



Lying about Lions— Fake News *Exposed* As Hunters Fight Fiction with Facts

PRIMED TO POUNCE AND PERSECUTE, THE ANTI-HUNTING EXTREMIST MOB WILL ALWAYS FIND AN-OTHER MARK—UNLESS WE HUNTERS TAKE A STAND.

By Karen Mehall Phillips

Few news stories are so emotionally charged that their slightest mention transports us back to the moment the first headlines broke. For 21st century hunters and anti-hunters alike, that story is about an African lion called Cecil—a 13-year-old collared male that on July

1, 2015, was killed by an American hunter near Zimbabwe's [Hwange National Park](#). The hunter was under the supervision of a professional hunting guide (PH) yet word of the lion's death sparked personal and professional harassment, death threats and international

outrage as animal-welfare extremists leveraged emotion and social media to fuel a new level of cultural warfare on hunting. Rushing to judgment, the mainstream media rode the headline-grabbing coattails of the [Humane Society of the United States](#)' (HSUS) and the [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals](#)' (PETA), touting false claims that the hunter had broken laws and that African lions were on the brink of extinction. The fallout from the perpetuation of the numerous untruths devastated the international hunting community. The notion that a hunter, despite following the order of his PH, could, at worst, land in an African jail, or at best, fear for his own safety even once back in his own country, made hunters pause before booking such a hunt. Thus, Zimbabwe's science-based lion-conservation programs and the livelihoods of its indigenous and local communities that depended on hunters' dollars began to pay the price, as hunters' social media beating continued.

Advance to June 30, 2017—one day before the two-year anniversary—and another named African lion, a 6-year-old collared male said to be that lion's offspring, was killed by a hunter near the same park in accordance with Zimbabwe law. This time hunters knew to put on hard hats as the hailstorm brewed among those set to condemn hunting, in spite of the facts. Again the hunt was conducted by a licensed PH, who is a member of the [Zimbabwe Professional Hunter and Guide Association](#) (ZPHGA). Before proceeding to hunt the lion, the PH contacted both the [Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority's](#) (ZNPWMA) senior ranger in the area and the field representative for Hwange's lion research project being conducted by Oxford University. Both confirmed the lion had been ousted from its pride in the park and inhabited the adjacent Ngamo-Sikumi forestry concession, a 420,000-acre unfenced wilderness area that allocated one male lion on quota per year. They confirmed the lion had no dependant cubs and was of a legal age for harvesting under new ZNPWMA regulations in compliance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines for sustainable use. (Fewer than 2.5 percent of the 2,000 resident lions in Zimbabwe—as recorded in a 2016 survey—were harvested in 2016 under this new program).

"The hunt was legal, with all paperwork and regulations being in order and followed in accordance with the Zimbabwe hunting laws. ..." said ZPHGA Chairman James Rosenfels in an [official statement](#). "The motto of our Association is 'ethics are everything.' Our professional hunters and guides are the most stringently examined in the world. Our members are all ambassadors of wildlife conservation. ..." Rosenfels added it remains legal to hunt a collared lion in Zimbabwe. Tracking devices

are for research purposes—not protection. After the hunt, the PH returned the lion's collar to the research team. The end.

Or at least it should have been.

But backlash still came. Even our mainstream counterparts—the wildlife "conservationists" who do not understand hunting as a necessary form of wildlife conservation—are often lumped in with the messaging of extremist groups bent on destroying all hunting—groups backed by biased media conditioned to follow their lead, groups like the HSUS, whose homepage now includes an image of a lion and the words "Cecil the lion's son shot and killed by a trophy hunter." Conveniently, this inflammatory statement sits adjacent to the site's "Donate" button and features a "Take a Stand" button that immediately sends one to a "Sign the Pledge to End Trophy Hunting" page.

HUNTERS' PATH TO A PLAN

It's not like the hunting industry should have taken this latest incident as a surprise attack. Was it prepared?

