How We Stop The Bulldozers Destroying Our Earth

We have put the fate of our earth's endangered species in the hands of profit-driven international organizations at the expense of our planet. To protect our future, we have to change this.

What's encouraging is that we can.

Last week, prayer groups globally of all cultures united with the Sioux Nation, doing ceremony to protect Standing Rock in North Dakota where the oil pipeline crisis revolved around water - sacred to Life on this planet. From the heart of White Lion territories in South Africa, I joined them, too. To many, myself included, President Obama’s intervention on 9/9 came as the answer to those prayers.

**It stopped the bulldozers. But they haven’t backtracked. Yet.**

What is now becoming clear is that the combination of heartfelt prayer for the earth and mass action in protest at her destruction can bring a turnaround.

Clearly, this combination of love and outrage - when people start to feel their hearts again and take action accordingly - will radically change our world in our near future.

It is not blind activism, but courageous heartfelt commitment to protect the earth and shift the consumerist paradigm that is destroying her.

A year ago, an event occurred that sparked this kind of mass mobilization. The senseless brutal trophy killing of Cecil the Lion in Zimbabwe by a Minnesota dentist,
Walter Palmer, touched the hearts of millions worldwide who demanded accountability from our politicians. The CECIL Bill was the result.

Public outrage brought about this change in legislation, and Cecil’s sacrifice helped pass a bill that could serve all endangered species: *Conserving Eco-systems by Ceasing the Importation of Large (CECIL) Animal Trophies Act.*

**It did so by activating the hearts of humanity.**

This kind of heart activation is the beginning of the turnaround for our earth and her restoration.

*Campaign poster in support of Standing Rock - regarded as a turning point in tireless campaigns to protect sites and animals which are sacred to indigenous nations.*

It’s a reminder that in our battle to save the planet, what happens to water in North Dakota and lions in Zimbabwe are interconnected in a delicate web of planetary consciousness.
Water, like land, is the foundation of eco-systems. Earth needs water to germinate the seeds on which survival and sustainability depend, all the way up the food chain to the very apex of the pyramid of life: the predators, or so-called “Capstone Species”.

While water and soil are the foundation of the food chain, lions are the apex predators. In Nature, the role of the apex animal at the tip of the pyramid is to maintain the balance and health of the whole. Lions regulate the prey species, which feed upon the fauna which feed upon the flora, which in turn draws life from water and soil. This fundamental ecological principle is called “Trophic Cascading.”

In short, lions play an absolutely fundamental role in protecting eco-systems, while eco-systems support all life on this planet, including our own.

If eco-systems collapse, our systems will also collapse. Conversely, the good news is that by restoring the capstone species - lions, bears, wolves, whales - to the eco-system, we restore balance and order across all interdependent species all the way down the trophic levels to the rivers. Yellowstone Park proved this principle in their wolf reintroduction.

As a critically urgent imperative, we need to ensure our human systems and legislation support these all-important eco-systems. To ensure the survival of Mother Earth, the oil pipelines that grease the global consumerist machine killing her have to go - along with those brutal structures, the conservation bodies that purport to be protecting her.

**As I write this, the world’s two top conservation entities, IUCN and CITES, are convening to decide the fate of our wildlife.**

If we care about our future, it’s critical that we understand the brutal yet shaky logic on which these global entities make their policy decisions.

Who are these authorities? Who appointed them? Who pays them? Who funds their decisions? And most importantly, based on profit and trade, what authority do they have to determine what species is or isn’t protected?
CITES (Convention for the International Trade of Endangered Species) has vast power over the future of our earth. Firstly, we should note the word “Trade” - rather than “Protection” - of Endangered Species, as this is the principle on which their decision-making turns. Secondly, the notion of separating species from their ecosystems and classifying them ‘protected’ or not, as the case may be, is fundamentally flawed - adopting pseudo-scientific jargon to create seeming legitimacy. As any true ecologist knows, all components of an eco-system are entirely interdependent.

Under the guise of saving our endangered species, CITES has maintained and legitimized a killing industry, and contributed to the dramatically declining numbers of many animals on the brink of extinction. Why? Because CITES is a commercial model controlled by trade considerations and managed by bureaucratic entities.

