underground, with the Port of Mombasa considered one of the largest illegal wildlife smuggling points in Eastern Africa (Kassa et al., 2019). Poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking are rife across Madagascar, with the most illegally traded wildlife being tortoises and sea turtles.

For example, more than 1,800 critically endangered tortoises that are endemic to Madagascar were seized in 2018 on their way to the Asian market.

Ivory and rhino horn trade in Zimbabwe is concerning due to less strict policies prohibiting the business. Following the global ban on the ivory trade, Zimbabwe appealed to have the ban lifted so that they could sell their ivory stock. Legalizing the ivory and wildlife trade is one way of encouraging IWT. This justifies why Zimbabwe leads southern Africa in illegal ivory and pangolin trade. According to Price (2017), Angola and Mozambique are the major transit hubs for illegal wildlife and products shipped in southern Africa. For example, Angola offers a transit point for ivory, rhino horn, wild birds, gorillas and pangolin. The rhino horn trafficking in South Africa is also a major concern because it has massively reduced the rhino population in the African continent.

The increased IWT in African countries such as Zimbabwe is facilitated by organized crime groups that operate at international levels (Anagnostou & Doberstein, 2021). For example, the Central Intelligence Organization of Zimbabwe was alleged to supply the poachers with guns and advanced poaching tools. Allegations also emerged that the agency protected the illegal ivory and rhino horn traders when shipping those products for money. Anagnostou and Doberstein (2021) emphasize that IWT is a serious form of organized crime in many African countries, with senior government officers linked to the business.

Theoretically, the high rate of IWT in the African continent is associated with ineffective policies, high corruption rates and multiple organized crime groups. Countries like Zimbabwe lack anti-wildlife trade policies, making it easier for poachers to trade ivories, rhino horns and pangolin illegally. Kassa et al. (2019) holds that the high corruption rate in Africa is a major cause of poverty that forces the locals to look for alternative sustainability methods. The majority, therefore, shift to the illegal wildlife trade to meet basic needs. Organized crime groups are highly concerning because the senior government agencies and officials are the stakeholders in this illicit business. African countries should thus undertake a joint approach and implement strict policies prohibiting the IWT.

2.0 Mechanisms of IWT

1

2.1 IWT Supply Chains

2.1.1 Major actors involved.

According to Merem et al. (2018), Nigeria, DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Tanzania, Cameroon and Kenya are the major suppliers of IWT market. The local poachers emerged as the primary suppliers of the wildlife and products. They poached wildlife and harvested the products, which they sold to larger dealers for good money. The large dealers accumulate the products and supply large quantities to the Asian markets (Merem et al., 2018). Since the dealers are highly connected to the senior politicians, border and customs officials, they use them as intermediaries to help them smuggle the shipments across the borders (Anagnostou & Doberstein, 2021). Nigeria was also reported to be the intermediary state for wildlife trafficking in Africa.

The major consumers in the IWT market are the Asian countries, particularly China and Vietnam (Duffy, 2016). For example, the Chinese and Vietnamese highly smuggle pangolin for meat consumption and traditional medicinal value. They also use ivories and rhino horns for decoration and special gifts to friends and business partners. Thailand, Laos and Myanmar also serve as direct and indirect consumers because they directly consume some and export the rest to China.

2.1.2 IWT perpetrators.

According to Mukpo (2021), most IWT activities in Africa are perpetrated by organized crime groups. These organized crime groups involve local and foreign perpetrators who coordinate to ensure the smuggling succeeds. The local poachers are the main perpetrators, assisted by foreign dealers who buy the wildlife products from them. The

Nigerian customs and border officials are also major perpetrators of the IWT. The corrupt border officials assist in smuggling the illegal shipments across the border to avoid seizure (Kassa et al., 2019; Mukpo, 2021).