"The truth is we had no plan to argue or advocate for the principles of regulated hunting," said Chris Hudson, past [Dallas Safari Club](#) (DSC) president and DSC, NRA and SCI Life member who works with multiple African safari operators. "Hunters are private people and it is not any one person's job to defend hunting so we'd just wait for controversies to pass. Unfortunately for wildlife and the American hunter, the result was extremist groups had no one to refute them." Then came the wake-up call.

"We had to change our preparedness level," Hudson added, "and go on CNN and 'Hannity' to defend ourselves and hunting. The DSC changed its corporate mission statement and the NRA stepped up like only the NRA and the NRA Institute for Legislative Action (ILA) can and launched the NRA Hunters' Leadership Forum (HLF) and [NRAHLF.org website](#) and most recently the [NRA Hunting campaign](#)—complete with a website and compelling 60-second commercials—to save hunting and show what we do is important to wildlife so let's use the material and hit it out of the park." (See "Ousting the Fox from the Henhouse: The NRA's Campaign to Save Hunting," *American Hunter*, September 2017, p. 48.)

Hudson says the U.S. model should be emulated when it comes to hunting as an invaluable tool of conservation professionals. Most wildlife biologists, for example, consider regulated sport hunting as necessary in scientifically managing a species to its ecosystem's car-

rying capacity. When species are in peril, as some in America were 100 years ago, instead of putting a glass dome over them via an [Endangered Species Act](#), the regulated, user-pays [North American Model of Wildlife Conservation](#) was created (and adopted by the NRA Board as official NRA policy in 2014 during the NRA presidency of Jim Porter). “We have more deer and turkeys than ever because we value them, shoot them and eat them, and we value their habitat.”

Consider Hudson’s home state of Texas alone where [Texas Parks and Wildlife’s](#) License Division just confirmed that 1,178,497 whitetail deer hunting licenses were sold in the fall of 2016. Clearly, the state’s deer population still thrives because it is managed for sustainable use. The same is true in Zimbabwe, similar to the North American Model, complete with wildlife officials’ salaries all paid from hunting fees. So why isn’t the recent hunt of another lion in Zimbabwe being applauded as a good, by-the-book harvest?

BOOTS ON THE GROUND

On active duty for wildlife as a PH since age 18, Zimbabwe’s Cliff Walker sits on the ZPHGA examining committee and has conducted safaris in nine African nations for 122 game species, including 85 lions. “The latest most recent hunt was legal in all ways, but the words ‘son of Cecil’ put it in the spotlight,” Walker explained. “*No one* outside the park knew that lion from 2015, but once it was given a human name people attached human emotions as anti-hunters and Zimbabwe’s photographic sector latched on and did lions more harm than good.” Walker added that there are many lions in and around [Hwange National Park](#), but the public reacts as if it were the last one. “I have hunted more wild lions than most African professional hunters in recent years and can tell you it is simple: If it pays, it stays.”

To illustrate, Walker points to the fact that the U.S. government banned nearly all U.S. lion imports as of Jan. 22, 2016. “So when I see lions killing my buffalo, they are killing my money stream but also harming the big picture—money to run camps, anti-poaching units, jobs,” he said. “If there’s no money in my pocket, it is best I shoot the lions. But if I can export a lion to the USA, that’s good money. People pay good money to hunt lions, so then I start protecting them: It pays, it stays.”

Walker personally spent \$85,000 on anti-poaching efforts in his area last year to stop fish and elephant poaching. He could have pocketed the money but he used it to save the area. “My area never will be a great photo tourism area—far out of nowhere in thick bush,” he said, “but that makes it a good hunting area, and I will protect it. Trying to kick me out or stop me from hunting

with clients by banning hunting is straight out stupid.”

Because most of his hunting areas are in proximity to villagers and livestock, yes, some will venture out of the area and become a problem. “But it’s Africa—*not* Walt Disney—and hunters’ dollars mean survival.” To those who say Africans should dart and move lions instead of hunt them: “To where? Who’s paying and who’s doing it?”

