

Conservationists flew 30 White rhinos to Rwanda in a huge operation to protect them

November 30, 2021 12:29 PM ET

[NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO](#) [JOE HERNANDEZ](#)



A tranquilized rhino is guided into crates at the andBeyond Phinda Private Game Reserve in South Africa.

Martin Meyer & African Parks

Conservationists flew 30 white rhinos from South Africa to Rwanda last week in what they say is the largest single rhino translocation ever.

The roughly 2,000-mile journey took the rhinos to their new home in Akagera National Park, where advocates hope the animals will be able to establish a new breeding stronghold and evade the rampant poaching that's put their species in danger.

"Introductions to safe, intact wild landscapes are vital for the future of vulnerable species like white rhino, which are under considerable human-induced pressures," Peter Fearnhead, CEO of the non-profit conservation organization African Parks, [said in a statement](#).



Locals celebrate the arrival of rhinos near Akagera National Park in Rwanda.

Gael Vande Weghe & African Parks

White rhinos are considered "near threatened" by the [World Wildlife Fund](#), which estimates there are about 18,000 of them in existence in protected areas and private game reserves. Officials say the decline in their population is largely attributable to poaching and the demand for rhino horns.

Each of the 30 rhinos that arrived in Rwanda on Saturday was fitted with a tracking transmitter for constant monitoring. Authorities have also deployed an anti-poaching canine unit and helicopter surveillance to protect the new arrivals.

A specialist veterinarian and others will monitor the group of ungulates daily as they settle into life at Akagera, where officials hope they will have a safer habitat.



White rhinos are introduced into Akagera National Park in Rwanda.

Gael Vande Weghe & African Parks

"This is an opportunity for Rwanda to substantially advance its contribution to rhino conservation, with Akagera poised to become a globally important sanctuary for black and now white rhinoceros," said Ariella Kageruka, the Rwanda Development Board's acting chief tourism officer. "This is timely for the conservation of these incredibly threatened species."

The rhinos came from the andBeyond Phinda Private Game Reserve in South Africa, which says it has been managing and growing its rhino population for more than 30 years.

The translocation was undertaken by African Parks, the Rwanda Development Board and funded by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.