

Testimony of Kate Wall
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Before the House Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
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Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the FY20 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) has 17 offices globally and works in more than 40 countries around the world. IFAW takes a holistic approach to innovating solutions for tough conservation challenges like conflicts between humans and wildlife, and illegal wildlife trafficking. Recognizing the unbreakable link between animals and human wellbeing, we support and empower communities to coexist with and value native wildlife and help those communities develop tools to protect their wild heritage. IFAW appreciates this Subcommittee's support in the current fiscal year (FY19) in providing funding for many important conservation programs, and requests your continued support for these programs in FY20, including full funding for the Endangered Species Act, the Multinational Species Conservation Funds (\$18 million), the International Affairs program within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department (\$18 million), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department Office of Law Enforcement (\$85 million). With respect to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), IFAW requests 1) the Subcommittee commission a report on proper funding levels necessary to fully implement the Act; 2) until a report has been finalized, raise ESA funding in line with any increases to defense spending; and 3) deny support for any projects that seek to circumvent the ESA or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Finally, we urge the Subcommittee to prioritize infrastructure projects that are sustainable and resilient.

It is more crucial than ever to prioritize environmental protection and conservation efforts. Wildlife and wild lands are in peril around the world. Climate change, habitat destruction, and the Earth's sixth mass extinction event threaten wildlife, ecosystems, and the very fabric of this planet we call home. Trafficking in wildlife and wildlife parts and products remains the fourth most lucrative criminal enterprise worldwide. Scientists warn that species are disappearing so fast that evolution cannot keep up. Here at home, years of scarce funding have left an overwhelming backlog of species awaiting evaluation for protections under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

However, at IFAW we see reasons for hope. If we invest wisely now, we can begin to stem the tide of extinction. The good news is that many of the programs that are best able to address today's grim challenges fall within the jurisdiction of this subcommittee. I will point to several programs that provide critical support for important on-the-ground endeavors shortly.

No NEPA or ESA Waivers: More broadly, IFAW urges this Subcommittee to consider the health of wildlife and the environment in all of its actions. At a minimum, no federally-supported construction project, including disaster remediation projects, should be exempted from such fundamental laws as the ESA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA and ESA analyses protect against substantial social, environmental, and economic harm. These reviews allow construction projects to move forward while ensuring full disclosure of potentially

harmful outcomes, informed decision-making, effective design, and risk mitigation. There has been a distressing trend to exempt projects from NEPA, ESA, or other environmental reviews and we urge the Subcommittee to reverse this trend by denying funding for any plan that does not include a commitment to bedrock conservation and environmental reviews.

Infrastructure: As Congress moves to address our aging infrastructure, we have an unparalleled opportunity to invest in environmental safeguards and conservation innovations that will ensure American wellbeing and security, and create jobs and prosperity for the citizens of today and for many future generations. IFAW urges this Subcommittee to review any infrastructure plans within your jurisdiction through the lens of wildlife conservation and environmental sustainability. We advocate prioritizing funding for projects that: rely on sustainable or natural materials to increase infrastructure resiliency and longevity; reintroduce or preserve native flora; create resilient and sustainable water and waste management systems, particularly through implementing natural alternatives like wetlands, dune restoration, and natural vegetation buffers; and reduce wildlife conflict using wildlife corridors and crossings.

Additionally, natural areas on public lands provide numerous valuable ecosystem services to the American people including clean water and water purification, filtration and storage; flood control; soil stabilization; climate regulation; wildlife habitat and corridors; and recreation opportunities. Unfortunately, some existing infrastructure may threaten ecosystem services, especially if in a degraded condition. For example, national forests contain more than 380,000 miles of roadsⁱ (more than 7 times as many miles as the interstate highway systemⁱⁱ), some 7000 bridgesⁱⁱⁱ and over 1,700 dams. Efforts must be made to repair or in some cases remove infrastructure that poses a threat to ecosystem and public interest values. As with all infrastructure projects, we urge the Subcommittee to give preference to projects that use sustainable and natural materials that provide better resilience to changing conditions.

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PRIORITY PROGRAMS

Endangered Species Act: In spite of years of relatively flat funding, our nations' most important conservation law, the Endangered Species Act, remains effective and has been successful in protecting 99% of listed species. More than 2,300 plant and animal species are currently listed. Saving species from extinction is more than just about preserving iconic wildlife for generations to come. We are also protecting integral parts of the ecosystem that provides the air we breathe, the water we drink, the parks we enjoy, and the medicine we need. The Endangered Species Act protects wildlife within the United States, and species around the globe by raising awareness of listed species and often directing funding to research or *in situ* conservation efforts and by generally prohibiting the import of listed species.