Such realities are also shared by [Africa-based NRAHLF.org](#) and *African Outfitter* magazine contributor Ron Thomson, an award-winning book author and PH whose experience is steeped in Big Five hunts conducted during colonial times in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Thomson regularly addresses why hunting issues in Africa matter to American hunters, and in 2016 launched Africa’s [True Green Alliance](#) to stand with the global hunting community and better inform southern Africans that hunting is wildlife management.

But the best firsthand account perhaps came from the *New York Times*’ op-ed “[In Zimbabwe, We Don’t Cry for Lions](#)” by Goodwell Nzou, a doctoral student in biosciences at Wake Forest University who grew up in Zimbabwe living in terror amongst the lions. When the “so sorry about Cecil” posts compelled him to turn on the TV, he was shocked to learn the frenzy was over a lion. The fact the hunter was the villain marked a cultural contradiction. Nzou wrote that no one in Zimbabwe cared how a lion was killed or who killed it as a lion had just killed yet another human near his village—a 14-year-old boy who was sleeping in his family’s field to keep elephants and buffalo from trampling their crops. He noted that few urban Zimbabweans have ever seen a lion, as game drives are a luxury in a country where residents’ monthly income is below \$150.

“Yet Americans who can’t find Zimbabwe on a map are applauding the nation’s demand for the extradition of the [hunter], unaware that a baby elephant was reportedly slaughtered for our president’s most recent birthday banquet,” he wrote. As for the Western hemisphere’s tendency to romanticize animals with names and jump onto the hashtag train: “Did all those Americans signing petitions understand that lions kill people? That all the talk about Cecil being ‘beloved’ was media hype? Did Jimmy Kimmel choke up because Cecil was murdered—*or because he confused him with Simba from ‘The Lion King?’*” And there you have it: the danger of storybook fantasies where make-believe animals sport human emotions.

REALISM VS. IDEALISM

Of course, any discussion of Walt Disney’s the “The

Lion King” must begin at the Disney launch pad—in 1942 with the now world-famous “Bambi,” the animated film about that orphaned young deer that influences how popular culture perceives wildlife to the point the word is a synonym for deer. Assuming a child’s persona, Bambi the character arouses the emotions reserved for the human experience and, in its 75th anniversary year, continues to subconsciously communicate anti-hunting sentiment.

As noted in “[The Trouble with Bambi: Walt Disney and the American Vision of Nature](#),” published by Ralph Lutts in October 1992, Bambi’s mother was killed, leaving the childlike character a “virtual orphan, without his principal caregiver, alone until his loving but aloof, uncommunicative father appeared”—a storyline more akin to a *Life-time* movie. As Lutts explains, “Bambi” targeted children in their most impressionable years as memory shapes opinions into adulthood. He adds that this bumper sticker of the day said it all: “All the world is watching the United States, and all the United States is watching Walt Disney”—or as the Disney marketing machine attests, at the very least they’re going to Disney World. But in reality, wildlife species do not co-exist in peace.

But not everyone went down without a fight. Lutts said that after *Outdoor Life* editor Raymond J. Brown previewed the film before its release, he sent Walt Disney a telegram explaining it was illegal to shoot a deer in the spring. Concerned America’s law-abiding hunters would be labeled “vicious destroyers of game and natural resources,” he asked Disney to include a foreword clarifying “Bambi” was not representative of sportsmen’s behavior. Disney refused so Brown labeled the film an insult to sportsmen and advised them to rally in hunters’ defense. They never mobilized. Maybe hunters guessed viewers would never conflate hunter-conservationists with the invisible hunter in the film. Or maybe the hunters of the day knew they were in the right so they weren’t concerned. Mistake?

But the past shapes the future. Worth noting for its historical significance, Lutts referenced a then-timely *San Francisco Chronicle*: “A poll taken by supporters of a June ballot measure that banned mountain lion hunting in California found that people reacted more negatively to the lions when told that they regularly kill deer than when informed that lions had mauled a couple of children.” Decades later, 21st century events are playing out in an eerily similar fashion from Zimbabwe to America as the anti-hunting band marches on to the tune that hunting is murder and that the law-abiding hunters are this world’s uncivilized miscreants. But since when has “law-abiding” got to do with anything?

