

**Testimony of Kate Wall**  
**Senior Legislative Manager, International Fund for Animal Welfare**  
**Before the House Committee on Appropriations,**  
**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**February 6, 2019**

Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the FY21 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) has 15 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 is grateful for this Subcommittee's championship of strong conservation funding for the current fiscal year (FY20), and requests your continued support for these programs in FY21. Specifically, we request the \$18 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Funds, \$5 million for information technology upgrades within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) \$23 million for the International Affairs program within FWS, \$85 million for the FWS Department Office of Law Enforcement, and \$500 million for the Endangered Species Act across five programs. IFAW also requests the Subcommittee 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.

This last year has brought ever more disturbing news about the state of our natural world. Twenty-nineteen was the second hottest year on record;<sup>1</sup> in May, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) released a report warning that one million species are at risk of extinction due to human activities<sup>2</sup>; changing climate conditions wreaked havoc on Australia in the form of catastrophic wildfires; we saw the fourth consecutive above-normal Atlantic hurricane season—only the second such on record<sup>3</sup>—which caused an estimated \$22 billion in damage in the U.S. alone;<sup>4</sup> and our ocean temperatures rose at record-setting levels.<sup>5</sup> Trafficking in wildlife and wildlife parts remained the fourth most lucrative criminal enterprise worldwide with an estimated annual revenue of as much as \$20 billion—add in illegal logging and fishing, and that number skyrockets to \$1 trillion or more<sup>6</sup>.

Given the grim challenges we face, IFAW respectfully asks this Subcommittee to exert its leadership and help to reverse these shocking trends. Fortunately, many of the programs that are best able to address our natural crises fall within the Subcommittee's jurisdiction, and U.S. action remains a key driver in convincing nations around the globe to invest in protecting imperiled wildlife.

**No NEPA or ESA Waivers:** 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 projects, including disaster remediation projects, should be exempted from such fundamental laws as the ESA and 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 toward exempting

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 laws 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 to traditional water and wastewater management systems like wetlands, dune restoration, and natural vegetation buffers. Over time, these modalities can increase resilience while saving scarce taxpayer dollars. A single acre of wetlands can hold up to 1.5 million gallons of rain or melting snow. For less than \$300,000, it's possible to construct an artificial wetland that can intercept 3.25 million gallons of stormwater otherwise destined for the sewer.

We also urge the Subcommittee to prioritize funding for infrastructure projects that reduce wildlife conflict using wildlife corridors and crossings. Every year in the U.S. there are an estimated 1-2 million collisions that occur between motorists and large animals.<sup>7</sup> These collisions result in 200 human deaths and more than 26,000 injuries, at a cost to Americans of more than \$8 billion annually.<sup>8</sup> A 2011 study by the insurance industry estimated that over \$1 billion dollars per year is spent on property damage due to wildlife vehicle collisions while the total annual cost to American taxpayers is nearly \$8.4 billion.<sup>9</sup> In addition, walls, fences, roads, and dams impede migratory routes, cut off food and water supplies, and otherwise disrupt important wildlife habitats. We can and must improve safety and safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem health by creating and protecting habitat connectivity, wildlife corridors, and crossings for wildlife.

### ***US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PRIORITY PROGRAMS***

**Endangered Species Act:** The Endangered Species Act, remains our nation's most important conservation law, and has been successful in protecting 99% of listed species from becoming extinct. Saving species from extinction is about more than just 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 requiring agencies to ensure that federally supported international activities protect species survival and preserve important habitat and by generally prohibiting the import of listed species.

While the ESA remains popular among Americans regardless of political party, with an approval rating of around 90%, it continues to face attacks 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—including legacy riders—be excluded from the FY21 Act.

