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Richardson Center, WWF & African Parks Leveraging Technology & Training To Protect African Wildlife

Unprecedented poaching crisis demands sophisticated solutions.

Date October 31, 2013

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Richardson Center for Global Engagement and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) co-hosted a forum today about the best ways to integrate state-of-the-art technologies and training methods into wildlife protection and enforcement in key parts of Africa. The effort kicked off in Washington, D.C. at a meeting of dozens of experts from government, NGOs, technology firms, and frontline conservation and enforcement officials who are working to identify and deploy promising anti-poaching practices and tools.

The Richardson Center also announced its plan to establish the first-of-its-kind, permanent ranger training school in the Republic of Congo, in collaboration with African Parks, based on a successful “poacher-to-protector” amnesty program, and create an international legal framework to dedicate funds raised from the forfeiture of seized assets to support anti-poaching efforts.

“Working together, we can transform wildlife conservation throughout Africa and the world,” said Gov. Bill Richardson. “We know that reaching and protecting the most remote locations is no easy task. It takes applying the most advanced, real-time surveillance technology. It takes trained and committed rangers and guards. It takes an infrastructure that sustains the effort over the long haul. And it takes international cooperation and strategic planning. This partnership and these new resources will help us get there.”

The illegal wildlife market has exploded in recent years, fueling a growing demand for elephant ivory, rhino horn, tiger products and other threatened species. Wildlife criminal groups—many of them “Mafia-style” gangs—that trade in illicit wildlife and wildlife products often act with impunity. Today, this illegal trade is the fifth most profitable in the world, with an estimated value of \$10 billion annually.

More than 30,000 elephants are killed each year – nearly 100 per day. A growing ivory demand in Asia, a thriving illegal international market and unstable political environments all contribute to a disturbing rise in poaching. The most recent analysis by the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) shows illegal trade in elephant ivory to be at its highest level in two decades. In the last 10 years, 62 percent of Africa’s forest elephants have been lost. There has also been a 5,000 percent increase in rhino poaching since 2007. In South Africa 746 rhinos have been killed this year, exceeding the record loss of 668 in 2012, according to TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade monitoring network.

“The planet’s most majestic species are being massacred by organized poachers in front of our eyes at alarming rates. A unified front and new solutions are needed to stay one step ahead of these global crime syndicates so we can eliminate the demand and dismantle illicit trade in wildlife,” said Crawford Allan, senior director, TRAFFIC / WWF. “We have to fight

fire with fire. Our collective know-how and resources will bring cutting-edge, affordable and readily-replicable critical help to this unprecedented crisis and push the envelope in the fight against wildlife crime. We're sending a very clear message to poachers: your time is short. We're closing in on your deplorable slaughter of innocent wildlife."

The Richardson Center and WWF are teaming up to explore various anti-poaching and wildlife monitoring technologies and ranger engagement initiatives on pilot bases for broader application in wildlife conservation. For example, specialized sensors, wildlife GPS tagging, aerial camera and thermal imaging systems and other visual notifications can be deployed in at-risk environments to provide real-time reconnaissance about illegal activities in protected areas. Over the coming months, these efforts will be evaluated and tailored for a variety of settings.

"Wildlife poaching is at a crisis level in Africa," said Leon Lemprecht, African Parks' manager of Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the Republic of Congo. "We still have a long way to go, but efforts like the poacher amnesty program and collaboration around technology are important steps in the right direction."

Technology alone will not safeguard wildlife, Gov. Richardson said. The governor, who just released a new book, *How to Sweet Talk a Shark*, about navigating high-stakes international diplomacy, will leverage the Center's record to strengthen other protection and enforcement efforts, including:

Prosecution of poaching as a 'wildlife crime' to allow seizure of poaching assets that can be redirected to wildlife conservation

Federal and State asset forfeiture laws in the U.S. and international treaties allow seized assets, including cash and bank accounts, generated from drug trafficking, money laundering and other illegal activities to be forfeited. Funds raised are often invested right back into enforcement operations.

Establishing elephant poaching as a 'wildlife crime' allows a similar opportunity for wildlife conservation. The Richardson Center is developing an Asset Forfeiture and Money Laundering legislative action guide for countries to adopt to combat wildlife crimes. Led by Gov. Richardson, the pioneering law reform effort would empower African heads of state and their wildlife conservation agencies to enact model forfeiture laws, then enforce them through advanced education for law enforcement and legal personnel at a planned law reform institute.

Establishment of a permanent 'poacher-to-protector' training academy

Working in partnership with African Parks, the Richardson Center supported the launch of a poacher-to-protector amnesty and ranger training program in Odzala-Kokoua National Park, Republic of Congo, in 2012. Since that time, there have been a record number of amnesty settlements and 56 weapons have been recovered. Fifty-six former poachers were accepted into the ranger training program and—after rigorous screening—43 successfully completed training and were given jobs as eco-guards or eco-monitors in the national park.

The Richardson Center also announced today that it is providing funds for a first-of-its kind, permanent ranger school in Odzala-Kokoua National Park. Developed in partnership with African Parks, the training facility will support the expansion of the successful "poacher-to-protector" program. It will improve instruction, provide enhanced infrastructure – such as obstacle courses – and supply necessary equipment, including uniforms, shoes, backpacks, camping equipment and weapons. The training facility also plans to share best practices with international partners.

One added advantage of the program is how former poachers can support broader enforcement efforts. For example, the testimonies of former poachers helped bring to justice a regional poaching kingpin, Ngondjo Ghislain, also known as "Pepito." Active in Odzala-Kokoua National Park, he was known for bribing corrupt officials. He provided them with firearms and ammunition in return for a portion of the profits of all the ivory sold by poachers in the region. After his arrest and trial, Pepito was sentenced to five years in prison, the toughest penalty in Congo for poaching.

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The Richardson Center for Global Engagement is a non-profit corporation established by former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson to promote international peace and dialogue by addressing specific conflicts and unresolved problems facing the world. www.richardsondiplomacy.org

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is one of the world's leading conservation organizations, working in 100 countries for over half a century. With the support of almost 5 million members worldwide, WWF is dedicated to delivering science-based solutions to preserve the diversity and abundance of life on Earth, halt the degradation of the environment and combat climate change. Visit www.worldwildlife.org to learn more and follow our news conversations on Twitter @WWFNews.

African Parks is a non-profit organization that takes on direct responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of national parks, in partnership with governments and local communities. African Parks currently manages seven parks in six countries – Chad, Congo, DRC, Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia – with a combined area of 4.1 million hectares. www.african-parks.org

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