

**TESTIMONY OF
MR. MICHAEL MACE, CURATOR OF BIRDS
SAN DIEGO ZOO GLOBAL
AND
MR. PETER JENNY, PRESIDENT AND CEO
THE PEREGRINE FUND**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee on the importance of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Endangered Species Recovery funding for the survival and ultimate recovery of the California condor. My name is Michael Mace and I am a Curator of Birds at San Diego Zoo Global, where I have been responsible for the condor program for more than 30 years. San Diego Zoo Global and its Institute for Conservation Research have been involved in the California condor recovery effort since its inception. I am here today with my colleague, Peter Jenny, President and CEO of The Peregrine Fund, a nonprofit endangered species recovery organization best known for leading the successful recovery of the Peregrine Falcon. We are here representing a coalition of five nonprofit organizations working in partnership with the USFWS to recover the California condor.

The California condor is one of North America's most majestic and iconic species. With a wing span of approximately nine feet, they are the largest flying bird in North America. They can soar to heights of 15,000 feet and can travel up to 150 miles in a single day. Condors are carrion eaters, fulfilling an important ecological role by feeding on the carcasses of dead animals. They historically ranged throughout the continental United States and most recently in the Western United States, from Canada into Mexico, and from the Pacific Coast into Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. Not only are they a magnificent part of our country's wildlife landscape, the California condor is also a critical part of our heritage, figuring prominently in the cultures of many Native American communities. The State of California recognized the iconic nature of the California condor by featuring the bird on the state quarter.

The once robust population of California condors was ravaged by habitat depletion, contaminants, and poaching over the course of the 20th century. While the species was officially classified as endangered in 1971, the population continued to decline, reaching a low point of just 22 birds in 1982. Following much debate, the last remaining condors were removed from the wild in 1987 marking the first time it was extinct in the wild. The first successful captive breeding of condors occurred at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park in 1988 and the process of restoring the population to its current levels began.

Since these early efforts, the California Condor Recovery Program has made significant strides in bringing this majestic species back from the brink of extinction. The California condor population is now 412, including 230 birds living in the wild in California, Arizona, Utah, and Baja California, Mexico, with the goal of further reintroduction in Oregon within the next few

years. This success is largely due to the increasingly rigorous and expensive efforts of a dedicated coalition of five nonprofit organizations:

- The San Diego Zoo Global and its Institute for Conservation Research
- The Peregrine Fund
- The Los Angeles Zoo
- The Oregon Zoo
- The Ventana Wildlife Society

Through a combination of captive breeding, behavior modification, reintroduction, active management of the wild population, research, veterinary services, and pathology, this coalition of nonprofits has given a species once condemned to extinction a second chance. In fact, the USFWS acknowledges that were it not for the combined efforts of the partners, the California condor would, in all likelihood, be extinct today.

The comprehensive, hands on approach that has made the recovery effort a success is costly. The partners' annual budget for the condor recovery effort totals more than \$3.3 million, with only \$581,700, or approximately 18%, coming from the USFWS. In total, we estimate that the nonprofit partners have dedicated more than \$40 million of their own, privately-raised funding over the last 30 years towards the recovery of the California condor.

While truly significant progress has been made, public perception that the recovery effort is complete is far from reality. The diligent efforts of the nonprofit partners have been persistently undermined by environmental threats, principally from lead, making the road to full recovery of the California condor much longer and far more challenging than originally anticipated. Condors are currently surviving in the wild only through the increasingly costly efforts of regular trapping, testing, and treatment for lead poisoning carried out by the nonprofit partners. This situation was predicted in the American Ornithological Union's (AOU) comprehensive 2008 Status Review on the California Condor which stated, "Condors are maintained in the wild only with great effort, so much so that one might argue that they constitute little more than outdoor zoo populations." Indeed, USFWS's own projections indicate that were the partners' efforts to cease, the California condor population would decline rapidly once again to the brink of extinction.

A 2012 report by the National Academy of Science confirms that lead poisoning is the leading cause of condor deaths in the wild. Further, research by The Peregrine Fund shows that lead from spent ammunition is the single greatest barrier to condor recovery. If lead were taken out of the equation, we are confident that we would be consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about de-listing the California condor.

While lead is currently a significant barrier to recovery, encouraging efforts are underway at the state level, in cooperation with the USFWS and the recovery partners, to mitigate and ultimately eliminate this threat. Working with state agencies in Arizona and Utah, The Peregrine Fund cooperates in a voluntary program to encourage hunters to use ballistically superior non-lead ammunition that is now available. Hunters have complied at a rate of 80% or greater over seven years in Arizona, and computer models indicate that condors can survive if that rate is sustained over time and the effort is expanded into the neighboring state of Utah. We are encouraged that

in this last season, 88% of hunters in Arizona complied, and Utah recently completed its second year of outreach and incentives. In addition, efforts to address lead are underway in other states. California has taken a legislative approach to the issue, which will phase into effect in the next 5 years. Our partner, the Oregon Zoo, is working closely with USFWS to educate hunters and is supporting a voluntary effort in the state, similar to those in Arizona and Utah.

As we work to address the lead issue that has slowed recovery efforts, the nonprofit partners, require additional federal funding to continue their critical work. Again, this situation was anticipated by the 2008 AOU report which states, “Partners cannot be expected to expend funds indefinitely to maintain condors in nature, especially when increases in the wild population increase management requirements and annual costs.... The ultimate goal of many of the partners is to be involved in lower intensity monitoring of a self-sustaining population, or to exit the program entirely when populations become self-sustaining, not to continue increasing expenditures indefinitely.”

At this point and time the Condor Recovery Program is at a critical juncture. Without additional federal support there is a strong possibility that the 30 years of progress and the substantial investment made by the partners and the Service could all be lost. On the other hand, with a relatively modest increase in federal support, this iconic species can be recovered and removed from the Endangered Species List. This investment will allow the USFWS to fulfill its statutory responsibility to recover the California condor and will provide an outstanding example of a truly effective and cooperative private-public partnership.