

THE PRE-BAN CERTIFICATE

There is one document required in every state in order to sell legal ivory but as it turns out we've never met a single person who has ever actually seen one.

This is what's called a pre-ban certificate and although every law governing the sale of ivory requires this piece of paper, very few people have ever even seen one or know what one is.

According to the International Coalition, called CITES, which is an international agreement between governments. If you sign a certain document agreeing to certain international standards you are considered a "party" to the convention and there are currently about 183 countries. Together they decided that in order to "legally" sell African ivory, meaning ivory that was killed prior to 1989 then the seller has to present a pre-ban certificate which is simply a certificate authenticating the elephant the ivory was taken from was killed legally or died of natural causes. And it isn't only CITES that requires this document but also the Endangered Species Act and it is written into state laws.

Hi everyone I'm Debbie Ethell, executive director of The KOTA Foundation for Elephants as well as a conservation research scientist.

So it would make sense that ivory appraisers such as Greg Brown would be used to seeing pre-ban certificates right?

DEBBIE: So this is the document required by law in order to sell ivory.

GREG: Correct.

DEBBIE: And how many of these have you seen?

GREG: I've never seen a single one.

DEBBIE: You've never seen a single one?

GREG: Never seen one.

DEBBIE: Really?

GREG: Right. No customer has ever brought a certificate with them with their ivory.

DEBBIE: Oh my goodness,

GREG: Yeah, in 20 years.

DEBBIE: WOW.

And that is the very definition of a massive loophole.

DEBBIE: So how often do people bring you ivory to appraise?

GREG: About once a week.

DEBBIE: If you've never seen a single preban certificate how would you know if one was forged?

GREG: I wouldn't.

So why would a pre-ban certificate even be required in the first place? Especially when no one we've ever met, professionals with literally years of experience, have never even seen one?

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