


industrial waste, in protecting surface and ground water, in protecting fisheries, and more.

The debate over environmental policies regarding global warming, air pollution, water pollution, chemical exposures, and ecosystem protection is too important to trivialize with an “Environmentalists Rule, Industrialists Drool,” world view. This Earth Day, it’s time for a New Environmentalism.

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Elephants, Markets, & Mandates

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What is the best way to protect endangered species? Is it better to try to devalue those species by banning trade in products derived from them, or is it better to embrace markets and property rights that create positive incentives for stewardship? Every couple of years the debate surrounding this question crystallizes around elephant protection and the international ivory trade. Lately, markets, not mandates, seem to be gaining as the best approach to protect elephants, as well as the human populations that need natural resources to raise their quality of life. The reality is that in much of the world the desperation generated by poverty poses the greatest threat to endangered species survival.

The UN-sponsored Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES, has been around since 1973, and a ban on trade in elephant ivory was adopted by the Convention in 1989. The ivory ban did succeed in reducing the demand for ivory in Western countries, but not in Asia. So poaching has continued.

Ironically, by succeeding in the West, the ivory ban failed in a different manner. CITES started out as an effort to regulate trade, but quickly moved on to outright trade bans on the premise that destroying the economic value of spe-

cies will aid in their survival. Despite much evidence to the contrary, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kenya and in wealthy Western countries like the US and Europe have promoted this view. But especially in poor countries where many of the world’s endangered species live, those species that do not pay their way will be quickly replaced by something else that does, such as agriculture.

These realities don’t stop radical environmentalists from having a field day whenever illegal products are found for sale, which they inevitably are (has any prohibition really been successful?). For example, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) recently published a report that claimed that its own operatives “easily obtained illegal bear bile products from China at 67 percent of Chinese medicine shops surveyed in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver.” The report offers an opportunity for the requisite hand-wringing over “putting a price on the head of every living bear”—a nice sound bite which does little to help the bears, since the only result of stricter enforcement would be higher prices.

But even the “moral victories” of endangered species trade bans are wearing thin, as southern African states with

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Species Trade

growing elephant populations and rampant poverty have sought revenues from their stockpiles of elephant ivory (mostly from natural deaths or conservation-minded culls) to plow back into conservation and rural development. Some African nations do have depleted elephant populations, but many, especially in southern Africa, have the opposite problem. In Zimbabwe, for example, the estimated carrying capacity of the elephant population is around 30,000 animals; the current population is over three times that number, resulting in serious environmental degradation.

Still, for many people, the announcement late last year that some Southern African nations would be allowed to sell a limited amount of elephant ivory surely evoked anachronistic images of gruff, mustachioed colonials from the heydays of hunting. In 2003, however, nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that combining conservation and commerce offers the greatest hope for improving the lot of both people *and* wildlife in the developing world.

The vote to allow some ivory sales (but not others) that took place at the November 2002 CITES meeting in Santiago, Chile, was bolstered by both Canadian and US support, something past ivory proposals have not had. The United States has traditionally been one of the staunchest opponents of any and all international trade in elephant ivory, and Canada has not been far behind. Even the European Parliament, which passed a resolution urging its CITES negotiators to reject the African proposals, eventually abstained from the elephant votes. The change of heart seems to indicate an important shift in international conservation efforts, toward positive incentives for species and habitat conservation and away from prohibitions on trade in wildlife that have been the norm for the last 20 years.

Specifically, Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa will be allowed one-off ivory sales of 20 metric tons (mt), 10mt, and 30mt respectively. This is the second time that CITES has permitted such a one-off sale. In 1999, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe sold almost 50 metric tons of ivory to Japan for about \$5 million. Zimbabwe had another proposal this time as well, but chaos and corruption in that country left international observers unconvinced that the sales could be properly monitored.

Even if CITES succeeded in destroying the positive value of species such as elephants, then all that would be left would be their negative value. Poor Africans most often bear the brunt of Western conservation initiatives, which focus on protecting elephants rather than elephant habitat, a far more important factor in ensuring elephant survival. And so, despite trampling crops and humans, knocking houses over, and generally wreaking havoc, elephants are rarely viewed in Western countries as a nuisance to the people who live around them.

The idea that wildlife will be better off without any economic value may have some merit for species survival in a National Park setting, but on communal lands or on private property it has the opposite effect. This points to another fatal flaw of the CITES ban approach. The best hope for the protection of wildlife, and especially endangered species, is the alleviation of poverty and the reform of domestic institutions that have encouraged poaching and habitat conversion—an area that CITES has no real jurisdiction over.

A number of southern African countries have moved to devolve control over wildlife to local, rural communities. The idea is to recognize that people will protect and conserve what they value.

Despite corruption ranging on a scale from petty to Robert Mugabe, it has been a tremendous step in the right direction. Community conservation programs have led to fierce local protection of wildlife, and the view that wildlife habitat has value far beyond simply being potential farmland.

Some CITES officials have also started to recognize the importance of making life better for both people and wildlife. “CITES seeks to promote a healthier and more sustainable relationship between people and wildlife,” said CITES Secretary-General Willem Wijnstekers. In addition, Linda Maltby, deputy head of the Canadian CITES delegation in Chile, said, “We support the idea of sustainable livelihoods.” Good news if this means that Canada intends to support sustainable conservation through commerce.

While the move to support the limited sale of ivory is a welcome one, it remains to be seen whether there has really been any sea change in policy. After all, ivory imports into the United States will continue to be prohibited under both the Endangered Species Act and the African Elephant Conservation Act. Canada, for its part, has the even-more-incongruous-sounding Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRITA).

Still, the move to sell some elephant ivory could be the first step towards an acknowledgement that trade bans are detrimental to elephants and other species, and that conservation based on incentives, decentralization, and ownership is better for both people and elephants. 