

Wildlife Conservation: Lawsuit Challenges Trump Administration's Trophy Hunting Council

Interior Secretary Zinke Illegally Stacked Panel With Insiders Who Profit From Hunting Imperiled Animals

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Conservation and animal protection groups [sued](#) the Trump administration today for illegally establishing the "International Wildlife Conservation Council," an advisory panel stacked with people who have personal or financial interests in killing or importing rare or endangered animals from overseas. Federal law requires government advisory panels to be balanced and not improperly influenced by special interests.

Today's lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court by Democracy Forward on behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Center for Biological Diversity, the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International. It asserts that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service flagrantly violated federal law by appointing a council packed with trophy hunters, firearm executives and representatives of businesses with close ties to the Trump administration.

"Elephants, rhinos, and lions face enough threats without the U.S. government giving the cover of credibility to trophy hunters peddling the self-serving notion that killing endangered species constitutes a legitimate strategy for conserving them," said Natural Resources Defense Council senior attorney Zak Smith. "If we have to sue to get our government to listen to wildlife conservation experts, we're happy to do so." Smith is also director of NRDC's Wildlife Trade Initiative.

The IWCC is designed to promote the "removal of barriers" to trophy imports. Zinke has refused to include conservation experts on the council, instead selecting trophy hunters and representatives of financially conflicted business interests. [Four of](#) the 17 [council members](#) had signed on to host a "Camouflage and Cufflinks" inaugural ball last year, soliciting millions of dollars in campaign contributions.

"Zinke's thrill-kill council is unethical and illegal, and apparently that's just fine with him," said Tanya Sanerib, international program legal director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "These people kill imperiled animals for fun. They have no business making policy decisions about wildlife imports and we're hopeful that the courts will agree."

Trump called big game hunting a [“horror show”](#) in 2017, just weeks after his Fish and Wildlife Service [abandoned](#) an Obama-era ban on importing elephant trophies and sanctioned the hunting of lions in several countries. According to a [Humane Society International report](#), trophy hunting has caused the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of animals since 2005.

“The public’s interest is not served by using taxpayer dollars to host meetings of wealthy trophy hunters to hatch plans to minimize governmental oversight of their unethical hobby,” said Anna Frostic, managing wildlife attorney for the Humane Society of the United States. “The Department of the Interior has failed to provide a rational justification for establishing the IWCC, and we are asking the federal court to revoke the council’s charter.”

“By establishing a council with the sole purpose of promoting the overseas hobby of trophy hunting, Secretary Zinke is breaking the law,” said Democracy Forward executive director Anne Harkavy. “Contrary to the committee’s own name, Secretary Zinke has failed to include any conservation biologists or others with expertise in advising on wildlife conservation policy.”

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