

**Testimony of
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Hearing on Advancing Effective Conservation Policy Worldwide: Successes,
Challenges, and Next Steps
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Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel and members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, thank you for providing this opportunity to testify on “Advancing Effective Conservation Policy Worldwide: Successes, Challenges, and Next Steps.” WCS is deeply concerned by the alarming rate of species decline due to illegal hunting, trafficking, habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict. Our testimony will summarize what is working, identify gaps, and recommend where the US Government and Congress in particular can assist in addressing those gaps. We will focus especially on the issue of poaching for the illegal wildlife trade.

WCS was founded with the help of Theodore Roosevelt in 1895 with the mission of saving wildlife and wild places worldwide. Headquartered at our flagship Bronx Zoo and managing the largest network of urban wildlife parks in the United States, WCS envisions a world where wildlife thrives in healthy lands and seas, valued by societies that embrace and benefit from the diversity and integrity of life on earth. Today, WCS works in more than 60 countries and across the world’s oceans, concentrating on many of the planet’s most important, ecologically intact places with the greatest biodiversity and resilience. Our goal is to conserve wildlife species as well as many of the world’s most ecologically intact wild places. Our conservation solutions draw on unrivalled expertise of our field biologists and other conservation practitioners, and our zoo- and aquarium-based veterinarians, curators and animal care staff. Our work is grounded in high quality science, and in strong, long-term partnerships that build the conservation capacity of government partners, and support the livelihoods of local communities and indigenous groups.

Poaching for the illegal wildlife trade is devastating for numerous species around the world. For example, 100 years ago up to a million tigers roamed Asia. By 2011, that was reduced to about 3,200. Within the last 15 years, we have lost three subspecies of rhinos, and are on the brink of losing two rhino species. African forest elephants declined by 62 percent between 2002 and 2011 due to illegal killing for their ivory. For savannah elephants, the Great Elephant Census (GEC) conducted from 2015-2016 estimated a 30 percent decline in over seven years at an average rate of 8 percent per year, primarily due to poaching. Countries with the highest poaching rates were Cameroon, Mozambique, Angola, and Tanzania. In Tanzania, the elephant population had declined by 60 percent in five years. In Mozambique, the population had declined by 53 percent in five years, with an alarming decline in Niassa Reserve to less than a few thousand, seriously jeopardizing the viability of this once-historic population. In Northern Cameroon, in February-March 2012 an estimated 360 elephants were massacred in Bouba-Njida National Park by heavily armed horsemen coming from the east. While protection progress has been made in recent years, bands of horsemen of Chad, Central African Republic and Sudanese origin still destabilize and create insecurity in this region, including incursions in early 2018 in Cameroon and Chad.

Multiple other species are affected by high levels of poaching: pangolins, song birds, parrots and macaws, tortoises and freshwater turtles, sharks and rays and many more. Internationally-driven trafficking that initially strongly impacted Asia (including tigers, rhinos, Asian elephants, pangolins,

helmeted hornbills, turtles and tortoises) has spread across Africa (including elephants, rhinos, pangolins, and is an increasing threat to lions) and is now an increasing threat across parts of Latin America (including jaguars, parrots and macaws, and freshwater turtles). Many large, charismatic species threatened by trafficking play critical ecological roles as top predators, seed dispersers and ecological engineers. Their loss has many implications, including loss of food security for marginalized rural people, reduced resilience to climate change, and loss of important cultural values in many societies. Moreover, the illegal trade is often driven by organized criminal groups with links to other forms of organized crime, facilitated by corruption along the trade chain. Such wildlife crime weakens rule of law and security for communities living alongside wildlife and wild places.

In recent years, the world is taking this threat more seriously and policies have changed accordingly. For example, the United Nations General Assembly has passed three resolutions on wildlife trafficking, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has adopted a series of strong resolutions and decisions, including to address corruption. In 2015, the African Union established an “African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa”, citing the negative impact on local livelihoods, hindering of economic growth, and undermining of sustainable development, peace, security, rule of law and good governance as reasons why action is urgently needed. The United States government has expanded the Executive Order on Transnational Organized Crime to include wildlife trafficking. Thanks to the leadership of Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel, the U.S. government has also strengthened law enforcement capacity to allow wildlife crimes to serve as predicate offenses to federal money laundering prosecutions, thereby unlocking critical investigatory and prosecutorial tools.