CITES works according to a treaty between countries. Government representatives meet every 4 years to determine how species will be traded across international borders. CITES determines international legislation of trade in a given species by categorizing it according to what is considered it’s “endangered status.” It lists species according to three appendices: Appendix I, II or III, depending on what is deemed its vulnerability to extinction.

**Significantly, there is no category for NO TRADE of Endangered Species.**

Cross-border trade in endangered species is a given - it is just about numbers, and numbers are influenced by vested interests with secondary consideration given to the plight of the animals or the consequence to eco-systems. If we understand anything about the workings of our planet, it is firstly, that ALL species are essential to the health and vitality of the planet as a whole. Secondly, species and eco-systems are geographically specific, so the concept of cross-border relocation of species is profoundly misguided and extremely dangerous. Profit over environment is at the core of the convention, and the planet is hostage to the decisions it takes.

**Is CITES doing a good job of protecting our endangered natural heritage?**

The statistics speak for themselves. The extinction of species has never been more precarious.
Take lions, for example. The most sought-after trophy animal on the planet. Lions, the King of Animals, are at the forefront of the notorious international killing industry. Their numbers in the wild have plummeted 80% in 50 years, yet escalated astronomically in captivity. There’s been an estimated 300% increase in dead lion exports in the last 10 years. And perhaps the worst statistic of all: Today, there are more lions in cages than in the wild.

In this cynical industry, lion killing is directly linked to lion cub petting. It’s a production line in which this iconic species is commercially bred for the bullet. First, handled by international tourists as baby lions in a merciless but lucrative hug-and-kill industry, which makes dead trophies out of Africa’s last surviving kings and queens - wild or tamed.

According to these statistics, lions will be extinct in the wild in our lifetimes - and the for-profit model on which CITES bases its policies cannot save them.
These illegitimate structures have to be dismantled, and redesigned. There is no rational reason for these organizations to have the power to determine how many animals can legitimately be killed and traded. The fate of our earth’s species must be in the hands of those wisdom keepers who uphold not only sacred sites, but all of Nature as sacrosanct. Those who recognize that all species are essential to the health and vitality of the planet as a whole. Lions are currently listed as CITES Appendix II. In the lead-up to CITES, West Africa has been motivating for up-listing lions to Appendix I for greater protection due to critically low numbers, while South Africa has been motivating for down-listing lions from Appendix II to Appendix III, affording them virtually no protective status at all. South Africa’s argument is based on their view that the wild lion population in this region is “stable” and can therefore sustain increased trophy hunting levels. However, the numbers they put forward are artificially boosted due to lions bred in captivity for trading and hunting purposes.

Firstly, this logic is inaccurate. South Africa has one of only five viable wild lion populations in the world, the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere; and the future of the lions here is by no means stable or secure. Due to wide-spread TB, Panthera leo in the Kruger risks an entire population crash.

Secondly, as already explained, this kind of thinking is dangerous to the planetary eco-system - apex predators are essential to the presence of diverse wildlife in ways we are only beginning to rediscover.

Finally, this logic is unethical. Treating the King of Animals as a commodity to be bred for blood money should be rightly understood as sacrilege - along with polluting water as the source of life and other criminal acts of ecocide. If we have any trouble understanding this, we should all be looking to the indigenous wisdom keepers and Mother Nature herself for urgent redemption.

In the commercial model of wildlife, lions have no rights to freedom or dignity. The King is treated as little more than a canned product with a price on its head, hence the name “Canned Lion Hunting” coined by the Cook Report (a British investigative TV program) when this malpractice was exposed way back in 1997.
Although this abominable industry was first brought to the attention of the world two decades ago, CITES has done nothing to curb its aggressive escalation in the intervening period. In fact, the opposite: what was a handful of disreputable mafia-type operators then, has escalated now into a massive cross-border killing industry. Hundreds of lion breeding facilities have been established, and thousands of captive bred lions are being commercially bred for the bullet.

The only argument for keeping and breeding lions under such abusive conditions is gross material greed. There is no conservation value. For ecological and genetic reasons, there is virtually zero probability of these captive-bred predators ever returning to the eco-system. Commoditizing lions is contrary to any concept of true and responsible custodianship of our earth.

At the same time as the North and South Dakota nations were uniting to protect their waters and lands, the World Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was announcing a motion to prohibit Canned Hunting of lions. Credit for this dates back to the mass public outrage that took place after CECIL’s killing and to dedicated efforts by conservationists uniting to drive more humane policies forward.

