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**Fiscal Year 2021 Testimony of Tom Cors, Director of Lands, U.S. Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy
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House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs
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The Nature Conservancy (TNC) thanks the Committee for its strong support of global biodiversity conservation investments. With over 60 years of experience in pioneering conservation in coordination and cooperation with private landowners, businesses, and federal, state, local, and tribal governments across the United States, TNC implements on-the-ground conservation in 79 countries around the world. As the world's largest conservation organization with over one million members, we see firsthand the challenges and opportunities in the developing world and to people who call those places home. We strive for conservation approaches that benefit both people and nature.

The U.S. government's leadership in biodiversity conservation occupies a special place in U.S. foreign policy. Foreign assistance has been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy for more than sixty years. Support for such assistance draws upon many sources, including the innate generosity of the American people in the face of acute needs in countries with far fewer resources than ours. Foreign assistance directed to biodiversity and climate change programs also helps address many challenges to natural resource management, contributes to local livelihoods and advances U.S. national security interests. But it also reflects a consensus that such assistance – including the conservation of natural resources – is in our own national interest.

The natural world is in such steep decline that we are at risk of destabilizing the very life-support systems we depend on for our own survival. According to the most recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), three-quarters of land and two-thirds of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions. We have lost half of the world's forests, half of coral reefs, 70% of wetlands and dammed two thirds of the world's main rivers. Wildlife populations have on average declined by 60% since 1970 and there is the potential for our actions to cause the loss of 1 million species. This massive loss of nature – species and ecosystems on land and in the oceans – threatens not only direct human health and wellbeing, for example through decline in food production and freshwater availability. The ecological crisis also threatens the stability of the entire planet, by further destabilizing the climate on Earth.

In the face of these crises affecting nature and people, doubling down on U.S. leadership and investment through targeted foreign assistance, could not be more paramount. The future well-

being of the U.S., in part, depends on making the world more stable, safe, and secure. By investing in proven international conservation programs that help less-developed countries better manage their natural resources and protect their forests, fisheries, and wildlife from bad actors and natural disasters, the U.S. protects its own national and economic security.

The following programs exemplify the critical role international conservation efforts play in U.S. foreign policy. Promoting “natural security” boosts America’s national security. As such, we respectfully request the Congress to continue its investments in global biodiversity conservation through our natural resource agencies of the U.S. government; and specifically, through the following foreign assistance mechanisms in Fiscal Year 2021:

USAID Biodiversity Conservation Program. Most U.S. foreign assistance for on-the-ground conservation is delivered through USAID and its robust portfolio of conservation programs. USAID is working with communities, non-governmental organizations, and governments to develop natural resource policies and management practices that conserve biodiversity and sustain local livelihoods. These programs help protect some of the largest, most at-risk natural landscapes and the livelihoods of millions of people who directly depend on natural resources for their survival and economic growth. For example, the USAID-funded and TNC implemented Endangered Ecosystems of Northern Tanzania (EENT) program is working to improve coordination, communication, and collaboration between organizations, government, and communities towards a joint vision of a resilient, healthy, and connected rangelands across the Northern Tanzania landscape. To date the project has supported improved natural resource management of over 619,000 hectares of biologically significant areas and engaged 9,300 community leaders in training. *We request Congress to fund the USAID Biodiversity Conservation Program at \$330 million, to meet critical development and administrative priorities such as increasing community resilience and reducing resource competition and conflict across Africa, and improving natural resource management and decreasing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Indo Pacific region.*

USAID Sustainable Landscapes. Tropical forests continue to be one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world, but efforts funded in part by Congress are advancing conservation in these areas. REDD+ (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks) continues to evolve as a policy framework that incentivizes developing forest countries to curb deforestation while addressing rural poverty, good governance, land tenure issues, and securing emissions reductions. The USAID Sustainable Landscapes Program supports efforts to halt deforestation and forest degradation, promote sustainable and responsible forestry practices, and prevent illegal logging in the world’s largest, most biologically diverse forests, including in the Amazon, Central Africa’s Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia. Through this program, the U.S. has supported efforts through multilateral funds such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the Forest Investment Program to scale up this framework. *We request that in FY21, the USAID Sustainable Landscapes Program be funded at \$140 million.*

