PRESS RELEASE

Thailand Launches Elite Wildlife Ranger Team

Eastern Thailand (September 5, 2013) – Thailand’s Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) launched an elite environmental enforcement unit this week that is currently undergoing specialized training to tackle wildlife poachers and traffickers nationwide. The special unit, called "King Tigers", was developed and is being trained by DNP in collaboration with the United States-sponsored "ARREST" Program.

The new special unit is authorized to investigate and suppress nature crimes throughout Thailand's forests and waterways. Unit members were hand-selected after undergoing intense mental and physical endurance tests. The unit is now undergoing specialized training for 8 weeks in remote jungle and marine habitats by instructors from Thailand and the ARREST Program, which is coordinated by Freeland and sponsored by the United States Government.

This training program, called "PROTECT", will fill a significant void in the response capacity of Thai enforcement personnel to address immediate threats to its outstanding natural heritage and interdict wildlife trafficking. Wildlife crime in both Thailand’s terrestrial and
marine areas, such as Siamese rosewood poaching and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing can quickly overwhelm enforcement personnel in protected areas limited in both numbers and training. Facing increasingly violent criminals, 40 rangers have lost their lives and 49 have been injured, including 23 seriously injured, in the line of duty in Thailand’s protected areas in the past four years alone.

Thailand is one of the most biologically diverse countries in Southeast Asia with approximately eight to ten percent of the world’s plant and animal species. However, many of these species are severely imperiled by poaching and the multi-billion dollar international illegal wildlife trade. The scale and violence associated with these and other transnational environmental crimes highlight the critical need for law enforcement training to promote increased natural resource governance and security in Asia.

Athapol Charoenchuns, Director of the DNP’s Protection and Suppression Division which the new team will fall under, said, “I believe by the end of this PROTECT training supported by FREELAND we will have an elite unit with highly-increased physical and mental capacity to combat wildlife crime on both land and water. With the additional specialized skills learned during the course, including investigation and ambush techniques, the risks involved for rangers will decrease and ultimately, the training will save lives.”

U.S. Government support comes from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Ali Jalili, the Director of INL’s regional office at the US Embassy in Thailand added, “This new unit and this training program mean that Thailand’s, the region’s, and the world’s biodiversity will be safer from those who would destroy it. We are proud to be partners with Freeland and the Thai government on this important initiative.”

ARREST stands for Asia’s Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking and is sponsored by USAID and implemented by Freeland and other organizations in Asia. PROTECT is a counter-poaching and habitat protection training program designed by Freeland.
Note to Editors:

FREELAND is an international organization dedicated to a world free of wildlife trafficking and human slavery. FREELAND works throughout Asia, raising public awareness and building local capacity to protect critical ecosystems, wildlife and vulnerable people. FREELAND is the lead implementing partner of ARREST (Asia’s Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking), a program sponsored by the United States Government in partnership with ASEAN and over 50 governmental and non-governmental organizations.

For more information, visit FREELAND.org also; follow FREELAND on twitter @FREELANDpeople or Facebook.com/FREELANDFoundation

ARREST (Asia’s Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking) is the U.S. Government’s largest counter wildlife trafficking program and addresses the Presidential Executive Order to combat illicit wildlife trade. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Freeland, ARREST fights wildlife trafficking in Asia in three ways: reducing consumer demand; strengthening law enforcement; and enhancing regional cooperation and anti-trafficking networks such as the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN). By uniting the dedicated efforts of the member states of ASEAN, China and South Asia, NGOs, and private sector organizations, ARREST helps Asia respond to the challenge of protecting the region’s biodiversity.

For more information, visit FREELAND.org/ARREST and follow on twitter @ARRESTprogram or Facebook.com/ArrestProgram

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