**However, as with Standing Rock, the bulldozers may have been halted. But they’re not retreating. Yet.**
We will not achieve the turnaround for our earth as long as we fail to see that the IUCN and other leading conservation entities, including CITES, WWF and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, are basing their conservation logic on exploitation rather than reverence.

The very basis of their arguments remain unsound:

“If it pays, it stays.”

Pause for a moment and question: Is that sensible conservation logic?

If Nature doesn’t stay, we’ll all pay.
Yet, I have attended numerous world congresses where this illogical logic reigns.

When it comes to lions, you'll hear an extension of the same rationale:

“Kill one lion to save five.”

This is not sound thinking. Nor can it be, as long as the IUCN remains largely funded by Safari Club International, the world’s biggest trophy hunting outfitter.

Einstein reminds us that we cannot solve a problem without changing the mind-set that created the problem. As long as profit drives our motives, we are on a losing battle for our earth.

**We forget that there has always been another way.**

With the re-emergence of the indigenous nations and their leadership demanding sanctity for our planet, we cannot be oblivious any longer. We urgently need to reassemble our council of wisdom keepers and eco-system experts, and ensure that the power to affect transformation is handed over into their authority to protect our earth and its sacred places.

Currently, along with CITES, the IUCN is considered the world’s main authority on the conservation status of species, with their Red List of Threatened Species providing an equivalent index of endangered species to CITES appendices - in similar reductionist scientific classifications. It’s time we start questioning their legitimacy.

The IUCN’s objectives seem honorable, in principle: “To convey the urgency of conservation issues to the public and policy makers, as well as help the international community to try to reduce species extinction.”

But when it comes to actual implementation, the IUCN is programmed into materialistic, exploitative rationale, classifying species according to reductionist science as part of a consciousness of dominion, ego and control. And profit-driven once again. They condemn illegal poaching while upholding legalized trophy hunting
of endangered animals, as if these self-serving malpractices weren’t two sides of the same commercialized coin.

The original ways of earth governance upheld by indigenous tribes who have offered us a model of true custodianship of our earth, are entirely dismissed as naïve and primitive. In the old indigenous model, any extraction from the earth, whether plant or animal, was done with the greatest reverence, economy of scale, and ecological preservation of life.

While the IUCN’s constitution pays lip-service to First Nations tribes and their age-old conservation principles, when it comes to actual policy these indigenous wisdom keepers are conveniently side-lined. In the IUCN world congresses I have attended, First Nations leaders are literally marginalized and may be found at the fringes of the convention centers, holding sacred ceremonies in honor of the earth, over which the policy makers walk “roughshod.”
Driven by cold-hearted commercial objectives, these so-called authorities are ill-equipped to understand the critical importance of these ceremonies: deep reverential honorings which are capable of shifting the consumerist paradigm into one of true relationship with Creation.

So, who are the bulldozers in this story?

The old exploitative model of “dominion over nature” must go. Along with the so-called authorities who benefit from it at the expense of our planet.

In traditional Africa, and among the tribal authorities with whom I work closely, the Lion is revered in his rightful place as the king of animals. For this reason, the majority of African countries have outlawed commercial trophy hunting as a brutal relic of colonial exploitation. States that have held to a ban on lion trophy hunting for many years, such as Botswana and Kenya, have shown that conservation strategies based on non-commercial trophy hunting do work.

Yet the IUCN’s approach to lion conservation over the past two decades has been to intimidate African countries to follow their paradigm of international pro-trade, pro-trophy hunting.

The old ways of indigenous peoples who revered Nature as a sacred heritage, for which we are accountable to the Creator, have been destroyed by this need and greed model. In both CITES and the IUCN, the protected status of Panthera leo and other precious species has been manipulated to accommodate trophy hunting interests in Western markets and a rampant trade in lion bones and parts to Eastern Markets.

If you are on the side of Nature, and her sanctity as a living flourishing heritage, you won’t find help in these bureaucratic corridors.

In 2009, at Wild9 Congress in Mexico, indigenous leaders from different tribes helped me drive a resolution to have the White Lions protected by all appropriate bodies by international law. These rare animals are regarded as a sacred living heritage by the indigenous peoples with whom I work. Along with the occurrence of
the White Bison and other “spirit animals,” they are honored as sacred across all tribes. 54 countries were represented in that Resolution.