In Zimbabwe, for example, the customs and senior Central Intelligence Organization officers were put in the spotlight for allegations of sponsoring the poachers with poaching guns and protecting them from seizure by law enforcement agencies. In 2018, the former first lady, Grace Mugabe, was investigated for using her senior position to smuggle illegal wildlife products via Harare airport. This shows that senior personnel are the major perpetrators in this business.

2.2 Supply

2.2.1 Major traded species and hot products.

The most illicitly traded wildlife species include the pangolin, sea turtles and mountain gorilla. Elephant ivories, pangolin scales, rhino horns, snake skins and turtle shells are the hot products in the IWT market (Merem et al., 2018). The elephants' ivories and rhino horns are highly valuable in the IWT market. This justifies the ever-increasing poaching rates for these species. According to Merem et al. (2018), consumers pay between \$1,000 and \$2,000 for a kilogram of ivories. The poachers, therefore, hunt down as many elephants as possible to maximize their profit margins and raise enough money to buy the "illicit trading freedom."

2.2.2 Reasons for trafficking.

The wildlife species are highly targeted because of their high economic, medicinal and cultural values. Wildlife species trafficking is driven by various economic, cultural and political factors. According to Price (2017), poverty is a serious economic issue in Africa which encourages IWT. The locals are therefore forced to look for alternative sources to

sustain themselves. Since the IWT market is highly paying, many people shift to it as a way of livelihood. The more the people engage in this illicit business, the more greedy they become, thereby increasing the rate of IWT. Rural development and urbanization are other economic factors encouraging IWT (Price, 2017). As rural areas develop into towns, the population increases and raises the demand for food. People shift to the poaching of wild animals in nearby conservation areas to boost the food supply to sustain the increasing population.

Politically, wildlife species are trafficked due to a lack of effective policies prohibiting IWT. Implementing strict anti-wildlife trade policies help address IWT, as witnessed in the case of Kenya and Tanzania (Kassa et al., 2019). Higher corruption rates encourage illicit wildlife trade, as evident in Nigeria. The Nigerian customs and border officials are highly corrupt. This explains why the country is the world's hub for the illegal wildlife trade. According to Price (2017), the west African regional policies are lenient to wildlife traffickers, and that's why the west coast is the continent's transit point for smuggled wildlife species and products.

The "false" cultural values of wildlife species in China and Vietnam also drive the IWT in Africa. The Asian communities claim that ivory, rhino horn, pangolin scales and turtle are vital sources of traditional medicine (Price, 2017). This "extreme" belief has increased the rate of IWT in Africa. Wildlife products such as ivory and rhino horns symbolize wealth, power, success and high social class in China. These social aspects are other significant drivers of IWT in Africa.

2.2.3 Trafficking scale

Illegal wildlife and wildlife products trafficking operate on a global scale. UNODC (2020) considers Nigeria, DRC, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Gabon and Angola as the main

African countries that supply the IWT market. Mukpo (2021) states that Tanzania and Kenya were the major suppliers between 1998 and 2014, but they implemented effective anti-IWT policies that helped reduce the rate of this illegal trade by a considerable margin. Presently, Nigeria and DR Congo lead in ivory trafficking, with Nigeria being considered the world's largest hub for this business. In 2019, Nigeria recorded the largest ever pangolin product trafficking when Singaporean customs seized one of its containers holding 12.9 tonnes of pangolin scale (‘t Sas-Rolfes et al., 2019). About 180kg of carved ivory was also recovered in the same container.

A few days later, another Nigerian container was confiscated with 12.7 tonnes of pangolin scales. According to Mukpo (2021), the two seizures revealed that this was the trend since 2014, considering that the wildlife trafficking activities had shifted from East to West Africa. Between 2014 and 2018, Nigeria and DR Congo led the African continent in ivory smuggling, recording 30.5 and 21 tonnes, respectively (Mukpo, 2021; UNODC, 2020). Nigeria also led the continent in pangolin trafficking as it was directly linked to 167.6kg pangolin scales seized in various parts of the globe.

