

**Public Witness Testimony of
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World Wildlife Fund
Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
April 12, 2013**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Moran and Members of the Subcommittee, I submit this testimony on behalf of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to request your support for a number of important conservation programs within the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). WWF is the largest private conservation organization working internationally to protect wildlife and wildlife habitats. WWF currently sponsors conservation programs in more than 100 countries with the support of 1.2 million members in the United States and more than 5 million members worldwide. We respectfully request that the Subcommittee fund the following programs at the following levels:

- US Fish and Wildlife Service Office of International Affairs at the Administration's request of \$13.5 million
- US Fish and Wildlife Service Multinational Species Conservation Funds at the Administration's request of \$9.8 million
- US Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement at the Administration's request of \$68.3 million, including \$4.2 million for enforcement of the Lacey Act
- We also ask you to support the President's America's Great Outdoors initiative and the Administration's proposal to permanently authorize funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million by FY 2015

One of my organization's top priorities, and the one I would like to focus on in my testimony, is to support efforts to curtail the global illegal trade in wildlife and other living natural resources, including timber and fish. Illicit wildlife trafficking alone is worth \$10-20 billion per year and ranked among the top five most lucrative criminal activities worldwide. It is a serious crime with clear links to transnational organized criminal organizations and other criminal activities, such as arms and drug trafficking. Large-scale illegal trade in wildlife, driving largely by soaring demand in Asia for wildlife products, has sparked a poaching crisis that is pushing some of our most iconic species towards extinction, including elephants, tigers and rhinos. This crisis is also having a devastating impact on local communities, regional security and economic growth in the developing world, including in countries of strategic importance to the United States.

African wildlife, in particular, is under siege. Last year alone, roughly 30,000 elephants were killed illegally throughout Africa, with Central African countries being hit the hardest. In the past ten years, the number of forest elephants in Central Africa has dropped by 62%, putting the species on the path to extinction in the near future. In South Africa, the number of rhinos lost to poaching jumped 5000% in 5 years, with a record 668 killed for their horns in 2012. As few as 3200 tigers remain in the wild in all of Asia, due in large part to poachers killing the animals for their skins, bones and other body parts. Several of the agencies that this subcommittee helps to fund play key roles in helping to combat these large-scale criminal activities, which rob developing countries of much needed resources, harm American businesses by flooding global markets with cheap illegal products, and threaten U.S. security interests because of their role in breeding corruption and their helping to finance organized crime, armed insurgencies and even terrorism.

USFWS Office of International Affairs

The USFWS Office of International Affairs contains the agency's **Wildlife Without Borders (WWB)** and **International Wildlife Trade (IWT)** programs, which provide critical support to on-the-ground species conservation programs. The WWB Regional program supports species and habitat conservation in priority regions, including Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Mexico, through capacity building, outreach, education and training. This includes training African wildlife professionals to combat the bushmeat trade and working to bolster wildlife laws and increase enforcement capacity in African countries. The WWB Global program targets cross-cutting, global threats to wildlife, support signature initiatives to maximize long-term impact, and address declines of critically endangered species, such as amphibians. It also fulfills USFWS mandates to support U.S. leadership through wildlife statutes and international treaties, such as NAFTA, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). From 2007 to 2011, the WWB Regional and Global Programs supported more than 800 conservation projects, awarded over \$16 million in grants and leveraged an additional \$26 million in matching funds to provide education, training and outreach in support of wildlife conservation. IWT works to prevent illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products, which not only threatens vulnerable wildlife populations but also transmits diseases and invasive species, which negatively impact public health and economic productivity in the U.S. – one of the largest importers and exporters of wildlife products. IWT ensures trade is legal and does not harm species in the wild while implementing scientific and management requirements of laws and treaties for traded species and issuing 15,000-20,000 permits per year. We recommend \$13.5 million for the Office of International Affairs, as requested in the Administration's FY14 budget request.

USFWS Multinational Species Conservation Funds

Through the Multinational Species Conservation Funds (MSCF), the United States supplements the efforts of developing countries struggling to balance the needs of their human populations and endemic wildlife. These modest federal programs, administered by the USFWS, make targeted investments in conservation of several global priority species. In 1989, Congress passed the African Elephant Conservation Act authorizing a dedicated fund in response to the threat posed to that species by rampant ivory poaching. Four more Funds have since been authorized to support the conservation of Asian elephants, great apes, marine turtles, and tigers and rhinos. Each of the funds is authorized at \$5 million, with the exception of the Rhino-Tiger Conservation Fund, which was intended as a double fund to address both sets of species, and is therefore authorized at \$10 million. Appropriated funds for the programs have remained roughly 30% or less of the authorized level.

MSCF programs have played a critical role in saving wild populations of these species by controlling poaching, reducing human-wildlife conflict and protecting essential habitat. Rhino-Tiger Conservation Fund (RTCF) support to World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and local partners for anti-poaching, habitat restoration and rhino monitoring in Nepal helped to ensure that no rhinos were poached in that country in 2011, in spite of rising demand for rhino horn on Asian black markets and a sharp increase in the number of rhinos killed in South Africa that same year. RTCF funding is also supporting the creation and expansion of tiger reserves and protected areas in Malaysia, India and Thailand, anti-poaching and enforcement efforts in Sumatra, and research, monitoring and capacity building in countries such as Nepal, where WWF helped conduct the first ever nation-wide assessment of tiger populations, distribution and prey base in 2009.

