

**Legislative Hearing, *CECIL Act***  
**Thursday, July 18**  
**Opening Statement of Chair Jared Huffman**

Thank you to everyone for joining us to discuss international trophy hunting today. Trophy hunting, needless to say, can be an incredibly divisive issue. For many Americans it can be deeply disturbing to see photos of hunters posing with slain lions, elephants or other charismatic animals. Many believe that exotic animal trophy hunting, typically done by extremely wealthy individuals, is different than the responsible, sustainable hunting and angling traditions that are so widely embraced in our country. Even within the sportsmen's community, trophy hunting elicits mixed feelings -- especially the practice of trophy hunting for vulnerable and threatened wildlife facing extinction.

Yet that is often the most sought-after thrill for Trophy Hunters, who pay five- or six-figure fees to kill vulnerable and threatened animals like lions. Trophy hunters claim that by paying large amounts of money that ostensibly goes toward conservation, they are actually helping the endangered animals they kill.

Whether that brand of pay-to-kill conservation actually works is debatable. It's something we'll examine more closely today as we discuss Chairman Grijalva's bill, the "Conserving Ecosystems by Ceasing the Importation of Large Animal Trophies Act," or CECIL Act for short, which is named for the lion killed in Zimbabwe in 2015 by an American trophy hunter.

The CECIL Act would protect species from trophy hunting import licensing at the time they are proposed for listing under the ESA -- to prevent a "rush" to hunt proposed species.

It would also require that the Fish and Wildlife Service go back and analyze -- with input from the public -- whether trophy imports to the U.S. actually enhanced the conservation of the species in the country where they were hunted. This is the claim trophy hunters make; so let's verify it. And let's make sure the appropriate political and conservation safeguards are in place before allowing importation of endangered and threatened animal trophies. If trophy hunters want their hunts to actually support conservation, they should support this -- to make sure their community, and US Wildlife officials, are not being bamboozled by corrupt operators or lax practices in these countries.

In addition to requiring these safeguards, the bill directs the GAO to determine whether trophy hunting in foreign countries actually contributes to wildlife conservation, and asks the GAO for recommendations for reforms to the industry. This is important to make sure our policy decisions are based on facts, not wishful narratives.

The need for at least some reforms is obvious. Right now, the cost of a permit to import a threatened or endangered animal trophy is \$100. That fee only covers 8% of the cost of the permit program at the Fish and Wildlife Service – the rest is subsidized: a gift from US taxpayers to trophy hunters who can afford to pay tens, or even hundreds of thousands of dollars, to hunt an animal in another country. Even if you support having a program for millionaires and billionaires to experience the thrill of killing a lion and hanging it on their wall, most people would agree that taxpayers shouldn't be subsidizing 92% of the cost. The CECIL Act would change that.

Of course, in the current administration, the National Rifle Association call the shots on these matters. At the NRA's bidding, the Trump administration has made trophy hunting much easier, without any of the proper oversight one would expect if you cared about protecting threatened species.

In fact, the administration has revoked an Obama-era rule that bars the import of animal trophies from certain African countries, and the Fish and Wildlife Service is now examining these trophy imports on a case-by-case basis.

Not only has the administration loosened trophy hunting standards in a way that weakens protections under the Endangered Species Act – they have also created a sham advisory committee, the so-called International Wildlife Conservation Council, whose mission explicitly requires it to *promote* trophy hunting.

And they packed the council with trophy hunting enthusiasts -- NRA representatives, celebrated trophy hunters, and advocates from trophy hunting organizations. Guess who isn't on the advisory committee - wildlife biologists. Clearly the administration doesn't consider itself bound by the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which requires that committee's like this be "fairly balanced in terms of the points of view represented" and "not be inappropriately influenced by the appointing authority or any special interest."

The CECIL Act would eliminate this sham advisory committee.

For those who say trophy hunting promotes conservation, let's at least make sure it's done right: with peer reviewed science, thorough oversight to prevent corruption or harm to local communities, and above all, with conservation in mind.

That, in a nutshell, is what the CECIL Act is all about.

If we're going to have a government sanctioned program for importing endangered animal trophies, we have the responsibility to make sure that hunting is conducted in an honest, verifiable, sustainable, and ethical way. The CECIL Act takes important steps in that direction.

With that, I'll turn it over to the ranking member.