To date, however, those strong legal mandates are not yet preventing all poaching and trafficking on the ground. Wildlife and wild places, and the communities living alongside them, urgently need targeted action and funding to address wildlife trafficking and associated issues along the trade chain: assistance to law enforcement authorities and protected area managers for preventing poaching at the source, identification and dismantling of trafficking networks, and reducing the market for illegal wildlife products.

What is Working to Combat Wildlife Trafficking?

WCS focuses our counter wildlife trafficking work on a suite of species that are of high commercial value, protected under national law or international treaties, and where we bring specific expertise and add value to ongoing efforts. Our current efforts focus on African and Asian elephants; rhinoceroses; pangolins; big cats; tortoises and freshwater turtles; helmeted hornbills; cage birds such as parrots, macaws and songbirds; and sharks and rays. WCS works to combat wildlife trafficking of these species in about 30 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe, including 19 of the 26 Focus Countries outlined by the U.S. Task Force on Combating Wildlife Trafficking, as mandated by the END Wildlife Trafficking Act (www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/11/275691.htm), and all three Countries of Concern. WCS continuously reassesses our geographic engagement and anti-trafficking investments based on the intelligence collected and analysed as we track the relevant criminal networks. Increased capacity of our government partners to combat trafficking in high profile species will also improve enforcement for lesser-known species that might also be at risk.

Protecting Species At The Source

Protecting species at the source requires the establishment and effective management of protected areas. Over the course of our history, WCS has supported governments to help establish more than 285 marine and terrestrial protected areas. We also work long-term on the ground to ensure that they are protected effectively. WCS, with partners, developed the GPS-based software enforcement program SMART (<http://smartconservationtools.org/>) which is now deployed in more than 600 sites in more than 55 countries worldwide. In addition to increasing patrol efficiency, this increases transparency and helps reduce corruption.

With long-term capacity building and sufficient investment, poaching can be curtailed. For example, in Huai Kha Khaeng National Park, Thailand, between 2006 and 2015, patrol effort increased by 600 percent. Tiger numbers have increased by 50 percent, and animals are now recolonizing surrounding areas.

We know that weak governance, easy road access to wildlife habitat, and dense human settlement all contribute to wildlife population losses, as has been shown for African elephants and many other species. Elephants need large areas well protected by trained anti-poaching staff. With the critical support of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Central Africa Program for the Environment (CARPE), WCS has been implementing field conservation programs in Northern Republic of Congo's Nouabale Ndoki National Park to train rangers and conduct SMART patrols. Patrols are conducted on foot, by motorbike, boat, vehicle and plane, which has resulted in increases in arrests and sentencing of transnational criminals implicated in ivory trafficking. Elephant numbers in the Park have remained stable since 2006, even while they have plummeted across much of Central Africa. Across Africa's Congo Basin in areas where WCS has supported ranger patrols, forest elephants are seven times more abundant than in non-patrolled areas.

For savannah elephants, there are also signs of hope. As in Congo, across savannah Africa, where site management levels are robust and the necessary resources, management systems, and training are available, elephant numbers have stabilized or increased. We know this from African Parks Network's work in Zakouma, Chad, and Northern Rangelands Trust community conservancies in northern Kenya. WCS has been working closely with the Tanzanian government to reverse the downward trends in elephant numbers through support to anti-poaching operations including aerial surveillance, especially in the Ruaha-Katavi landscape. While poaching pressure continues, it appears to be at a reduced rate, and repeated aerial surveys are urgently needed to accurately assess the current situation. In Mozambique, robust mobilization of anti-poaching, anti-trafficking, and anti-corruption programs at Niassa landscape, and at national and transboundary scales are required to save the elephant population there. WCS and the Cameroon government are improving transboundary law enforcement cooperations, military-conservation partnerships (including with AFRICOM), intel-led enforcement, and aerial surveillance. Real time law enforcement responses are critical to securing these small but important elephant populations and stabilizing these sensitive areas for security of both wildlife and people.