The ESA has faced frequent attacks in recent years, through spending riders, authorizing legislation, and administrative action. IFAW thanks this Subcommittee for its efforts to fend off appropriations riders in past bills, and asks that any riders aimed at undermining the ESA be excluded from the FY20 Act.

Additionally, while species face ever-mounting pressures from climate change, habitat loss, and other factors, funding for the ESA has not kept pace with the need. There is a backlog of species

awaiting consideration for protections under the Act. IFAW urges the Subcommittee to direct the Congressional Research Service (CRS) to provide on funding levels necessary for FWS to fully implement the ESA. In the meantime, we ask the Subcommittee to increase funding for ESA programs at a rate commensurate with increases to defense spending in order to better reflect the increasing need of imperiled species.

FWS International Affairs: The FWS International Affairs (IA) program is tasked with coordinating domestic and international efforts to protect and restore wildlife and ecosystems. By overseeing domestic conservation laws and international conservation treaties, including the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the IA program has become a keystone of US leadership on the international stage. Importantly, the IA program supports transboundary regional projects as well as those that focus on target species, promoting habitat conservation and restoration in areas where wildlife is most at risk from habitat loss. However, while pressures on imperiled species continue to mount, federal support for the program has not kept pace. We suggest an increase in FY20 in order to better meet conservation needs, particularly the need to combat wildlife trafficking. IFAW requests \$18 million for this important program.

Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF): IFAW is part of a diverse coalition of groups, including animal welfare, environmental, sporting, and industry organizations, that support the MSCF. These funds protect tigers, rhinos, African and Asian elephants, great apes, and marine turtles, all of which are in constant danger from illegal poaching and wildlife trafficking, habitat destruction, climate change, and other pressures. Wild members of these species may live outside our borders, but these iconic animals remain important to the American people. Rhino horns, by weight, now command as much as platinum, and tigers find their already fractured habitat further threatened by a changing climate. None of us wants this to be the generation to preside over the extinction of elephants or tigers in the wild. MSCF programs have helped to sustain wildlife populations by funding groundbreaking projects that combat poaching, reduce human-wildlife conflict and protect the vital habitat of priority species. By promoting community engagement and combatting trafficking, the MSCF programs also promote the rule of law abroad and contribute to our domestic security. These programs are highly efficient, with low administrative costs ensuring that more than 95% of appropriated funds were distributed through grants in FY17. The MSCF received a small increase in FY19, but with pressures on these species increasing, IFAW requests that \$18 million be appropriated for the MSCF for FY20 to address growing the needs.

Office of Law Enforcement: The US remains one of the world's largest illegal markets for wildlife and wildlife products. Our leadership within the global community is also a key driver in convincing nations around the globe to invest in protecting endangered wildlife. The Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) within the FWS is on the front lines of wildlife crime, inspecting wildlife shipments, conducting investigations, and enforcing federal wildlife laws to protect fish, wildlife, plants, and ecosystems. The OLE combats poaching and wildlife trafficking, breaking up international criminal rings that not only harm wildlife, but may also engage in other illicit activities. Among other things, the small but mighty force at OLE sends experienced FWS attachés to strategic regions where they combat wildlife trafficking by supporting and advising

foreign partners. This program is critical both to domestic and international conservation efforts and to US security. IFAW requests \$85 million for OLE.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to share IFAW's priority requests to promote conservation in the FY2020 Interior, the Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Wildlife and their habitats are more than our national heritage, they are essential to human health and happiness. We appreciate the continued support of this Subcommittee for conservation efforts globally and within the United States. With your support, we look forward to a bright and healthy future for future generations of wildlife lovers and all Americans. Thank you.

ⁱ According to USDA that is an estimated 380,000 miles of Forest Service roads not including public roads such as state, county and private roads maintained by others on National Forest System.

https://www.fs.fed.us/eng/road_mgt/factsheet.shtml last observed 1/24/19

ⁱⁱ According to the Federal Highway Administration: Currently, the Interstate System is 46,876 miles long

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/interstate/faq.cfm#question3>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.fs.fed.us/eng/road_mgt/factsheet.shtml