

Dan Ashe
President and CEO
Association of Zoos and Aquariums
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Thank you Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee about the priorities of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for Fiscal Year 2021. Specifically, I support Recovery Challenge Grants and the Multinational Species Conservation Funds, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Environmental Education Act (NEEA) programs at the Environmental Protection Agency, and sufficient funding for the Fish and Wildlife Service to carry out its work, including to support the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

My name is Dan Ashe, and I am the President and CEO of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Founded in 1924, the AZA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that our 238 member zoos, aquariums, nature centers, and science centers represent the very best in animal care and welfare, conservation, education, science, and guest experience. In 2018, AZA's accredited member facilities welcomed nearly 200 million visitors (more than all U.S. professional sports combined), generated more than \$22 billion in economic activity, and supported more than 208,000 jobs across the country. They contributed \$231 million in direct support for field conservation in 130 countries benefiting 863 species and subspecies, of which 241 are listed under the ESA.

At the heart of AZA is its mandatory accreditation requirement, which assures that only those zoos and aquariums that meet the highest standards can become members. The rigorous, independent, objective, and exhaustive AZA accreditation process includes self-evaluation, on-site inspection, and peer review. Our standards are publicly available and are continuously evolving and improving as we learn more about the needs of the animals in our care. Once earned, AZA accreditation confers best-in-class status, an important message for local, state, and federal government and the visiting public.

AZA and its members are leaders, partners, and participants in species conservation. We work in concert with Congress, the federal agencies, conservation organizations, state governments, the private sector, and the general public to conserve our wildlife heritage. AZA's Wildlife Trafficking Alliance is a coalition of private companies, non-profit organizations, and AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums working closely with U.S. government agencies to combat wildlife trafficking worldwide. AZA and its member facilities have long-standing partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Our collaborative efforts have focused on:

- Engaging in endangered species recovery and reintroduction;
- Supporting conservation domestically and internationally through multinational species conservation funds and state wildlife grants; and

- Collaborating on partnership opportunities involving national parks and wildlife refuges, migratory birds, freshwater and saltwater fisheries, national marine sanctuaries, illegal wildlife trade, amphibians, and invasive species.

Today I am testifying in support of the following key programs funded through the annual Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill.

Endangered Species Recovery and Recovery Challenge Grants

First, I express my gratitude for the Subcommittee's continued support for increasing funding for endangered species through the Recovery account and working with our partners at the Fish and Wildlife Service to create the ESA Recovery Challenge Grant program in fiscal year 2018. This program recognizes the critically important role of nonprofit partners to the Service's endangered species recovery efforts and it is a mechanism, through merit-based matching grants, to provide funding in a more commensurate manner to support and enhance these efforts. Recovery Challenge Grants are limited to nonprofit organizations implementing the highest priority recovery actions identified in recovery plans, such as for genetically sound breeding, rearing, and reintroduction programs.

I urge you to continue to provide robust funding for endangered species recovery and prioritize longstanding recovery efforts in which existing resources and partner expertise can be most effectively leveraged. Specifically, I am requesting an increase for Endangered Species Act Recovery actions generally to \$118 million and an increase in funding for the Recovery Challenge Grant program to \$10 million in FY2021. This funding will power recovery partnerships and inspire their work to better recover critically endangered species.

Multinational Species Conservation Funds

Next, I support the inclusion of \$18 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Funds (MSCF) administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service. These programs support public-private partnerships that conserve wild tigers, Asian and African elephants, rhinos, great apes, freshwater turtles, tortoises, and marine turtles in their native habitats. Through the MSCF programs, the United States supplements the efforts of developing countries that are struggling to balance the needs of their human populations and endemic wildlife. These programs help to sustain wildlife populations, address threats such as poaching and illegal trade, reduce human-wildlife conflict, and protect essential habitat. By working with local communities, they also improve people's livelihoods, contribute to local and regional stability, and support U.S. security interests in impoverished regions. The Fish and Wildlife Service is seen as a global conservation leader in large part due to its commitment to international conservation efforts. This federal program supports AZA-accredited facilities in their field conservation efforts and partnerships with the Service.

