



PRESS STATEMENT

CNRG CONDEMNS ELEPHANT CULLING AT SAVE VALLEY CONSERVANCY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Harare, 05 June 2025

The Centre for Natural Resource Governance (CNRG) strongly condemns the issuance of permits by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZimParks) to Save Valley Conservancy to cull 50 elephants under the misleading guise of an “elephant management exercise.”

While we acknowledge the ecological pressures within Save Valley Conservancy and the challenges posed by elephant overpopulation, we reject culling as a legitimate, ethical, or science-backed solution. Culling is a violent, short-term fix that disregards the complex social structures of elephant herds, risks traumatizing surviving animals, and ultimately fails to address the root causes of habitat stress and human-elephant conflict.

We reiterate similar concerns we raised in 2024 when the government announced plans to cull 200 elephants in a similarly controversial move. Killing wild animals that are the basis for the tourism economy threatens sustainable livelihoods. In Zimbabwe, tourism is the third largest economic sector and contributed US\$ 433 million to the country’s GDP. This industry is heavily reliant on healthy wildlife populations and intact protected areas and could suffer significantly from the culling of wild animals.

Further culling elephants is a major policy reversal. It was carried out in Zimbabwe and South Africa between the mid-1960s and the mid-1990s but was abandoned after heavy criticism because of the cruelty and trauma inflicted on these highly intelligent and social animals. The statement by ZimParks fails to clarify how the culling will be conducted and whether they target entire herds or which criteria they will use to select the elephants kill. Shooting elephants causes distress to their families and can significantly exacerbate human wildlife conflict. At a time organizations like CNRG are working hard to promote human wildlife co-existence, the proposed culling exercise comes as a major setback.

A Flawed Justification

ZimParks cites an ecological carrying capacity of 800 elephants, with the current population at 2,550. Yet such carrying capacity models are often contested, outdated, and based on narrow ecological calculations that ignore broader landscape-level dynamics and climate variability. Wildlife does not recognize artificial boundaries and isolating Save Valley from the broader ecological system reduces conservation to spreadsheet arithmetic.

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Alternatives Exist – But Are Ignored

Over the past five years, the Conservancy translocated 200 elephants. This is commendable, but far from the scale required. What is needed is a national strategy on elephant range expansion, ecological corridors, and increased investment in transboundary elephant conservation. Contraceptive methods, community engagement, and landscape restoration offer far more humane and sustainable options than state-sanctioned killing.

Disguised Commercial Interests?

We are alarmed by the quiet commodification of this exercise. The planned distribution of elephant meat to communities masks what may be a veiled effort to generate ivory stockpiles. Zimbabwe's ongoing lobbying for ivory trade has long cast doubt on the government's commitment to ethical conservation. Turning elephants into meat and trophies under the label of "management" betrays both our heritage and our moral responsibility to future generations.

We are also concerned that the proposed culls ultimately serve the interests of those who stand to benefit from the commercial exploitation of threatened wildlife populations.

True conservation must be rooted in justice – for communities, for wildlife, and for ecosystems. The militarized and extractive approach to wildlife governance that continues to exclude communities from decision-making will only escalate conflict and deepen mistrust.

We therefore call on ZimParks to:

1. Immediately halt the planned culling of elephants in Save Valley and withdraw plans to cull elephants, and instead use their available resources to implement existing, well-proven, alternative, sustainable, and humane measures to tackle the current challenges facing both people and wildlife.
2. Convene a transparent, multi-stakeholder dialogue on ethical elephant management for human-wildlife coexistence, while also protecting increasingly threatened wildlife populations.
3. Invest in non-lethal, community-based conservation strategies grounded in scientific research and local knowledge.
4. Develop a national strategy on elephant range expansion, ecological corridors, and increase investment in transboundary elephant conservation.

Zimbabwe's elephants are not surplus biomass to be disposed of for convenience. They are sentient beings, ecological engineers, and national treasures whose future must not be traded for short-term expediency.

End of Statement

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