SPIN CENTRAL

In “[Scientists Finally Admit Cecil Wasn’t Lured from the Park](#),” John J. Jackson III, president of Conservation Force, highlights the facts published by [Oxford University’s Wildlife Conservation Research Unit](#) (WILDCRU) that in 2009 began satellite-tracking the now famous lion. The article, “[et al. Cecil: A Moment or a Movement? Analysis of Media Coverage of the Death of a Lion](#),” stated the lion was not lured out of the park by the hunter or his PH; it was in its core area outside the park; and killing a collared lion was not illegal. In fact, most area lions taken for the past decade (45 of the 65 hunted) were collared because they were being studied—an expensive venture covered largely by hunters’ dollars. At least one media source was threatened with government sanctions for misrepresentation as more deceptive news claimed the lion’s brother was also killed by a hunter in the park.

But the lion *was not* killed, was not the cat’s brother and, therefore, *was not killed by a hunter in the park*. Other false reports claimed one of the cat’s cubs had been killed, but as Jackson noted, it “was not likely to have been Cecil’s—and it still survives today.” Equally important, the lion quota was extremely low and scientifically based and, in light of hunters’ dollars, local communities and hunting operators had the incentive to shepherd lions as potential trophies instead of as livestock-eating vermin. In fact, landowners adjoining the park had removed the livestock fences and eliminated their cattle to let the lions expand and become more valuable trophies. The result: The park lion population increased from 300 to 400 lions to 800—with a growing resident population outside park boundaries at the time that lion was taken. Yet one more success story animal welfare extremists conceal to keep focus on a single animal instead of on a species’ overall health.

This tactic was best exemplified on May 4, 2016, as Intelligence Squared U.S. (IQ2US) hosted a [live debate and podcast titled “Hunters Conserve Wildlife”](#) in New York City. Representing hunter-conservationists worldwide and arguing for the motion were [NRAHLE.org](#) contributor Catherine Semcer, COO of [Humanitarian Operations Protecting Elephants](#) (HOPE), and Anthony Licada, editor-in-chief of [Field and Stream](#). Representing anti-hunters were kingpin animal rights extremists Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of HSUS, and Adam Roberts, CEO of [Born Free USA](#).

The debate was framed using the widely publicized 2014 [Dallas Safari Club](#) auction of an endangered black rhinoceros tag from the Namibian government that sold for \$350,000 with all proceeds handed to Namibia for black rhino conservation. So is hunting conservation?

Pacelle and Roberts were off, keeping the audience focused on the hype over that one rhino despite that part of Namibia's rhino management involves targeting and removing territorial, aggressive, post-breeding bulls that will kill other rhinos and that this rhino bull was slated to be culled—a fact extremists never mentioned while issuing death threats against the hunter and his family.

Semcer repeatedly trounced them for being disingenuous and for tapping into audience emotions while passing off poaching as hunting and market hunters as sportsmen. With the NYC-based audience stacked in the extremists' favor, a man in the front row interjected that he knew "Cecil" and that "there were 13 other lions killed illegally that were wearing collars in Hwange National Park." At that point, even the moderator said, "But this team is not arguing for the illegal killing of animals." Thank you. [Poaching is not hunting](#)—but it may be hunting's single greatest threat.

