



AFRICAN LION WORKING GROUP

Affiliated with the Cat- and Conservation Breeding Specialist Groups
International Union for the Conservation of Nature/Species Survival Commission
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Dear Dr. Brisendine and Colleagues,

About 30,000 African lions remain in the wild, inhabiting less than 20% of their former range. Their survival is threatened primarily by conflict with people over depredation on livestock, bushmeat snaring, and the loss of prey and habitat. There are also concerns about the sustainability of lion trophy hunting, as negative impacts on lion populations have been demonstrated in several areas. We agree that the ongoing and widespread decline in lions range warrants immediate action throughout their remaining range, but are concerned that an uplisting to Endangered status in the US may have unexpected negative consequences for conservation. Uplisting would stop import of lion trophies to the US, with resultant impact on the viability of hunting as a form of land use, but would not influence other human causes of lion mortality.

When evaluating the role of trophy hunting in lion conservation, the following points must be considered:

- Lion hunting assigns an important financial value to the species in areas where it would otherwise have none, and where protection of lions and other wildlife would otherwise be unlikely. This is particularly important as lions are a species that regularly come into conflict with people, and are therefore costly to live with outside of fully protected areas.
- Lion hunting provides revenue to wildlife authorities for conservation in areas that would otherwise be unsupported. Most wildlife authorities are severely underfunded and the reduction in income from trophy hunting would further compromise their ability to protect large parks networks. Recent research shows that effective conservation in Africa costs at least \$1,000 per square kilometre (\$2,500 per square mile) per year. Thus, rather than eliminating ways for wildlife to generate income, we need to find more ways for rural Africans to benefit from wildlife.
- Lions are legally hunted across 650,000 km², about 20% of total lion range. However, that proportion is much higher in the countries where lions are hunted, e.g. 38% of Zimbabwe, and one third to one half of Tanzania.

- In some countries, current lion hunting practices are not sustainable and require genuine and immediate reform.

There are three ways to proceed from this point:

1. **No change** – This would be undesirable because the combination of all human impacts, including current trophy hunting practices, creates an unsustainable level of lion mortality in some areas.
2. **Uplisting to Endangered** – This would make sport hunting in some areas largely unviable and would reduce the income-generating potential of others. Loss of lions as a trophy species would jeopardize the contribution of hunting to conservation and reduce the funds available to wildlife authorities in hunting countries. Reducing the value of wildlife in areas outside of National Parks renders those areas less competitive with more destructive forms of land use such as agriculture, livestock, and resource extraction, making them more vulnerable to expanding human settlement. As an example, wildlife populations in Kenya have declined by over 70% since all trophy hunting was banned in 1977, while wildlife populations increased by xx% during the same period in South Africa, due to conversion of xxx km² of cattle ranches to wildlife areas supported largely by managed hunting. The ban removed the most practical means for governments, private land owners and communities to derive benefit from wildlife on lands outside of parks, while doing nothing to provide wildlife law enforcement or antipoaching activities.
3. **Reform of hunting practices** – We believe that better management of hunting would be the most desirable outcome for lion conservation. Reforms should include enforcement of reasonable age restrictions and conservative science-based quotas. These would prevent detrimental effects of trophy hunting while still allowing lions to contribute high economic value to local communities, wildlife authorities and land owners.

ALWG Recommendations:

- We support urgent and significant reform of lion hunting rather than trade restrictions. Science-based management must be implemented by all range countries to ensure that lion hunting is beneficial rather than detrimental to the long term survival of the species. For trophy hunting to be a valid conservation tool, effective anti-poaching efforts must be undertaken in hunting areas to reduce illegal offtake. The governments of Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe have all instituted, or are in the process of instituting, reforms to rectify past mistakes and ensure that lion hunting is sustainable. These should be encouraged and supported.
- Unless other reliable sources of revenues can provide equal or greater contributions to conservation than those currently associated with hunting, moratoria on lion hunting should only be considered as interim steps to provide an opportunity to implement reforms, or until lion populations recover in depleted areas. Such alternate revenue sources would need to ensure:
 - equal or increased wildlife based revenue for local people and wildlife authorities.
 - equal or improved protection of wildlife habitat.
 - equal or improved anti-poaching success.
 - equal or improved incentives for rural people to coexist with lions and other large carnivores.
- We believe that failing to secure reliable alternative revenue sources before implementing moratoria on lion hunting may expose existing populations of lions and their prey to increased poaching and habitat degradation, and further threaten their survival.

- In the absence of alternative revenue sources, conservation efforts should focus on reforming current hunting practices and the management of hunting areas to ensure sustainable utilisation of lions and reduction in illegal offtake of all wildlife.
- Rural communities should be the primary beneficiaries of income from hunting on their land
- On all land tenure types, there must be significant investment in anti-poaching by state wildlife authorities, hunting operators, private land owners and/or communities.

The African Lion Working Group brings together lion experts from across the world, with differing perspectives on what it is required to secure the future of African lions. While this statement represents the prevailing views among ALWG, there are members who do not endorse trophy hunting as part of the solution. For them, the listing of the species as Endangered in the ESA would be a positive step forward in recognizing the dire situation currently faced by African lions, and promote further intervention to protect lion populations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. J. van der Merwe', with a horizontal line underneath.

S. J. van der Merwe
Chair