In addition to long-term presence in key areas, conservationists also need to be adaptable. Increasingly effective enforcement against elephant poaching in Kenya has driven poachers instead towards Mozambique and Uganda (<https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/sc/69/E-SC69-51-01-A.pdf>). Recent studies of trafficking networks in Uganda have highlighted that trafficking networks within the country are extensive, dynamic, and highly localized, and these create the conditions and connections necessary to support transnational networks that have been the recent focus of much international concern. Hence, efforts and resources need to be deployed broadly and across multiple countries where wildlife populations are known to be targets, and trafficking routes have been established to exploit them.

Preventing Trafficking

Moving out along the trade chain, WCS works with governments and other law enforcement partners to dismantle wildlife trafficking networks that drive the illegal hunting. We do this by increasing the risk of wildlife trafficking by identifying, targeting and removing the most important criminals in trafficking networks, through established judicial systems.

Trade choke points can change rapidly along with trade routes. Hence, WCS focuses on gathering and managing information on the activities of wildlife trafficking networks and the criminals that run them, from local to national to international, creating and sharing intelligence products with government enforcement agencies, and improving communications at the national

and international scale to implement proactive enforcement activities. Our intelligence-led enforcement approach increasingly focuses on long-term support and mentoring, building on short-term training workshops, and we help our government partners convert actionable intelligence into action. This approach has already led to enhanced enforcement operations resulting in the successful arrest, prosecution, and conviction of targeted wildlife criminals in several countries, including Indonesia, India, and the Republic of the Congo.

With the vital support of the U.S. Government agencies such as USAID, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, we have achieved measurable success in reducing poaching and shutting down criminal networks engaged in wildlife trafficking. For example, in Indonesia, WCS's Wildlife Crimes Unit (WCU) performs intelligence work and assists law enforcement, and raises public awareness through the media. The WCU works with, and provides training for, various key agencies including the police, the Supreme Court of Indonesia, the Attorney General's Office, Customs and Excise, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, and the Financial Transactions and Analysis Centre. WCU investigators gather information on wildlife poaching and trafficking using IBM i2 software, and provide the information to enforcement agencies to conduct sting operations. Since the unit was formed in 2003, more than 1,000 prosecutors have been trained; 70 percent of the tiger criminal networks in the Leuser landscape (Sumatra) and Java and 30 percent of the manta and shark networks in Eastern Indonesia have been dismantled; and more than 600 suspects have been arrested, with a sentencing rate of over 90 percent and a repeat offender rate of less than 10 percent. Furthermore, we are already seeing signs that our ultimate goal is being achieved -- wildlife populations are stabilizing or increasing in many of the landscapes where we work.

Support from the U.S. Government is also helping us to realize success at the regional, transcontinental and international levels to address trafficking. We are working along key trade routes, such as the one between Mozambique and Vietnam and China, to bring together law enforcement officials to agree on principles for mutual legal assistance treaties and set the stage for collaboration on intelligence-led enforcement. We are also seeing closer cooperation between the Chinese government and business communities and Southeast Asian countries such as Lao and Indonesia where there are deep relationships and established trade routes. WCS works with the Ugandan Government and Chinese businesses operating in Uganda to develop guidance that can inform not only operations in Uganda but across Africa. Increasingly, we are connecting counter wildlife trafficking expertise in Asia with relevant personnel in Latin America, where a growing crisis for jaguars, freshwater turtles and cage birds is gaining regional and international visibility.

Tackling wildlife trafficking requires strong legal frameworks to change at the local, national and international levels. WCS works to help ensure that governments strengthen wildlife crime laws and improve their enforcement, as well as to make it more difficult for consumers to purchase illegally and/or unsustainably sourced wildlife products. We are working to ensure that criminal justice systems and relevant government agencies have robust laws and penalties for combating wildlife crime that act as a deterrent, and legal procedures and followed through prosecution and sentencing of criminals convicted of wildlife crimes.