Endangered Species Act

AZA and its members take wildlife conservation very seriously and wholeheartedly support the ESA, which has prevented hundreds of listed species from going extinct. The ESA, which is a

globally recognized model for species preservation, is working. It has prevented the extinction of 99% of the species it protects since its inception in 1973. However, we know that the challenges facing our planet in the 21st century are as complex as they are urgent. Scientists estimate that the total number of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish has declined by more than 50% since 1970, and many believe that we are living amidst the planet's sixth mass extinction. Climate change threatens to accelerate this crisis. Without critical intervention today, we are facing the very real possibility of losing some of our planet's most magnificent creatures such as lions, cheetahs, elephants, gorillas, sea turtles, and sharks.

AZA-accredited facilities have a unique opportunity and responsibility to help others understand this crisis. It is our obligation -- to these animals and to all life on earth -- to take bold action now to protect our planet's biodiversity. One achievement that has gone unnoticed by most people is that zoos and aquariums have played a significant role in bringing over 25 species, including California condor, Florida manatee, and black-footed ferret, back from the brink of extinction.

Although we have made significant progress in saving endangered species, this work is far from done. Species protection and conservation requires long-term commitment by all of us. It is through the ongoing work related to species recovery plans that we will conserve these species for future generations. The AZA and its members fully support the ESA, and I encourage you to assure that the agencies responsible for carrying out the mandates of the Act receive the necessary funding and human resource capacity to succeed.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Budget

Much of the important conservation work at AZA-accredited facilities depends on a robust and fully staffed Fish and Wildlife Service. Acknowledging the budget challenges facing Congress and the agencies, I encourage you to assure that the Fish and Wildlife Service has sufficient resources to employ qualified professionals, particularly for the programs handling permits, which support AZA's science-based conservation breeding and wildlife education programs that require animals to be moved in an efficient, timely manner: International Affairs (Management and Scientific Authorities), Endangered Species, Law Enforcement, and Migratory Birds. In particular, AZA is keenly interested in expanding our critical work in support of treating and placing live confiscated wildlife seized at the ports/borders and on scientific and conservation research on polar bears in AZA facilities. The success of these important initiatives depends on the effective assistance of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Environmental Education Grants

Finally, I urge the Subcommittee to include \$10 million for National Environmental Education Act programs. This relatively small investment in communities yields an impressive return. Since 1990 the NEEA has served as a highly effective tool for improving student performance in science and math, protecting public health, and helping build 21st century skills by promoting job training and innovation.

NEEA-supported education programs at AZA-accredited institutions provide essential learning opportunities in formal and informal settings. In the last 10 years, accredited zoos and

aquariums trained more than 400,000 teachers, supporting science curricula with effective teaching materials and hands-on opportunities. School field trips at AZA member facilities annually connect more than twelve million students with the natural world.

Chairwoman McCollum, I know that you and your colleagues on the Subcommittee know that species conservation is a team sport. Certainly, my former employees and forever-friends at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are the core of that team, and I implore you to continue your strong support for them and their work. State and tribal organizations are also key players. But I'm here today to remind you that AZA-accredited facilities are unsung and long-standing partners that have made possible conservation successes for species like California condor, manatee, Mexican wolf, sea turtles, and less charismatic species like hellbender and American burying beetle. We bring talent and treasure to the table. We tell the story to millions of visitors. We are engaging and inspiring the minds of new generations of conservationists. You have the opportunity to encourage and amplify that with the small investments that we speak about in this testimony.

Thank you for your time and attention today. AZA and its members look forward to working with this Subcommittee and Congress to assure that as a nation we are devoting the necessary resources to conserve wildlife at home and globally.

Thank you.