

Americans Support Wildlife Conservation, Know Very Little about Illegal Wildlife Trade

The U.S. public overwhelmingly supports wildlife conservation, but only one in five Americans surveyed know anything about the illegal wildlife trafficking and trade problem in this country, according to a recent poll.

A new WildAid poll conducted in early 2016 by KRC Research found that more than 80% of Americans surveyed expressed support for wildlife conservation measures. However, about one in 10 Americans report hearing nothing about the illegal wildlife trade, while nearly one-third of Americans say they've heard **only a little** about the issue.

The survey also found:

- When asked if wildlife trade is an important issue – 82% of Americans agree. Notably, over half of Americans (52%) say it is an extremely important issue. When asked to rank the issue in terms of importance, ending illegal wildlife trade ranks high with water conservation and wildlife conversation broadly, ahead of reducing the effects of climate change, strengthening environmental protections.
- Americans are more aware of the illegal ivory trade and product trade among elephants, rhinos and tigers. Respondents knew less about trafficking and illegal trade of birds, reptiles and marine life.
- The survey found that few Americans knew basic facts about the issue and were unaware that the illegal wildlife trade is valued at between \$10 and \$20 billion a year.

Additional key findings to utilize internally:

- **More public education is needed as most Americans have not heard a great deal about illegal wildlife trade and are not really aware of the issue.** Just 18% have heard a great deal about illegal wildlife trade and awareness rests with the species that are most frequently spoken about as endangered, such as elephants, rhinos, tigers and sea turtles. Awareness of other threatened species drops dramatically.
- **From the outset, there is strong opposition to the illegal wildlife trade and this attitude increases over the course of the survey.** Initially, 82% of Americans oppose illegal wildlife trade, 71% strongly so. This is extremely high and sets a high bar to move. After seeing information presented in the survey questionnaire, opposition increases to 90%, with 81% strongly opposed. This is some of the highest support for any issue in the US.
 - **A bloc of respondents are in favor of illegal wildlife trade; they are resolute in their views and cannot be swayed.** There is a small subset of respondents

(5-10%) that favor the sale of wildlife products, and no amount or type of messaging will alter their opinion. This is not uncommon and typical for most issues, as some are set in their ways or like to be contrarian. In addition, this unreachable subset of the population is low compared to most issue campaigns.

- **Some demographic and psychographic groups are especially receptive to the message on illegal wildlife trade.** Exposure to education combined with emotional and factual messaging about the illegal wildlife trade successfully shifts the opinions of many respondents. Those most likely to shift in favor include: Millennials, frequent domestic travelers, those that have previously purchased wildlife souvenirs or trinkets, rural dwellers, and African Americans.

Detailed Findings

Landscape/Environment

Less than one-fifth of Americans (18%) have heard a great deal about illegal wildlife trade. Overall, those who have not heard about it are a less sophisticated audience, they have lower incomes, are less likely to be employed and travel less frequently. Of those who claim awareness, **over 1 in 3 (36%) say their main source of recall is hunting and poaching.** Others say they have heard about specific species such as elephants, rhinos and lions. Also, a significant number of Americans (20%) have heard about conservation efforts.

When asked about the impact illegal wildlife trade has, most connect it to the environment and communities around the world. Three-in-five Americans (60%) say the illegal wildlife trade has a large impact on the environment and an additional 44% say it has a large impact on communities around the world. They specifically do not see the personal connection as well as the impact it has on their own community. By comparison only 16% of respondents say the illegal wildlife trade has a large impact on their local community.

Awareness

Less well-known species are just that, less well-known. Americans are less likely to recognize the threat to these species. The more well-known species (elephants, rhinos, tigers, and sea turtles) are easily identifiable for respondents as threatened. When they get to lesser known species like caimans and pangolins just 1 in 10 respondents are able to say they are threatened. Even sharks (35%) and crocodiles (28%) only have about a third of respondents saying they are threatened. Those who shift in WildAid's favor over the course of the survey are less aware of the peril these species face. On average, a 10 point difference in awareness exists between these "shiffters" and the population overall.

Uncertainty when it comes to specifics around illegal wildlife trade. For each true/false question, more than a quarter of respondents are not sure of the correct answer. This number

was even higher among those who were not international travelers and those initially less willing to take action.

- **People don't recognize marine life part of the issue.** Nearly 2 in 5 (41%) Americans are not able to confidently identify that marine life is part of the illegal wildlife trade issue.

Those who favor wildlife trade are misinformed. Those who favor wildlife trade are more likely to incorrectly answer true/false on questions. For example, 28% who initially favor the illegal wildlife trade believe that marine life is not threatened, while only 14% of those who initially opposed it had the same incorrect understanding. It's not that they are naysayers per se, but instead are truly uneducated on the issue.