February 25, 2014

A.8824 (Sweeney)

Title: The ban on the sale, purchase, trade, barter, and distribution of certain ivory articles in New York State.

Purpose: This bill would amend the Environmental Conservation Law, prohibiting the purchase and sale of ivory articles in the state. The legislation would work to close New York as a market for ivory sale.

Statement of Support:
The largest ivory consumer nation in the world is China, but the United States has one of the largest markets globally. Within the U.S., New York City has the largest market and demand of any U.S. city.

While the international commercial trade of ivory was banned in 1989 (by the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES), it is still legal to trade documented ivory predating the 1989 ban, or “pre-convention” ivory. This loophole allows for the sale of ivory to continue because once ivory is within the U.S. it is almost impossible to distinguish pre-convention ivory with illegal ivory. As long as the demand for ivory remains, the legal trade of ivory will continue to serve as a front and will also continue to drive the criminal elephant poaching practice in Africa.

Because of the continued demand for ivory, African elephants are being slaughtered at an unprecedented rate. In 2012 alone, approximately 35,000 African elephants were killed – the worst mass slaughter of elephants since the international ivory trade was banned in 1989. The African forest elephant population was 322,000 in 2002, but population levels have declined by 76% to 80,000 in 2013. At this rate, African forest elephants could be extinct within 10 years.

Today’s ivory traffickers are well-organized groups that operate as transnational criminal networks, and often traffic other illegal substances such as narcotics and weapons. Because of these networks’ experience, it is extremely difficult to crack down on ivory trafficking.

As the U.S. works with China and other countries to address the illegal ivory trade, it is important for New York to lead by example. By establishing a moratorium on the sale of all elephant ivory and ivory products, New York can eliminate the significant enforcement challenge posed by the legal ivory trade (the pre-convention ivory). In doing so, we can raise consumer awareness, reduce the poaching pressures on elephants and set an example for other states to follow. In order to save the elephant population for our future generations, we need to take action now.

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support Of A.8824.