Countering false statements on the decline in lion populations, Semcer, whose organization works with governments and organizations to fight poaching in Africa, explained, "We are the people who hunt *legally*. We pay into the system. We purchase licenses. We do boots-on-the-ground conservation projects. The cause of lion decline is not sportsmen—and you know this. The cause is herdsman killing lions because they are competing with their livestock. That is in every single document, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to the IUCN," referring to the [April 2016 IUCN \(International Union for Conservation of Nature\) Briefing Paper](#) prepared for the European Union advising it to ensure decisions restricting or ending trophy hunting are based on an analysis of trophy hunting's critical role in affected communities and are made only if alternatives can deliver equal or greater conservation incentives. *(With anti-hunters hijacking the term "trophy hunting," please define it for non-hunters. It is the sustainable pursuit of a game animal—often a mature male beyond breeding age—based on superior body, horn or antler size. Hunting for antlers and meat are not mutually exclusive, and it is generally unlawful to abandon edible game meat.)*

During the 2017 [NRA Annual Meetings](#), my husband Phil and I presented a seminar on why hunting matters. We showed scenes from the [Professional Hunters' Association of South Africa's](#) (PHASA) recent documentary, "[A Conservationist's Cry](#)," tracking countries like Kenya where hunting is banned and where wildlife has all but disappeared—yet we aren't telling the world about the miserable failure Kenya's policy has been. "Many well-meaning supporters of wildlife are unaware they

are standing against the well being of the wildlife they love," the film notes. "If left unchecked, unmanaged and unprotected, it will be the tribal people of Africa who decide the fate of wildlife, all of which will be used to fill the stomachs and pockets of people until none is left."

For another example, consider Botswana where ungulate species suffer from competition with too many endangered elephants, thanks to shutting down elephant hunting, which bans harvesting the crop. Where is the anti-hunting [Center for Biological Diversity](#) on this one? Elephant biologists say Botswana has 180,000 elephants but, being 80 percent desert, it can support only 20,000 to 30,000 people. What biologist will open his mouth about this when trying to raise money from uninformed Americans for his next research project? Of course, without hunters' anti-poaching-unit funding, criminals have no fear of being spotted considering hunting operators are long gone. Instead, well-intentioned donors are in fear that some African species are nearly extinct.

The rest of the Western world is busy posting Facebook pics of their latest organic gastropub meal, thinking they launched the organic movement, unaware their vitriol and money aren't touching the problem. Why? Because too much money is being spent not to fix it. Instead, they're busy naming wildlife and describing unrealistic scenarios where every lion, rhino, elephant and other creature will die if, as PH Cliff Walker says, anti-hunting, animal welfare extremists continue "saving wildlife to death."

IUCN CASE STUDIES: ON THE GROUND VS. FROM ON HIGH

The governments of countries such as Namibia know that solutions point to hunting revenue. In March 2016 its government announced it was putting a ban on all hunting bans, kicking off the motion by auctioning [three black rhino tags](#). Namibia has auctioned off at least one black rhino tag per year since 2012. One case study from the [2016 IUCN report](#) showed that if trophy hunting revenues were lost, most Namibian conservancies could not cover operating costs. Revenues on conservancies totaled nearly \$1.7 million (U.S.) in 2013: Five [CITES-listed species](#)—elephant, common hippopotamus, Hartmann's mountain zebra, lion and leopard—accounted for 63 percent. For example, for every elephant harvested, a community receives about \$20,000 (U.S.)—and 3,000 kg of meat.

Another IUCN case study addressed private wild lands in Zimbabwe where trophy hunting is the primary revenue source and where photographic tourism has not proved a viable alternative. The [Savé Valley Conservancy](#) (SVC) was created in the 1990s by livestock ranch-

ers who had eliminated all elephants, rhinos, buffalo and lions and then realized wildlife management was a better use of the land. Today SVC has 1,500 African elephants, 117 black rhinos, 43 white rhinos, 280 lions and several packs of the endangered African wild dog, one of numerous non-hunted species worldwide that are threatened or endangered and conserved through hunting revenue. (A U.S. example is the recently delisted grizzly bear population of the [Yellowstone National Park](#) region that benefitted, in part, from bighorn-sheep hunting revenue used to retire livestock-grazing land to reduce bear-livestock conflicts.) Hunting on the SVC's Sango Ranch, for example, yields \$600,000 annually and employs 120 permanent workers supporting 1,000-plus family members. The [Bubye Valley Conservancy](#) (BVC) today has roughly 500 lions, 700 African elephants, 5,000 Cape buffalo, 79 white rhinos and, at 202, Africa's third largest black rhino population. Trophy fees in 2015 generated approximately \$1.4 million. The BVC employs 400 people and invests \$200,000 annually in community development.

