

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-7](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Wildlife trafficking—illegal trade in wildlife—is estimated to be worth \$7 billion to \$23 billion annually and, according to State, continues to push some protected and endangered animal species to the brink of extinction. In 2013, President Obama issued an executive order that established an interagency Task Force charged with developing a strategy to guide U.S. efforts to combat wildlife trafficking.

GAO was asked to review U.S. agencies' CWT efforts. GAO's September 2016 report on wildlife trafficking focused on supply side activities ([GAO-16-717](#)). This report focuses on demand side activities and examines, among other things, (1) what is known about the demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products in the United States and in Asia and (2) actions agencies are taking to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products in the United States and in Asia. GAO reviewed information from U.S. agencies and international and nongovernmental organizations and interviewed U.S. officials in Washington, D.C., and Miami, Florida, and U.S. and foreign government officials in China, Thailand, and Vietnam.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Interior, State, and USAID work to clarify roles and responsibilities for staff collaborating on combating wildlife trafficking efforts in Southeast Asia. Agencies agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-18-7](#). For more information, contact Kimberly Gianopoulos at (202) 512-8612 or gianopoulosk@gao.gov.

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COMBATING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

Agencies Are Taking Action to Reduce Demand but Could Improve Collaboration in Southeast Asia

What GAO Found

In the United States, China, and countries in Southeast Asia, there is diverse demand for illegally traded wildlife, according to data, reports, and various officials. The Department of the Interior's (Interior) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has seized a variety of wildlife at U.S. ports, such as coral for aquariums, conch meat for food, seahorses for medicinal purposes, and crocodile skin for fashion items. In China and Southeast Asian countries, reports and officials have identified seizures and consumption of illegally traded wildlife products such as rhino horn, elephant ivory, pangolins (shown below), turtles, and sharks, among others, used for purposes such as food, decoration, pets, or traditional medicine.

Live Mother and Baby Pangolins at a Rescue Center in Vietnam (left) and Seized Pangolin Scales and Products at an Education and Awareness Display in Hong Kong (right)



Source: GAO. | GAO-18-7

U.S. agencies are taking actions designed to reduce demand for illegal wildlife, including building law enforcement capacity and raising awareness, but disagreement on roles and responsibilities has hindered some combating wildlife trafficking (CWT) activities in Southeast Asia. FWS inspects shipments in the United States and facilitates law enforcement capacity building with partner nations overseas. The Department of State (State) conducts diplomatic efforts, some of which contributed to a joint announcement by China and the United States to implement restrictions on both countries' domestic ivory trade. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) works with local organizations abroad to support programs intended to reduce wildlife demand, strengthen regional cooperation, and increase law enforcement capacity. Several other agencies also contribute expertise or resources to support various demand reduction activities. Certain practices can enhance and sustain collaborative efforts, such as establishing joint strategies, defining a common outcome, and agreeing on roles and responsibilities. GAO found that agencies applied the first two practices but could improve with regard to agreement on roles and responsibilities in Southeast Asia. For example, although the *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking Implementation Plan* designates various Task Force agencies to lead or participate in achieving CWT strategic priorities, it does not define specific roles and responsibilities at the working level. Agencies have different views on roles and responsibilities in Southeast Asia. According to some officials, this disagreement resulted in inappropriate training activities and hindered U.S. cooperation with a host nation. More clearly defining roles and responsibilities would enhance agency collaboration.