

Testimony of John F. Calvelli
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Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
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Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on FY15 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. My name is John Calvelli, the Executive Vice President of Public Affairs at the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). WCS was founded with the help of Theodore Roosevelt in 1895 with the mission of saving wildlife and wild places worldwide. Today, WCS manages the largest network of urban wildlife parks in the United States led by our flagship, the Bronx Zoo. Globally, WCS works to protect 25 percent of the world's biodiversity and address four of the biggest issues facing wildlife and wild places: climate change; natural resource exploitation; the connection between wildlife health and human health; and the sustainable development of human livelihoods. While taking on these issues, we manage more than 200 million acres of protected lands around the world, employing more than 4,000 staff including 200 Ph.D. scientists and 100 veterinarians.

The American conservation tradition is based on promoting sustainable use of our natural resources in order to preserve the world's species and environment for future generations. In recognition of the current fiscal constraints, it is important to note that effective natural resources management and conservation has indirect economic benefits, including contributing to local economies through tourism and other means.

Domestically, the story of the American bison is an excellent example of how long-term conservation and management of a natural resource can have a very positive economic impact. Brought to the edge of extinction at the end of the 19th century, a few bison were saved, mostly through the actions of private ranchers. Conservationists, led by Roosevelt and William Hornaday, brought some of the few remaining bison to the Bronx Zoo to breed the animals for eventual reintroduction. Within 2 years, 15 bison bred in captivity at the Zoo were returned to their natural habitat under Federal control in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Congressman Cole's district in Oklahoma, the very first wildlife refuge in the United States. This is the first known instance of a nearly-extinct mammal being successfully reestablished.

Today, more than 20,000 bison are in Federally-managed herds and serve as major tourist attractions at Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and other jewels of the National Park system. States are also successfully managing herds, with the Henry Mountains herd in Congressman Stewart's district being particularly notable because, in addition to being a tourist attraction, it generates revenues through hunting concessions. And in every state in the country, private producers manage 200,000 bison, sustaining thousands of jobs and generating more than \$280 million in revenue. Clearly, the rescue, reestablishment and conservation of bison is a great success, both environmentally and economically.

Internationally, by supporting conservation, the US is increasing capacity and governance in developing nations and improving our own national security as a result. And these efforts are absolutely critical, as we have reached a crisis with regard to the trafficking of wildlife. US government estimates compiled by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) last summer show that illegal trade in endangered wildlife products, including elephant ivory, rhino horns, and

turtle shells, is worth at least an estimated \$7 to \$10 billion annually. When the trade in illegal logging, plants and fisheries are also included, CRS states that some estimates exceed \$100 billion, which would place the illegal wildlife trade among the 10 largest criminal activities worldwide. Because of the lucrative nature of this industry, evidence is showing increasingly that transnational criminal organizations and terrorist groups that are involved in other major trafficking operations – drugs, humans and weapons – are engaged in wildlife trafficking as well.

On the ground in Africa and elsewhere, WCS scientists are seeing, first-hand, the devastating impact poaching is having on elephants, rhinos, tigers, and other iconic species. In 2012 alone, we estimate that 35,000 African elephants were killed for their ivory – that is an average of 96 elephants per day or one killed every 15 minutes. The subspecies of African forest elephants has seen a decline of 65 percent since 2002, dwindling to less than 80,000 today. Continued poaching at these rates may mean the extinction of forest elephants within a decade. Action must be taken now, so that we do not end up where we were with bison a hundred years ago. Although that story continues to be a happy one, there is no guarantee that story of the elephant will not, ultimately, be a tragedy.

The Federal government recently announced the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking (National Strategy), which is designed to provide a framework for a whole-of-government approach to addressing wildlife trafficking. Several programs within this bill form the basis upon which that strategy is built. This testimony will touch on several of those programs, beginning with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which plays a key role in the National Strategy and US antitrafficking efforts.

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF): Global priority species – such as tigers, rhinos, African and Asian elephants, great apes, and marine turtles – face constant danger from poaching, habitat loss and other serious concerns. MSCF programs have helped to sustain wildlife populations by controlling poaching, reducing human-wildlife conflict, and protecting essential habitat – all while promoting US economic and security interests in far reaching parts of the world. These programs are highly efficient, granting them an outsized impact because they consistently leverage three to four times as much in matching funds from corporations, conservation groups, and national governments. WCS requests that \$10 million be appropriated for the MSCF for FY15, equal to the FY09 funding level.

WCS has had great success on projects using funds from the MSCF. In 2009, with support from the African Elephant Conservation Fund, WCS launched a new project in collaboration with Bauchi State Government to improve levels of protection and reduce rates of elephant poaching in Yankari Game Reserve. Yankari contains the largest surviving elephant population in Nigeria and one of the largest remaining in West Africa. WCS has been able to make substantial progress in building the capacity of the ecoguard staff and empowering local authorities to manage this population. Despite years of extreme poaching pressure, the number of elephants killed this year has been kept to a minimum through constant effort and surveillance. A strong team of ecoguards is now using durable, GPS-enabled technology to detect illegal activities and report back to authorities in an efficient way, utilizing real-time data and illustrative maps.