The African Elephant Conservation Fund (AfECF) is supporting improved protected area enforcement in several African countries, including hiring and training of local “ecoguards” to protect populations of elephants and other threatened wildlife. In Cameroon’s Campo Ma’an National Park, the AfECF supported a large-scale anti-poaching operation involving village and forest patrols, soldiers and game guards that flushed out four suspected poachers, including two notorious elephant poachers, and resulted in the seizure of 450 lbs of bushmeat. The Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (AsECF) has supported improved wildlife law enforcement, established elephant population monitoring systems, and helped to reduce conflicts between humans and elephants. On the Indonesian island of Sumatra, AsECF support to World Wildlife Fund has helped to establish “Flying Squads” – teams of rangers equipped with noise and light-making devices and trained elephants that drive wild elephants back into the forest whenever they threaten to enter villages. The Squads have reduced losses suffered by local communities and prevented retaliatory killings. In 2009, they helped reduce elephant mortality in the Riau region by 27 percent in 2009 compared to the previous four years.

Since 2008, the Great Ape Conservation Fund (GACF) has been supporting conservation efforts in Virunga National Park – Africa’s oldest national park (established in 1925) which contains some of the richest biodiversity of any protected area on the continent and one of the largest populations of endangered mountain gorilla. Over the past five years, GACF funding has helped to improve law enforcement and training for park rangers, develop alternative fuel sources to reduce the destructive practice of charcoal creation from the park’s forests, increase aerial surveillance capacity, and grow the park’s tourist revenue through a chimpanzee habituation and tourism project that generated nearly \$1 million in 2011 alone. In the Solomon Islands of the Pacific, the Marine Turtle Conservation Fund has supported WWF conservation activities on important nesting beaches for endangered sea turtles, including turtle tagging, DNA sampling, nesting beach cleanups, hatchery construction, workshops on community-based monitoring, and active monitoring of nests during the turtles’ nesting seasons. Hatchling success has grown each year since the program began.

Not only have these programs proven remarkably successful; they have also consistently generated enormous constituent interest and strong bipartisan support in Congress. The MSCF has awarded over 2,200 grants to over 265 organizations for conservation projects in over 75 countries, and these small grants consistently leverage between 2 to 4 times as much in matching funds from public and private partners. From 1990 to 2011, Congress appropriated a total of \$88 million for MSCF grant programs, which generated over \$200 million in matching and in-kind contributions. Administrative costs for the program are low, and 97% of the appropriated funds are distributed through grants. By conserving iconic species, these programs help sustain large areas of habitat home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna. By working with local communities and improving livelihoods, they build capacity and support for conservation in the developing world, contribute to economic growth and stability, and support U.S. interests in strategically important regions of the globe. The U.S. government has been a consistent leader in international species conservation, and the modest funding for these programs is more needed than ever in the face of the worst poaching crisis we have seen in over two decades. We recommend \$9.8 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Funds, as requested in the Administration’s FY14 budget request.

USFWS Office of Law Enforcement

The USFWS Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) investigates wildlife crimes, enforces regulation of wildlife trade, helps citizens comply with the law, and works with other international and U.S. government entities to carry out its mission. OLE's 143 wildlife inspectors are the front line of defense in nearly 40 designated and non-designated ports of entry around the country including in Alaska, California, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Montana, Tennessee, Texas and Washington. In FY11, they processed about 179,000 declared shipments of wildlife and wildlife products worth more than \$2.8 billion. OLE's 219 special agents are expert investigators that break up smuggling rings, stop commercial exploitation of protected U.S. species, and work with states to protect U.S. game species from poaching that steals both state income and hunting and fishing opportunities. In FY11, OLE special agents investigated more than 13,000 cases. OLE also runs the Clark R. Bavin National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon, which is the only lab in the world dedicated to solving wildlife crimes – a real life “Wildlife CSI.” OLE is playing a crucial role in tackling the illegal trade in endangered species, including elephants and rhinos. “Operation Crash” is a nationwide, multi-agency effort led by USFWS OLE to investigate and prosecute those involved in the black market trade of endangered rhinoceros horns. So far, the operation has resulted in ten arrests and nine convictions following the seizures of dozens of rhino horns and millions of dollars in assets. In spite of successes such as this one, OLE is severely underfunded to meet the rapidly growing challenges it faces, including the need to place agents at key posts around the world to assist in shutting down global wildlife smuggling rings. USFWS OLE is also responsible for enforcement of the Lacey Act, including its expansion to cover plants and plant products. The agency has yet to receive funding to carry out this additional mandate, however. Part of what makes the Lacey Act effective is the deterrent effect it has on bad operators when they see the real risk of being prosecuted or having illegal goods seized, and periodic public enforcement cases are critical to making the law work. WWF recommends \$68.3 million for the USFWS Office of Law Enforcement, including \$4.2 million for Lacey Act enforcement, as requested in the Administration's FY14 budget request.

America's Great Outdoors

WWF also recommends support for the President's America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative, which supports Federal, State, and Tribal conservation efforts and fosters interagency collaboration for conservation. We are highly supportive of AGO programs that foster partnerships between public land managers and private landowners working towards conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat – particularly the grasslands and wetlands of the Northern Great Plains and the resident and migratory species that depend on a healthy prairie ecosystem. We also recommend that the Subcommittee support President Obama's proposal to permanently authorize funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million by FY 2015. Dedicated funding for LWCF will provide the stability public land managers need to plan for long-term and strategic investments in our shared natural resources to support wildlife, outdoor recreation and the outdoor economy.

We hope the Subcommittee will consider our requests above alongside the important conservation issues that these agencies are working to address and their track record of success in doing so – in many cases with limited resources. We respectfully ask the Subcommittee to fund these programs at the levels outlined above. Thank you for your consideration.