Global Environment Facility (GEF). With over 4,700 projects in 170 countries, the GEF, an independent international financial institution, unites donor and recipient countries with U.S. corporations and NGOs by providing grants to support natural capital and improve management

of natural resources. The GEF also has a blended finance window that provides non-grant financial resources and engages the private sector to promote innovative business models to combat global environmental degradation. America's investment in the GEF also yields a very high rate of return. For every dollar the U.S. invests in the GEF, it generates another \$40 from other countries and partners. The GEF has supported the improved cooperation and governance of one-third of the world's large marine ecosystems. For example, its Common Oceans program – working with over 60 public and private sector partners to address overfishing, bycatch and pollution in international waters achieved a reduction in the number of major tuna stocks experiencing overfishing from 13 to five and reduced the mortality rate of dolphins, sea turtles and other marine mammals caught by Pakistani gillnet fisheries in the northern Arabian sea by 98 percent. The GEF support has also been critical to placing 12 percent of the world's terrestrial area under protection, resulting in 3,300 protected areas spanning 2.1 billion acres containing at least 700 globally threatened species. The GEF has invested over \$1 billion to address land degradation, which affects over 3.2 billion people, especially rural communities, smallholder farmers, and the very poor in the drylands of Africa and Asia. Its Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Program promotes sustainable land management to increase food security for smallholders and communities that depend on farming for their livelihoods. *We request \$139.5 million in FY21, of which \$136.5 million be earmarked exclusively for the third installment of the U.S. contribution to the seventh replenishment of the Global Environment Facility.*

Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA). Since first enacted in 1998, the TFCA has offered eligible countries the opportunity to reduce their official concessional debt owed to the U.S. government while generating funds locally to conserve biological diversity and protect ecologically and economically vital forest ecosystems. In 2019, Congress expanded the authorities of TFCA, a highly successful “debt-for-nature” program, which has produced tremendous returns on investment over the last two decades. *In addition to seeking a longer-term reauthorization for this program, we request \$20 million for the Tropical Forest Conservation Act.*

Science, Finance and International Cooperation. Two United Nations programs—the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—have received funding from the United States for years. The IPCC, for example, has received broad bipartisan support for providing high-integrity science on climate change since the panel's creation in 1988. Similarly, the UNFCCC has been the primary space for policymakers to mount an international effort to tackle these risks. The United States has won plaudits worldwide for leading on climate action. U.S. foreign assistance also leverages substantial private investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies. Continued funding of a modest budget line will signal that America continues to place an importance on climate science and wants a place at the table in negotiations.

Green Climate Fund (GCF). The Green Climate Fund is an independent multilateral trust fund that operates outside of the United Nations and is designed to foster low-emission and resilient development in the developing world. The U.S. made a signed commitment of \$3 billion over four years (2014-2018) to the fund, of which \$1 billion has been paid. If the US does not fulfill its commitment to the GCF, it risks falling to the 5th largest contributor among countries, including losing its seat on the GCF Board. The Global Climate Change Initiative (GCCII) is the

current funding mechanism for the GCF. GCCI helps countries both mitigate and adapt to climate change through important multilateral and bilateral engagement with major and emerging economies. We urge the Congress to support the GCCI, including funding for the GCF. We request a \$750 million contribution in FY21 towards the Green Climate Fund to demonstrate clear U.S. commitment and incentivize developing countries to further reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Through collaboration with the U.S. government, TNC is supporting work which empowers host country governments to safeguard natural resources, co-develop and deploy nature-based solutions to improve the resilience of people and critical ecosystems on which all life depends. Our projects help to strengthen local capacity, leverage private sector partners, and empower women and youth in the improved economic development of their communities. While a vast majority of these projects are administered directly through federal agencies furthering U.S. foreign policy and assistance goals, TNC also supports strengthening funding at U.S. natural resources agencies such as at the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration by supporting international programs and partnerships that further our country's foreign policy goals.

We stand ready to partner with and support the U.S. government to achieve its foreign assistance goals for the wellbeing of our planet and its people. We urge you to continue investing in our common security through our formidable foreign assistance programs.