Impressed? Then applaud hunters who pay to manage the world's renewable wildlife resources. Citing conservation success stories all around where hunting is permitted, the [IUCN report](#) repeatedly states that legal, regulated trophy hunting benefits wildlife and the livelihoods and wellbeing of indigenous and local communities living with it. But again, all wildlife must be managed and every species suffers the second regulated hunting shuts down. Which brings us back to ... the African lion. Let's revisit the [Bubye Valley Conservancy](#).

In February 2016, [NRAHLF.org](#) reported the BVC needed help [addressing lion overpopulation](#). In what many call the "Cecil effect," the drop in the number of big-game hunters visiting Zimbabwe meant the BVC would have to cull at least 200 of its 500 giant cats. They were doing what lions do: munching the antelope, cheetah, leopard, giraffe and wild dogs. But after its driest summer on record, tall grasses also were decimated, exposing prey. The BVC hoped other facilities could take some lions, but where could lions go and not be in conflict with humans or existing prides? The BVC sustains its wildlife populations through hunting revenue, but with U.S. government [restrictions on lion importation](#), lion-hunter numbers are dwindling.

FORGET ME ... NOT

So are some hunting success stories too successful—as in Zimbabwe's BVC, which has *too many lions*? You never heard that story? Or any others from that IUCN report? That's because memory can be tricky when extremists distort it—if mainstream media lets you hear it at all. I recall a [December 2014 Chicago Tribune ar-](#)

[ticle](#) in which neuropsychologist Daniel Reisberg, who teaches at Reed College in Portland, Ore., advised, "The more you reinforce the memory, the longer it will be etched in your brain *accurately*." Consider that last word. Had HSUS and PETA leadership read this same article, confirming their best way to advance their cause was to keep presenting lies as truth?

You also may have missed the big news out of Johannesburg, South Africa, following [CoP17—the 17th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\) in October 2016](#)—confirming "hunting is conservation." While CoP17 was expected to be an uphill battle for global sustainable-use proponents, the representatives from 182 nations, each with its own scientists in tow, embraced the value of hunting. As for what else you haven't heard, perhaps it was facts from other [NRAHLF.org](#) stories on how [hunting is positive therapy for America's military warriors](#), [how hunters prop up America's rural economies](#), or how the state of Colorado's ["Hug a Hunter" ad campaign thanks hunters as the driving force of conservation](#). What about how [Florida needs hunters to trim python populations](#) or how [Mozambique needs its man-eating crocodile populations to be hunted](#) with 300-plus human attacks a year as Australia pushes for hunters to [assist with its own croc problem](#) in national parks? I think not—or else the artis would not be so well funded.

And you likely didn't hear about these two: the [U.S. federal report](#) touting hunters—not hired sharpshooters—as ideal citizen wildlife managers for national park game-culling operations, a common-sense strategy the NRA and SCI have pushed for years; or the research from [Responsive Management](#) (RM) on [hunters' role in creating our National Wildlife Refuges](#), *which annually attract 48 million visitors and generate in excess of \$2.4 billion for local economies and nearly 35,000 U.S. jobs*. As of 2015, refuges were home to more than 380 of the nation's 1,311 endangered or threatened species with our funding working for game and non-game species alike. Because no wildlife conservation story is complete without a mention of [1937's Pittman-Robertson Act](#), sportsmen, did you hear we've generated more than \$10 billion for state fish and wildlife agencies to date?