We also thank the subcommittee for including strong ESA funding in its FY20 bill, which was, unfortunately, not retained in the final spending package. There remains a backlog of species awaiting consideration for protections under the Act, as well as listed species in need of additional resources to promote recovery. As species face ever-mounting pressures from climate change, habitat loss, and other factors, funding for the ESA has not kept pace with the need. IFAW requests \$500 million across the following five programs to make up for lost ground and put species on the path to recovery:

- Recovery Program: \$205 million
- Planning and Consultation Programs: \$132 million
- Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund: \$100 million
- Listing Program: \$53 million
- Conservation and Restoration Program: \$10 million

### **FWS Information Technology Improvement**

Currently, FWS is operating with outmoded information technology (IT) systems. Outdated websites mislead the public, provide inaccurate information, and can lead to legal liability for agencies. Reduced access to information online also contributes to inefficiencies and can cause duplication of staff time.

Upgrading FWS IT systems will increase openness and transparency; provide improved access to digital assets that should be in the public domain, including photos and videos; improve staff efficiency in responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests; and increase public access to documents and information that should be publicly available. Similar information that is requested via FOIA three times is required to be posted, so improving public access to such information will reduce duplicate FOIA requests, saving staff time and resources. IFAW therefore requests that \$5 million be appropriated to improve FWS IT systems, including staffing, in FY21.

**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 U.S. 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. The IA program is now responsible for implementing important safeguards this subcommittee included in the FY20 spending bill to ensure partner groups comply with the highest level of integrity and professionalism. With additional resources, the IA team will be better able to implement these responsibilities, and to get necessary funding to qualifying projects promptly and efficiently. IFAW requests \$23 million for this important program in FY21.

**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 and freshwater turtles and tortoises, 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. 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 an increase in FY20, but pressures on these species continue to increase around the globe. IFAW requests that \$18 million be appropriated for the MSCF for FY21.

**Office of Law Enforcement:** 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. The US remains one of the world’s largest illegal markets for wildlife and wildlife products. And, as the world confronts a novel coronavirus with suspected origins in wildlife, the OLE’s inspection and enforcement responsibilities take on even greater import. This program is critical both to domestic and international conservation efforts and to national health and security. IFAW requests \$85 million in FY21 for OLE.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to share IFAW’s funding priorities to promote conservation in the FY2021 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Wildlife and their habitats are more than our national heritage; they are essential to human health and welfare, and to domestic and international security. We appreciate the continued leadership of this Subcommittee on conservation efforts globally and within the United States. With your support, we can reverse the tide of extinction and promote a better future for generations of wildlife lovers and Americans yet to come. Thank you.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.noaa.gov/news/2019-was-2nd-hottest-year-on-record-for-earth-say-noaa-nasa>

<sup>2</sup> IPBES, *Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Summary for Policymakers*. 2019. Available at [https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/inline/files/ipbes\\_global\\_assessment\\_report\\_summary\\_for\\_policymakers.pdf](https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/inline/files/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> NOAA, Active 2019 Atlantic Hurricane Season Comes to an End: Stretch of consecutive above-normal seasons continues. Available at [https://www.noaa.gov/media-release/active-2019-atlantic-hurricane-season-comes-to-end?utm\\_source=Social%20Media&utm\\_medium=Facebook&utm\\_campaign=AtlanticHurricaneSeason\\_20191126](https://www.noaa.gov/media-release/active-2019-atlantic-hurricane-season-comes-to-end?utm_source=Social%20Media&utm_medium=Facebook&utm_campaign=AtlanticHurricaneSeason_20191126)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.accuweather.com/en/weather-news/accuweathers-2019-total-storm-damage-estimate-is-22-billion/604569>

<sup>5</sup> Cheng, L., and Coauthors, 2020: Record-setting ocean warmth continued in 2019. *Adv. Atmos. Sci.*, 37(2), 137–142, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00376-020-9283-7>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/482771571323560234/WBGRReport1017Digital.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Huijser, M.P., P. McGowen, J. Fuller, A. Hardy, A. Kociolek, A.P. Clevenger, D. Smith and R. Ament. 2008. Wildlife-vehicle collision reduction study. Report to Congress. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Washington D.C., USA.

<sup>8</sup> Id.

---

<sup>9</sup> Putting a Dent in the Cost of Wildlife-Vehicle Collisions, Defenders of Wildlife Blog, September 20, 2011, <https://defendersblog.org/2011/09/putting-a-dent-in-the-cost-of-wildlife-vehicle-collisions/>