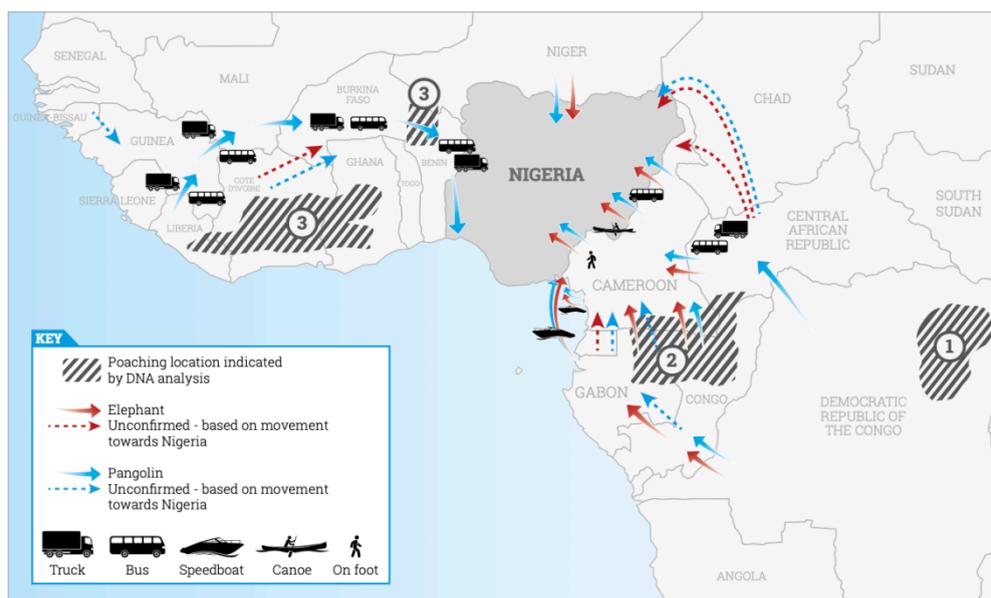


Figure 2: Illegal wildlife trafficking routes to Nigeria

Cameroon and Gabon are major suppliers of the illegal wildlife products shipped via Nigeria as shown in *figure 1*. IWT is common in the Central and West African regions because of a lack of strict policies on the illegal wildlife trade. China is the largest importer and consumer of illegal wildlife species and products. According to Nguyen and Roberts (2020), about 10,000 pangolins get smuggled to China every year, with African countries contributing to more than half of this value.

2.3 Demand

2.3.1 Trafficking destinations.

More than 80 percent of the smuggled wildlife species in Africa are consumed internationally, with very little quantity consumed domestically. The Asian countries offer the largest market for illegal African wildlife species (Nguyen & Roberts, 2020). More specifically, China and Vietnam are the largest global consumers of trafficked ivory and pangolin. More than 50 percent of the illegal wildlife shipments that leave the African coast are destined for Vietnam and China (Nguyen & Roberts, 2020; UNODC, 2020). For example, the two Nigerian containers seized by the Singaporeans officials with huge quantities of ivory and pangolin scales were on their way to China. Seizing two smuggled containers implies that this was the trend, and many containers with smuggled wildlife products must have made their way to the Chinese IWT market. *Figure 2* below provides a list of seized ivory and pangolin between 2018 and 2022.

Location	Date	Product	Quantity	Route
Lagos, Nigeria	July 2021	Ivory, pangolin	7,137kg pangolin scales; 4.6kg pangolin claws; 846kg ivory	Unknown
Apapa port, Nigeria	January 2021	Pangolin	8,800kg pangolin scales and ivory	Destined for Vietnam
Cai Mep port, Vietnam	May 2019	Ivory, pangolin	5,260kg pangolin scales	Provenance Nigeria
Da Nang port, Vietnam	October 2018	Ivory, pangolin	6,334kg pangolin scales; 1,800kg ivory	Provenance Nigeria

Figure 3: Seized ivory and pangolin between 2018 and 2022 (Source: EIA: Global environmental crime tracker)