If you didn't know any of the above, there's even less chance mainstream media is reporting on the [NRA Institute for Legislative Action's](#) (ILA) 24/7 legislative and political efforts to protect hunting and wildlife conservation. Haven't heard about ILA working for the adoption of hunter harassment laws and Right To Hunt and Fish Amendments in all 50 states? What about how

NRA-ILA worked tirelessly with [SCI](#), the [Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation](#) and other like-minded groups to get the [Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement \(SHARE\) Act](#) passed in the U.S. House last congress, providing enhanced hunter access to federal public lands while limiting punitive regulations promoted by "animal welfare" extremists. With the SHARE Act reemerging this congress, "There will be more resources available for public ranges, more hunter access to public lands, and more opportunities for Americans to enjoy the great outdoors," said NRA-ILA Executive Director Chris Cox. Other SHARE Act provisions permit law-abiding gun owners increased access to carry firearms on land managed by the [Army Corps of Engineers](#), protect the use of traditional ammunition and more comprehensively addresses the interstate transportation of firearms and ammunition for hunters and law-abiding gun owners. Visit [NRAILA.org](#) to search these NRA-ILA topics and more.

Was the media too busy reporting on lion hoopla in Zimbabwe? No, because they never did report on Quinn Swales, the Zimbabwean PH who was killed ... by a lion ... in the storied Hwange National Park a month after their "beloved." Swales was guiding park tourists on a "bush walk" when a lion charged. He got between it and the tourists, was mauled and died on the scene. (*I felt doubly sick as I wondered if Swales hesitated for even a millisecond to grab his rifle and shoot the lion because of the current uproar.*) Animal welfare extremists cared more about a legally hunted lion than about a human's tragic death. A few online comments fanned the "Cecil" flame. Others were said to be dismissive. So let it be known: Those who knew Swales say he dedicated his life to conserving wildlife and fighting poaching—and it had value. Swales' life was not only more valuable than that of the savage lion that killed him, but of any animal. On the flip side, as [reported by NRAHLF.org](#) and [NRAHUNTING.com](#), we have the HSUS mantra per one of its most radical commanders, Princeton professor Peter Singer: "The life of a newborn is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog or a chimpanzee." Such rhetoric is garbage, yet it plagues mainstream America as extremists appeal to the hearts and minds of our children.

As for who's Quinn Swales, after the death of the latest Zimbabwe lion, PH Cliff Walker said, "And who's the 10-year-old girl who was just killed here by another lion?" recounting how antis hide that wild animals are ... wild. "Nothing was said or done about it, yet the whole world knows Cecil. The irony: Zimbabweans asked, 'Who's Cecil?' and then came the explosion."

PULL YOUR WEIGHT

If we are to balance the needs of humans and wildlife in the 21st century, American hunters must be twice as vocal as the antis to be heard over their background noise. It is in their interests to keep the truth about hunting hidden from the Western hemisphere's good-hearted, unsuspecting public—the people who, unlike in many other parts of the world, are generally blessed with life's necessities—food, clean water, shelter, opportunities to earn a living—and want to give something back.

But who gives back more than hunters? Who does more to create the world's wildlife conservation and hunting-related humanitarian revenue stream—every time we buy a hunting license; or the state hires game wardens to set and enforce wildlife regulations or wildlife biologists to study wildlife diseases and launch conservation research; or we donate desperately-needed game meat to state-based Hunters for the Hungry programs or to communities in the world's most remote places where no one but hunters venture? As someone who is blessed to have hunted in 29 states and eight countries, including hunts for African plains and dangerous game, I thank God for my American freedom and have seen firsthand the life-and-death difference hunting revenue makes, which as the IUCN report attests, is ever critical in more rural areas and in indigenous communities struggling to sustain livelihoods.

Case in point: In June 2015, not two weeks before the lion story broke, my husband Phil and I were at the [Dinokeng Game Reserve](#) outside Pretoria, South Africa, when a nearby rhino was poached. Ironically, we were assisting [Theron African Safaris](#) to set up a hunting operation there specifically to fund an anti-poaching unit. As the first and maybe only free-ranging African Big Five residential game reserve next to an urban area, Dinokeng was struggling to protect its rhinos. Game scouts kept rhino locations a secret so word did not get out to poachers. For Dinokeng residents and photo tourism visitors, spotting the iconic rhino was the luck of the draw. Two days later, the scouts were on high alert. It was the night of the full moon when poachers could operate without spotlights. That evening [a rhino was poached on the private reserve adjacent to Dinokeng](#). Of course, you don't have to visit Africa to know of its poaching crisis, but we need to make people aware hunters are funding the bulk of efforts to stop it.