In the case of ivory, a facilitator of the illegal trade was that, although international commercial trade has been prohibited by CITES since 1990, many countries, including the U.S., still had legal domestic ivory markets. Those facilitated the laundering of illegal ivory into the market. WCS launched a comprehensive campaign to raise awareness in the United States that up to 96 elephants a day were being poached across Africa. Responding to a call from African countries for a global closure of domestic ivory markets, and determined that the US Government should set a global example, the 96 Elephants Campaign (www.96elephants.org) pushed for a U.S. ban on all commercial ivory sales, to demonstrate to other consumer countries that it is possible to close ivory markets. The U.S. and China now have bans on commercial domestic ivory sales, and

the UK has announced that it will also do so. This growing momentum is codified in IUCN and CITES Resolutions calling on all governments to shut down their domestic ivory markets.

Controlling Markets

In the long term, it is vital to eliminate demand for illegal wildlife products, and to prevent consumers from being able to purchase ivory and other illegal wildlife. WCS believes that efforts to reduce demand must be science-based, culturally specific, and focused not only on the desire of people to own a product, but on how to change their buying behavior. WCS and several other organizations have run an array of different programs in China, Vietnam and other parts of Asia to discourage purchases of illegal wildlife products. This takes place through both legal reform (i.e., removing the option to purchase wildlife products), or through analysis of wildlife demand and awareness raising campaigns to effect long-term behavioral change among key populations and within key markets. In Peru, WCS launched the award winning "If You Buy, You Are an Accomplice" campaign to change the attitudes of unsuspecting buyers, recognized by the National Association of Advertisers (ANDA) Award (<http://sicompraserescomplice.pe/>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8-DPgXsO_o).

Other Sectors

Corruption at all levels facilitates wildlife crime, and undermines the rule of law, good governance, and sustainable development. The United States must pay attention to the scourge of corruption, and take appropriate action through diplomatic and other channels to address this problem. We support increased scrutiny of national obligations under both the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), including the Implementation Review Mechanism, and the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC). We are pleased that the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has taken the lead on developing anti-corruption guidelines under the auspices of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC), and we encourage the U.S. to focus on anti-corruption efforts in future international assistance programs.

We must work together to engage other stakeholders in wildlife trafficking, including postal systems and courier companies, social media and e-commerce companies, and entities involved with online financial transactions and the regulation of money laundering. WCS welcomes discussion on how existing measures governing online payment systems in the United States, including payment systems integrated with online sales platforms, can incorporate measures to combat payments associated with illegal wildlife trade. We also welcome the expertise of financial crime units and anti-money laundering practitioners to that effect.

We understand the Committee will be considering the DELTA Act today, which would call on USAID to develop a conservation strategy for the Okavango Delta, one of the largest freshwater inland wetlands on the planet (<http://www.okacom.org/okavango-river-basin>) with Botswana that contains the largest remaining elephant populations in Africa, and Angola with some of the highest reported poaching rates. The U.S. Government has a role to play not only for elephant conservation, but also for identifying biodiversity priorities to protect the world's most ecologically intact places with the greatest biodiversity and resilience, as well as those strategic priorities that promote sustainable development (www.usaid.gov/biodiversity/policy). These priorities are supported by the NGO conservation sector, particularly WCS. It is so important that the United States continue to demonstrate its leadership on the global stage as the threats to the world's conservation heritage bleed into national security threats growing beyond existing capabilities.

What More can the U.S. Government do Support Combating Wildlife Trafficking?

Even though we are having some successes where sufficient resources and effective management are exist, we are still not bringing this up to the necessary scale to save many important populations of multiple species, or to allow reduced populations to recover. Enforcement efforts need to be better funded and, crucially, better managed in many places, with attention to transparency and anti-corruption programs. Moreover, local enforcement teams must work in cooperation with local communities as true partners in the protection effort. Securing

wildlife populations against the types of poaching prevalent in many areas also improves security and good governance for local people.

