

ELEPHANT FRIENDLY TEA - AN EXAMPLE OF WILDLIFE SCIENCE-BASED COMMERCIALIZATION TO SAVE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

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In the U.S. alone, >84 billion servings of tea are consumed per year, totaling \$12.5 billion in annual sales. Almost none of these consumers realize that tea is a death crop helping to drive Asian elephants extinct. Building on our applied population ecology research and local outreach in the India-Bhutan region, we have: a) identified tea production practices that drive elephant mortality; b) identified specific actions to reverse those impacts; c) and incentivized those conservation-relevant tea farming practices through a novel “Elephant Friendly Tea” (EFT) Certification. Through our program tea estate owners who implement EFT actions receive a price premium for their tea, which is then sold under a Certified EFT logo; in turn, global tea consumers have a direct opportunity to support science-based elephant conservation with every cup of tea. We expect EFT to be game-changing for arresting the decline of Asian elephants because – unlike traditional conservation approaches – it both implements incentive-based conservation actions on and around the private agricultural lands where most elephants are killed, and it will create profits that we will fully invest into research and conservation actions across the elephant’s range. Critical partners to development of EFT include local villagers and tea professionals, the non-profit certification group Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network, and University of Montana (who will manage the “EFT Elephant Research and Conservation Fund” created by EFT sales). We believe this model has great potential to address seemingly intractable conservation problems in Montana by developing meaningful win-win wildlife friendly enterprises.

