

U.S. - Asian Elephant Conservation Act Summary Report Available

The Asian Elephant Conservation Act of 1997 (AsECA) was enacted to "Assist in the conservation of Asian elephants by supporting and providing financial resources for the conservation programs of nations within the range of Asian elephants..." Originally authorized for 5 years between 1997-2002; the AsECA has been re-authorized for an additional five years beginning in 2003. The Congress of the United States appropriated \$1,944,500 to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (through which the Act is implemented) during the first three years of activity (1999-2001). A 40-page summary report describing progress in implementing the Act during this period through support to 44 projects in 12 Asian elephant range states may be requested from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Information on submitting proposals to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund may also be requested as proposals are accepted year-round.

Please address your requests to:

Chief
Division of International Conservation,
Asian Elephant Conservation Fund,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
4401 North Fairfax Drive, ARLSQ 730,
Arlington, VA 22203-1622. USA

e-mail: InternationalConservation@fws.gov
Tele: 703-358-1754
Fax: 703-358-2849

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund Fact Sheet Update

1) During the four-year period ending in 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service received 160 proposals and awarded 65 grants totaling \$ 3,027,050. This effort leveraged close to a 1:1 match of in-kind support and additional funds contributed by project executants and other partners.

The following paragraphs summarize significant challenges to Asian elephant conservation and provide examples of contributions made by the Fund to address these threats.

Habitat loss: This is the single greatest threat to the survival of substantial numbers of wild Asian elephants in the long term. A recent report suggests that overall, the geographic

range of the Asian elephant has declined by some 70% since the 1960's. In Sumatra, Indonesia (thought to be home to some 3,000 Asian elephants) and the State of Assam, India (thought to be home to some 5,000 Asian elephants), unsustainable logging, an expanding agricultural frontier, recession, civil unrest, and (human) immigration have worked together to fuel rampant habitat loss. Symptoms of this habitat loss are greater elephant-human conflict, characterized by increased elephant deaths by poisoning, shooting, and electrocution, and (in Sumatra) capture and domestication of problem elephants.

To combat habitat loss and maintain viable elephant populations in the wild, the Fund has supported habitat protection and habitat management work in 10 Asian elephant range states. In Assam, the fund has supported the construction of anti-poaching camps in wildlife sanctuaries and reserve forests to halt illegal encroachment while in Sumatra, Sabah (Malaysia) and in southwestern Cambodia, the Fund has supported the development and implementation of land use planning programs to develop core protected areas surrounded by elephant friendly buffer zones. In addition, the Fund has supported the establishment of elephant corridors at key sites in Thailand, India, and Nepal.

Human-elephant conflict (HEC) over crops is often held as the chief proximate cause of human-induced elephant deaths. For example, in Assam (in North-eastern India), 31 elephants were recently poisoned to death within a 70-day period as retribution for crop raiding. In Sri Lanka, a country with some 3,000 elephants, some 110 -120 elephants are killed each year, most of them while raiding crops. The Fund is supporting 14 projects (of which 3 are in Sri Lanka) that directly address HEC. The first project seeks to fence villagers and their crops in and fence the greater (elephant range) out. Under this model, circular solar-powered fences of 8-10 kilometers in length are built around village cropfields, but only after agreements have been reached with local communities to insure routine maintenance. In a companion project, a group of engineers are working to apply their technical skills towards the development of new techniques to detect elephant movements towards cropfields and then to deter elephants away prior to crop damage. Yet a third strategy aimed at enhancing human tolerance for elephants is being undertaken outside of Sri Lanka's Ruhuna (=Yala) National Park. Given that up to 70% of Sri Lanka's 3,000 Asian elephants live outside parks, it was reasoned that the development of ecotourism opportunities based on elephant viewing in Yala's buffer zone might provide an alternate source of income for farmers and thus help compensate them for crop losses.

Poaching - the destruction of Asian elephant populations by unregulated hunting - continues to be a major threat and is the primary cause for the decline of the species in some

Karl A.K. Stromayer

Division of International Conservation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 730
Arlington, Virginia 22203-1622,
U.S.A

parts of its range. Cambodia, for example, has plentiful elephant range of at least 8000 square miles -however, after some 30 years of warfare and civil unrest, only some 300 elephants remain in habitat that is likely to support an order of magnitude more. In some parts of southern India, centuries of ivory poaching, which targets male elephants exclusively, has produced a skewed sex ratio of some 50 adult female elephants to every adult male. In response to such threats, the Fund has supported on-the-ground antipoaching work in 6 Asian elephant range states, including the development and implementation of a protection and monitoring program in 3 key elephant ranges in Cambodia. In Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains, 45 full time rangers and 75 part-time community-based wildlife monitors and guides were trained to protect wildlife populations and counter illegal activities. On their very first joint patrol, these rangers broke up a band of hardened elephant and tiger poachers. In southern India the fund has supported anti-poaching training, the equipping of ranger staff, the construction of anti-poaching camps, and the provision of legal assistance to increase prison sentences for elephant poachers.

In addition to working with partners to address threats the Fund has contributed to the assessment of elephant

population size, and to applied research into the distribution, seasonal movements, and habitat use patterns of elephant populations at some 11 sites in South and Southeast Asia. For example such projects in Cambodia supported national surveys of all elephant ranges and set the stage for on-going protection and park-establishment projects. In a similar vein, applied research to improve elephant population survey techniques and to examine aspects of Asian elephant conservation genetics have helped to provide information needed by managers to prioritize on the ground conservation actions in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Almost all projects supported by the Fund have training components and many also have conservation education/ outreach components. For example, a training project for the forest field staff of elephant reserves in Tamil Nadu (India), enhanced the applied technical skills of some 100 state forest rangers and Asian elephant conservation education outreach materials developed with Fund support were used as pedagogic aids by over 1600 teachers in India. In addition, the Fund has supported the World Conservation Union's development of a range-wide Asian Elephant Conservation Action Plan, as well as National Action Plans for Bangladesh and Cambodia.



Surveying elephants in Cambodia