Urgently needed is targeted action and funding to address wildlife crime at points all along the trade chain. The U.S. Congress has directed funding to anti-poaching and anti-trafficking since fiscal year 2014, doubling the amount to \$90 million by fiscal years 2017 and 2018. However, the current Administration's FY19 Budget proposes deep cuts to critical federal programs that combat wildlife trafficking. In the Administration's Budget proposal, the USAID Biodiversity Program is cut 72 percent from \$269 million to \$75 million and the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) is cut from \$40 million to \$7 million with no commitment to continue supporting longstanding protected areas and combating wildlife trafficking programs in the region at the end of its current phase of work. The Combating Wildlife Trafficking initiative implemented by State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement and USAID is cut more than 50 percent from \$90 million to \$38 million. The Global Environment Facility is cut more than 50 percent from \$140 million to \$68 million in the midst of the 7th Replenishment negotiations. WCS is very concerned about the potential harmful impacts of these proposed cuts, and we are pleased to see that 74 Members of Congress and 26 Senators urged Appropriators to fully restore these ill-advised funding cuts at a time when so much more needs to be done on the ground for wildlife being used to fuel corruption and instability. In addition, cutting these funds will undermine long-standing US investments, where in many countries we are seeing real progress in curbing poaching and wildlife trafficking. The U.S. Government should urgently commit to a 4th Phase of CARPE that will continue to strengthen capacity of protected areas to counter-poaching and combat wildlife trafficking delivered through mechanisms that conservation not-for-profits can manage accordingly. All of these federal funding accounts that support international conservation and combating wildlife trafficking must be restored or the gains secured from previous investments will be undone in short order.

The END Wildlife Trafficking Act mandates that the Task Force to Combat Wildlife Trafficking establish Combating Wildlife Trafficking Strategic Plans for the 26 Focus Countries by August 2018. The Strategic Assessments conducted by U.S. Missions and Embassies were mandated by the END Wildlife Trafficking Act to be completed by Feb. 2018 have still not been made publically available, and were conducted using varying processes across missions to collect baseline data from non-governmental organizations implementing programs in those 26 Focus Countries. In developing the Focus Country Strategic Plans, WCS has only been consulted in eight of the 19 countries where we are actively working, despite the END Wildlife Trafficking Act calling for full stakeholder engagement in the development of such strategies. Those eight countries are Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Republic of Congo, DRC and Madagascar. While the process of identifying the Focus Countries was based in best available scientific data on populations declines, seizures and criminal prosecutions, countries where little data are available have been under-recognized. These tend to be countries in Latin America. Recent jaguar beheadings have demonstrated an emerging threat to big cats related to trafficking to Asian markets as substitutes for tiger parts.

We appreciate that the U.S. Government has successfully raised the profile of wildlife trafficking as a serious crime and provides tools and law enforcement attaches overseas to tackle this serious crime. Operation Crash, Operation Thunderbird, ARREST and other law enforcement efforts (www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/03/268182.htm) have built enforcement capacity, yielded prosecutions and seizures of criminal assets. But much more needs to be done to build on these efforts. Financial crimes and the platforms through which wildlife trafficking occurs need to be shut down. E-commerce, postal systems, courier companies, and the transportation sector need to dialogue on how existing measures governing online payment systems in the United States, including payment systems integrated with online sales platforms, can incorporate measures to combat payments associated with illegal wildlife trade. The expertise of financial crime units and anti-money laundering practitioners are gravely needed.

We cannot let our guard down and think that the work in the United States is done. Just last week, the House of Representatives was considering a proposal to remove foreign listed species from the Endangered Species Act, the legal underpinning for the U.S. Ivory Ban, and a bipartisan beacon of conservation leadership to the world. WCS thanks Chairman Royce for leading the voices of opposition and eliminating that amendment to the Farm Bill, thereby maintaining the existing legal standards for removing threatened and endangered species from the wild only where it can be demonstrated that such actions will enhance the survival of the species.

It is vital that the United States continues to demonstrate its leadership on the global stage as the threats to the world's conservation heritage grow into national security threats beyond the capability of one actor, one non-governmental organization, or one government to solve. We need focused, coordinated action and leadership, which the United States is in the ideal position to provide, if the world's wild species, wild places, and vulnerable people living alongside them, are to thrive into future generations.