Wildlife Without Borders Global and Regional Programs: These programs are a great investment in addressing cross-cutting threats to ecosystems and wildlife such as disease outbreaks, human-wildlife conflict, and the bushmeat trade. Wildlife Without Borders (WWB) is making lasting impacts through capacity building, technical support and training, local community education and citizen science. In FY15, WCS recommends funding the WWB Global and Regional Programs commensurate with the President's request of \$7.2 million.

Created in 2010, the *WWB Critically Endangered Animals Fund* provided over \$300,000 in grants in FY13 to protect the most imperiled species on the planet. This funding was matched more than 2 for 1 by non-Federal contributions. A portion of this funding is supporting a successful WCS project in Myanmar to ensure a genetically diverse, self-sustaining, wild population of the Burmese roofed turtle. I urge you to include language in the report to accompany the bill that would ensure this small but important program for critically endangered species remains open.

Office of Law Enforcement: The US remains one of the world's largest markets for wildlife and wildlife products, both legal and illegal. A small group of dedicated officers at the FWS Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) are tasked with protecting fish, wildlife, and plant resources by investigating wildlife crimes – including commercial exploitation, habitat destruction, and industrial hazards – and monitoring the Nation's wildlife trade to intercept smuggling and facilitate legal commerce.

Many of the new responsibilities placed on the FWS by the National Strategy will be enforced by the OLE, and WCS supports the President's request for \$65.8 million. Most of the proposed increase will go to strengthening forensic capabilities needed to address wildlife trafficking and expanding the capacity of the Special Investigations Unit so that it can maximize the scope and effectiveness of FWS efforts to respond to the elephant poaching crisis and shutdown trafficking in elephant ivory. This funding, in concert with full implementation of the effort to deploy OLE personnel at key embassies overseas, will increase investigations involving species that are victimized by illegal trade.

The National Strategy calls for the Federal government to “increase coordination among law enforcement and intelligence agencies to enhance the effectiveness of Federal efforts to combat wildlife trafficking.” For no agency is this increased coordination with the intelligence community more important than for the OLE. We strongly encourage the Committee to include language in the report that would facilitate increased coordination between the OLE and the intelligence community.

State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program: The State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program gives states and Tribes funding to develop and implement comprehensive conservation plans to protect declining wildlife and habitats before protection under the Endangered Species Act is necessary. This important program is supported by more than 6,200 organizations that have formed a national bipartisan coalition called Teaming with Wildlife of which WCS is a steering committee member. WCS recommends Congress provide \$58.7 million, equal to the FY14 level, for the program to implement State Wildlife Action Plans.

US Forest Service

International Programs: The Forest Service International Programs (FSIP) level the playing field in international trade for US timber producers and reduce illegal logging by providing specialized experience. This improves the sustainability and legality of timber management overseas which translates to less underpriced timber undercutting US producers. FSIP, through partnerships with USAID and the Department of State, helps to improve the resource management in countries of strategic importance to US security. Resource scarcity and unregulated extraction of natural resources—whether water, food, timber, or minerals—is often a root cause of unrest and corruption, both of which undermine democracy, the rule of law and political stability. FSIP has increasingly leveraged modest funding from Congress to make a big impact for the US taxpayer. For every federal dollar invested in FSIP, four additional dollars is leveraged in matching funds and other contributions from partners. WCS requests that the FY14 enacted level of \$8 million for the FSIP is maintained in FY15.

With technical and financial support from FSIP, WCS has been working to conserve a biologically rich temperate forest zone called the Primorye in the Russian Far East. The region hosts over a hundred endangered species as well as numerous threatened species, including the Far Eastern leopard and Amur tiger. Habitat conservation for these animals, which are dependent on large tracts of intact forest ecosystem, benefits associated species and biodiversity in the region. FSIP works with us to exchange information and methodologies with Russian scientists, managers, and students on a variety of wildlife-related topics to support conservation and capacity building efforts and ensure the sustainable management of forests and wildlife habitat.

US National Park Service

Office of International Affairs: In 1961, the US government initiated its first international conservation program with the creation of the Office of International Affairs (OIA). Since then, this office has facilitated technical assistance and exchange projects with counterpart agencies globally building on the legacy of American leadership in national parks management. OIA is also the managing agency for World Heritage Sites located in the United States. Thanks to this program, NPS is working on collaborative areas of trans-frontier concern, including at the Beringia Shared Heritage Initiative (US - Russia), which WCS has been involved with as part of our ongoing conservation efforts in Arctic Alaska. WCS is currently studying the behavior and survivorship of migratory birds that travel to Teshekpuk Lake in Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve to nest each year, as well as the impacts climate change is having on Alaska's walrus populations. The international work conducted by NPS is not only about helping other countries protect their parks and heritage. It is about bringing home best practices and learning from international engagement that could benefit the American parks. WCS recommends including the President's request of \$897,000 for the OIA in FY15.

In conclusion, I appreciate the opportunity to share WCS's perspectives and make a case for increased investment in conservation in the FY15 Interior, EPA and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Conservation of public lands is an American tradition and, as far back as 1909, Theodore Roosevelt recognized that the management of our natural resources requires coordination between all nations. Continued investment in conservation will reaffirm our global position as a conservation leader, while improving our national security and building capacity and good governance in developing countries. Thank you.