2.3.2 Uses of smuggled wildlife species

The price of the species varies with the market demand, product value and availability. The species are trafficked mainly for monetary gain, medicinal value, human consumption, souvenir and decoration purposes. The pangolin is highly valuable to the Chinese and Vietnamese because its scales serve as vital traditional medicine for the locals (Mukpo, 2021; Price, 2017). Pangolin meat is also a highly valuable delicacy to the Chinese and Vietnamese hotel industry. Chinese hotels sell pangolin meat as a high-end delicacy, with the primary target being high-income individuals. The excessive hunting of the Asian pangolin for local consumption massively reduced their population, resulting in increased demand from external sources. According to Price (2017), the African continent emerged to be the best opportunity for reinforcing the pangolin supply in the Asian markets. The Asians also use the pangolin as a symbol of wealth. Some individuals, therefore, smuggle the animal to use it as a symbol of wealth and high social class in society.

Ivory is mainly trafficked because of its economic and social values. The elephant ivories are highly valuable in the market, and the need to maximize profits drive people to poach more wildlife. A pound of ivory costs between \$1,000 and \$2,000, encouraging dealers to smuggle larger quantities to generate additional profits (Mukpo, 2021). Ivory is also a vital raw material for making valuable, high-end products. The legal market supply is low and cannot sustain large scale production; therefore, the firms turn to the illegal market to supplement their raw material supply to increase production capacity (Kassa et al., 2019). Some Asian communities use ivory as a traditional symbol of power, success and wealth. According to Price (2017), the cultural aspects push the demand for ivory, resulting in an

increased trafficking rate of ivory in the IWT market. Ivory is also trafficked for decoration purposes because of its beautiful nature.

Like the elephant ivory, the rhino horn is also a cultural symbol of wealth and success. The traditional Chinese communities carry the rhino horns when attending important community forums to display their wealth and social classes (Kassa et al., 2019). Therefore, some wealthy individuals engage in rhino horn trafficking to fulfil their cultural ambitions. Africa is the largest rhino reserve in Africa faces a severe threat from the IWT market. According to Kassa et al. (2019), some individuals smuggle in the rhino horn to dedicate as special gifts to friends and business partners. In such cases, the rhino horns boost social ties and maintain good relations in society.

The rhino horn is also trafficked for decoration purposes in buildings and palaces. For example, the horns are mounted on the front and inner walls of palaces to manifest the leader's power in the community. The Vietnamese communities also smuggle the rhino horns for traditional treatment of diseases such as fever and gout (Nguyen & Roberts, 2020). The rhino horn powder is believed to be a vital traditional medicine relieving complications like hangovers and chronic infections such as cancer. Due to the high demand for rhino horns, some South African farmers considered dehorning their rhinos to curb rhino poaching.

The turtles are trafficked for souvenirs, delicacy, traditional medicinal value and beautification purposes. Numerous cases of seized tourists attempting to smuggle live turtles back to their countries have been on the rise, primarily for souvenir purposes. Many Chinese use turtles as a traditional medicine for treating various infections like fever and skin diseases (Nguyen & Roberts, 2020). Therefore, many local Chinese engage in IWT to increase the supply of their traditional medicine. Turtles are consumed across Asia, and the locals prefer them because of their high nutritional value. It's thus trafficked to Asian countries to

supplement the turtle food stock. According to Esmail et al. (2020), the Chinese also smuggle the turtle to use their shells to make decorative boxes, beautiful combs and magnificent jewellery. The turtle is also smuggled for use as an exotic pet.

The gorillas are mainly trafficked by Asian zookeepers seeking to increase animal diversity in their zoos to attract more tourists and generate more income (Price, 2017). Since gorillas' genetic make-ups resemble humans', some people smuggle them for drug and substance testing. Some illicit drug firms use gorillas to test such substances' effectiveness and side effects.