Following this Resolution, my goal was to identify those “appropriate bodies” to protect this genetic rarity intrinsic not only to the biodiversity of its region, but as indigenous wisdom keepers know, to the health and restoration of the planetary system as a whole. CITES? IUCN? Could I rely on help and protection here? No efforts have been spared, including ground-breaking genetic research, parliamentary presentation, persistent engagement at global forums as well as in policy-making, yet the White Lions have been deliberately left off any protected species list. The status quo is that there is still no law to protect these critically endangered rarities from being erased from the Earth.

On the contrary, appallingly, White Lions are now #1 on the trophy hunter’s hit-list.

**Given that money drives votes in CITES, in whose pockets are these authorities?**

No pockets deeper than Safari Club International, which operates out of the comfort and glitz of Las Vegas, wheeling and dealing in Africa’s wild animal trophies.

As for our best efforts to protect lions by motivating “motions” that they be raised to CITES I, Safari Club International goes so far as stating brazenly on their Home Page:

“To help all hunters understand the significance of this issue, SCI provides the following … questions and answers.

Q: What is CITES Appendix I?
A: Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in Appendix I species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. Generally speaking, commercial trade is prohibited, but trade for personal use may be allowed. Trade in hunting trophies may be allowed because it is for personal use.”

**Lions for “personal use?”**
Clearly, whatever CITES decides, Safari Club International knows it’s business as usual.

In the face of this kind of madness, whether CITES shifts the Appendices up or down is simply moving deckchairs around the Titanic.

As a matter of critical urgency, we have to stop these illegitimate bodies from nose-diving the rest of us into its inevitable collision course with disaster.

![Campaign poster for One United Roar in support of sites and animals, sacred to indigenous nations.](image)

The North-South Dakota oil pipeline crisis is an urgent reminder that the fate of the earth should be returned to the hands of it’s true stewards, those humble caretakers who understand the intelligence of eco-systems and the intricate, interdependent web of life.

Each of us can potentially be such a steward. But not until we have removed the unsound paradigm that is killing our earth. Which includes stopping the US government from executing 50,000 wild horses to make way for the super-sized beef burger industry - one of the most relentless components of that killing machine.
As today’s history is showing, we can achieve transformation of our human systems to bring them into communion with eco-systems - through a powerful combination of prayer and protest.

And then, together, let us start to build a true authority governed by eco-systems experts of different disciplines and a Council of Indigenous Elders giving voice to all species, who will ensure our earth is treated with the love and respect she has always deserved.

Linda Tucker with High Chief Francois Paulette, advocate for sacred sites and sacred animals. The High Chief of the Dene Nation led the Resolution to have the White Lions protected by international law. Photographer: Ranveig Eckhoff (© Global White Lion Protection Trust)

**UPDATE**

Under worldwide pressure, the IUCN has emerged from its convention with a motion to prohibit Canned Hunting and a motion to protect Sacred Sites.

**Clearly, Standing Rock represents a turning point for Sacred Sites just as Cecil did for lions at this time last year. But it is only the beginning of rewriting the story.**
To be in alignment with true ecological principles, the IUCN would have to review their misguided classification of the White Lions, the White Buffalo, and the other sacred “spirit animals” known to indigenous wisdom keepers as indicator species of climate change. The IUCN would also have to withdraw their uninformed classification of these genetic rarities as having “no conservation value.” Indigenous wisdom keepers, such as Sioux leader, Chief Arvol Looking Horse, 19th Generation Keeper of the White Buffalo prophecies, have long understood that these sacred animals are intrinsically connected to sacred sites, to restoration of eco-systems, and the great web of interconnected life on this planet.

Going forward, the IUCN will need to pay attention not only to people’s protests at the destruction of our planet, but also to the prayers of those elders who recognize the sanctity of life and natural creation.

*The One United Roar Talent Challenge honors elders and offers youth a chance to Roar for Lions. Entries close on World Peace Day (21 Sept) and winners announced at opening of CITES (24 Sept), providing a leadership platform for international youth to protect Nature as a living heritage. Learn more at [www.OneUnitedRoar.org](http://www.OneUnitedRoar.org).*

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