



Testimony of Kelly Keenan Aylward
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Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment & Related Agencies
March 18, 2015

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on FY16 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. My name is Kelly Aylward, the Director of the Washington Office of 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 manages 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.

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. The illegal trade in elephant ivory, rhino horns, tiger skins and other illegal wildlife products is worth at least an estimated \$8 to \$10 billion annually. 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.

U.S. Ivory Ban

The Federal government recently presented a plan to implement its National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking (National Strategy), which is designed to provide a framework for a whole-of-government approach to addressing the crisis. Several programs within this bill form the base upon which that strategy is built, but I wanted to speak first about a key piece of the overall National Strategy that has been of some concern to the Committee – the US Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) announcement to change its current Federal rule to further restrict the commercial sale of ivory.

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. A study published by WCS found that in 2012 alone, 35,000 African elephants were killed for their ivory – that is an average of 96 elephants per day or one killed every 15 minutes. This finding is supported by a subsequent study which also found that 100,000 elephants were poached between 2011 and 2013. Both studies show that conditions are dire for the subspecies of African forest elephants, which has declined by about two-thirds in a little more than a decade. Continued

poaching at these rates may mean the extinction of forest elephants in the wild within the next ten years and the potential loss of all African elephant species in the wild in our lifetimes. Action must be taken now to prevent this catastrophe from occurring.

There is no question that China is the largest market for illegal ivory. However, the United States is also one of the larger destinations, both for domestic consumption and as a transshipment hub for Asia. As part of Operation Crash, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Department of Justice have successfully arrested criminals and prosecuted cases in several states over the last 18 months – including Texas, New York, Florida and New Jersey – involving millions of dollars illegal ivory and rhino horn. These busts are strong evidence that there is a domestic problem with illegal ivory, all of which is smuggled in from overseas and which frequently crosses state lines, placing it firmly under Federal jurisdiction.

The problem with ivory is that you cannot differentiate legal ivory antiques from illegal ivory without lab tests, which are costly and can damage the piece. Once raw or worked ivory from recently poached elephants is smuggled into the United States, it can easily be placed in the marketplace right alongside genuine antiques. A survey conducted in 2008 of 24,000 pieces of ivory being sold in antique stores in 16 cities in the US and Canada concluded exactly this point, finding that more than 7,000 of these items were potentially illegal. The system, as it was, was fundamentally flawed.

Recognizing it does not have the resources to test and verify this many pieces of ivory, FWS is in the process of revising its rules regarding African elephant ivory to bring them more in line with the underlying statutes. FWS had initially indicated its intent to publish a proposed rule last summer, but after consulting with stakeholders from all sides, the agency appears to have taken the time to craft a rule that seeks to accommodate as many of these stakeholders as it can while still making meaningful changes that stop the domestic sale of illegal ivory.

Last year's Interior bill in the House contained a provision that would have blocked FWS from proceeding on any rule related to ivory, forcing the continuation of a system that we know does not work and has been a contributing factor in the poaching of 100,000 elephants over the past three years. Our understanding is that a preliminary rule is very close to being released. I would encourage the Committee to allow this process to continue so that the public can see the proposal and have a substantive debate on the actual content of the rule rather than the current arguments from both sides, which is based on speculation about what the rule might contain.

US Fish and Wildlife Service

Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF): As I mentioned, there is much more to the Federal effort to combat wildlife trafficking than the ivory ban, much of which is under this Committee's jurisdiction. 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 two to four times as much in matching funds. This program has been level-funded for the last three fiscal years, and WCS requests that \$11 million – equal to the President's request – be appropriated for the MSCF for FY16.

WCS has had great success on projects using funds from the MSCF. One grant we receive through the African Elephant Conservation Fund supports the longest running study of African forest elephants at Dzanga Bai in the Central African Republic. In spite of political turmoil and instability in the country, the area remains an important habitat and gathering site for large numbers of elephants. Funds support ongoing surveillance and monitoring of the site, collection of baseline data, and collaboration with local anti-poaching efforts.

FWS International Affairs: The FWS International Affairs (IA) program supports efforts to conserve our planet's rich wildlife diversity by protecting habitat and species, combating illegal wildlife trade, and building capacity for landscape-level wildlife conservation. The program provides oversight of domestic laws and international treaties that promote the long-term conservation of plant and animal species by ensuring that international trade and other activities do not threaten their survival in the wild. Within IA, the Wildlife Without Borders program seeks to address grassroots wildlife conservation problems from a broad, landscape perspective – building regional expertise and capacity while strengthening local institutions. WCS encourages supporting the President's request for \$14.7 million.

Office of Law Enforcement: As I noted earlier, 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 \$75.4 million. The additional funding requested for this year would allow OLE to expand its approach to target and stop illicit trade; ensure sustainable legal trade through the CITIES; place enforcement officers in transit hubs overseas; reduce demand for illegal products in consumer countries; and, provide technical assistance and grants to other Nations to build local enforcement capabilities.

Cooperative Landscape Conservation: Many of the domestic conservation programs in this bill provide funding to states to implement their conservation goals. But as you know, wildlife does not recognize political boundaries, and scarce conservation dollars can best be spent when effective planning and coordination takes place across entire ecosystems. The Cooperative Landscape Conservation Program funds a network of 22 Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) in the US and Canada, which use a collaborative approach between Federal, State, tribal and local partners to identify landscape scale conservation solutions and work collaboratively to meet unfilled conservation needs, develop decision support tools, share data and knowledge, and facilitate and foster conservation partnerships. Funding will support landscape planning and design that will improve the condition of wildlife habitat and improve resilience of U.S. communities. WCS encourages the Committee to meet the President's request for \$17.9 million for this program.

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 strong and continued support for FY16 at levels at or above FY15 appropriations for the program.

US Forest Service

International Programs: The US economy has lost approximately \$1 billion per year and over 200,000 jobs due to illegal logging, which is responsible for 15-30% of all timber by volume. The Forest Service International Programs (FSIP) works to level the playing field by reducing illegal logging and improving the sustainability and legality of timber management overseas, translating to less underpriced timber undercutting US producers. Through partnerships with USAID and the Department of State, FSIP helps to improve the resource management in countries of strategic importance to US security.

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. 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.

FSIP has been level funded for several years. Given the economic benefits to US timber producers and the program's excellent history of leveraging four additional dollars in matching funds for each Federal dollar invested, WCS encourages the Committee to appropriate \$9 million for the program, an increase of \$1 million from FY15. With additional appropriated funding, FSIP would expand a number of activities, including developing new technologies, protecting habitat for migratory species and endangered wildlife, promoting community forestry, supporting policy formulation, and strengthening law enforcement.

US National Park Service

Office of International Affairs: Since the establishment of the Office of International Affairs (OIA) in 1961, the US government has been facilitating 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. 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 FY16 Interior, the Environment 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.