2.3.3 Trafficking and selling methods for wildlife species

The traffickers operate in organized crime groups, with the senior political, customs and border officials linked to the illegal business. The most common marketplace for trafficked wildlife species is the dark web. The dark web is preferred because of its anonymity feature that conceals traders' identities, making it difficult for law enforcement agencies to track and arrest them. According to Wright (2019), more than 80 percent of illegal wildlife trafficking deals are organized via the online marketing platforms, particularly the dark web and social media. Trafficking is majorly done using sealed containers, wrongly labelled, then mixed with ordinary goods' containers on a ship (t Sas-Rolfes et al., 2019). Numerous cases of air shipping have also been reported, but fewer than the water shipping method.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations¹

3.1 Conclusion

The illegal wildlife trade is indeed a serious issue affecting the developing countries of the African continent. The high demand for illegal wildlife species and products in China and Vietnam pushes up the IWT in Africa. The trade is highly spread across the African continent, with the West and Central regions leading in trafficking cases. The most commonly trafficked wildlife species and products include African elephant ivory, rhino horn, pangolin, sea turtles and mountain gorillas. Critically endangered species are on the verge of extinction due to high poaching rates. The IUCN report confirmed that more than 20,000 elephants lose their lives annually following the rising demand for their ivory. Similarly, over 1,000 rhinos lose their horns annually to the IWT market.

Nigeria, DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Gabon, Angola and Cameroon are the leading suppliers of illegal wildlife species. Kenya and Tanzania implemented strict anti-IWT policies, which significantly helped them curb the issue of wildlife trafficking. However, Nigeria has remained the continent's major supplier and transit root for traffickers. The majority of the internationally seized trafficked wildlife and products root back in Nigeria. This implies that the country has done little to address the issue. The local poachers are the primary suppliers of illegal wildlife and products. The bid dealers illegally purchase them from the local poachers and traffick them to international Asian markets via the main transit routes. Surprisingly, senior government officials are involved in the business through organized crime groups, making it difficult to completely end the business.

China remains the major trafficking destination for trafficked wildlife, followed by Vietnam. The ineffective policies, high poverty rates and extreme corruption in Africa encourage IWT among the African countries. The water and air shipping methods are the

most common trafficking methods to the international market. Nearly all IWT deals are organized online via the deep to conceal the identity of traders from law enforcers.

3.2 Recommendations

- African countries should develop a joint approach to monitor and capture the wildlife traffickers across the continent (Vandome & Vines, 2018). Most traffickers use the west African transit route because of relatively lenient policies. Authorities from eastern, southern, northern and central Africa should work collaboratively to end the IWT on the continent.
- All developing countries should implement strict policies and effective frameworks to end IWT (Price, 2017). Nigeria is a trafficking hub because it lacks strict policies to encounter the business and close all trafficking corridors. Kenya and Tanzania are typical examples of African countries that successfully encountered the IWT by implementing strict anti-IWT policies.
- The customs and border control units should use sniffer dogs to intercept goods and thoroughly scan all goods to ensure no wildlife smuggling occurs. The sniffer dogs will help discover the wildlife products hidden under the wrong labels. Advanced container scanners will also help discover illegal wildlife and products hidden in containers.
- The emerging African countries should implement an integrated approach to make the anti-IWT operations effective. Price (2017) states that the investigation, law enforcement and prosecution units should work collaboratively locally and internationally to increase the chances of seizing the trafficked wildlife products and perpetrators.

- All countries should ban all forms of wildlife trade to block all possible smuggling opportunities for traffickers. Countries like Zimbabwe should prohibit wildlife trade as this encourages IWT.
- All the seized ivory, rhino horns and pangolin scales should be destroyed to show the bold stance against IWT (Vandome & Vines, 2018). The ivory stockpiles from naturally dead elephants and horns from dehorned farmed rhinos should be burned to inform the public that they are non-tradable items.
- Create public awareness of the benefits of wildlife to the national economies. The public should be educated on the economic benefits of conserving wildlife to curb poaching at the grassroots. According to Vandome and Vines (2018), conservation incentives should be offered to the public to encourage conservation efforts.

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