So yes, I take pride in knowing where hunters' dollars go. All those state and federal hunter-funded conservation and habitat restoration projects I saw growing up in my home state of Maryland and on my first out-of-state hunts—projects that also would be funded by extremist groups if they truly wanted to help wildlife—revealed

the big picture. And I knew the other outdoor recreationalists—the campers, backpackers and birdwatchers—also got to enjoy wildlife by riding on the backs of our conservation dollars. Do they and non-hunters know that [hunters and anglers amassed \\$1.1 billion for U.S. wildlife conservation in 2016 alone](#) or that hunters spend \$426 million annually in Africa based on the [recent study from market research firm Southwick Associates \(SA\)](#)? The report—“[The Economic Contributions of Hunting-Related Tourism in Eastern and Southern Africa](#)”—researched hunters’ total economic contributions between 2012 and 2014 in the top eight African hunting destinations: South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. The findings? American hunters led the charge with the total number of visiting hunters worldwide exceeding 18,000 accounting for 53,000-plus jobs. Once again, hunting is a driving force in wildlife conservation and in the growth of local economies.

I touted this right out of college. My non-hunting friends were saving for the beaches and ski slopes while I was saving for my next gun or bow hunting adventure and making payments on my NRA Endowment Life membership. They weren’t hunters but they understood why hunting was necessary—because I told them. And they understood why *American Hunter* magazine was on the coffee table next to the latest issues of *Elle* and *Vogue*.

Explaining who we are and what we do—and why we do it—pays off. Recently a non-hunting friend was checking out my taxidermy, pausing at my Florida gator skin. Aware of the state’s problem with nuisance gators

and how it is paying trappers to remove them, thanks to a [May article in the “Miami Herald,”](#) she said, “I might want to hunt with you sometime. I like alligator meat—and alligator handbags.” No doubt, a nice leather gator bag is being featured in the latest issue of *Vogue*.

Whether in America, Africa or anywhere else, management is necessary for every game species. Wildlife cannot manage itself, and science-based hunting—not emotion—remains the world’s No. 1 management tool. Fortunately, we American hunters hunt legally and ethically during hunting seasons carefully managed by professional wildlife officials and are up to the task.

Might Makes Right

Groups out to destroy hunting are ever in search of their next poster child to condemn and the next “cash cow” to bankroll their agenda. They will make impulsive, emotional responses center stage over science-based research, critical thinking and common sense. But we hunters now have immediate tools at our fingertips to fight back, thanks to the NRA’s recently launched NRA Hunting initiative. Visit [NRAHUNTING.com](#) for article material and on [NRATV.com/nra-hunting](#) to view and then share the campaign’s corresponding 60-second TV ads with

every “undecided” you know. Watch any one of these ads and it hits you: The clearest path to saving hunting is just to tell the truth.

Of course, for general news on the threats to hunting worldwide—and on how science-based conservation does not exist without hunters’ funding—visit [NRAHLE.org](#) and share the story links. But for the most powerful tool of all—one that, by the way, works not only for the NRA’s five million members but for every single all-American hunter, shooter and gun owner (not always

one in the same)—visit [NRAILA.org](#). For the record, if you’re wondering how I know firsthand that NRA-ILA has 19 full-time lobbyists working for us 24/7, it’s because I struggle to keep pace with them to report on their efforts on [NRAHLE.org](#) as they collectively lead the charge, working nonstop at the state and federal levels to protect hunters and hunting, pass pro-hunting legislation and leverage the grassroots efforts of millions of mainstream Americans. If there were no NRA or NRA-ILA, would we even be hitting the hunting trail this fall?