

**STATEMENT ON H.R. 4341, *Critically Endangered Animals
Conservation Act***
Chairman Jared Huffman
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources
(560 words, ~3 min)

Now I'll recognize myself to speak on H.R. 4341, the Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Act.

I'd like to thank Rep. Buchanan for joining me on the bill and helping to lead this effort, along with my colleagues on the Committee and other bipartisan Members who have cosponsored the bill. While we don't often hear a positive narrative in this Committee, wildlife conservation should be a bipartisan issue because it is important for healthy ecosystems and communities around the U.S. and around the world.

As I said in my opening statement, we must act now to address the extinction crisis. We must act for everyone who depends on ecosystem services and for future generations who deserve to experience a world as rich in biodiversity as we do today.

This bill would establish the Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Fund, to be administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the successful Multinational Species Conservation Funds.

The existing conservation funds are critical for wildlife conservation around the world, including programs for elephants, great apes, and marine turtles. This new fund established by the bill would complement existing Fish and Wildlife international conservation efforts by focusing on the animal species most at risk on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List, the most comprehensive global assessment on the conservation status of species.

This is a critical need because not all species face the same risk. Those with small populations or narrow distributions face a greater risk of extinction. The Critically Endangered Animals Conservation fund would focus on species especially at risk like snow leopards, Andean cats, African penguins, white backed vultures, and Bali starlings that are facing extinction.

The bill would establish the new fund and provide competitive grants for the conservation and protection of wildlife outside of the United States. Eligible projects would focus on habitats, research and monitoring, conservation management, and training, outreach, and capacity building efforts that help to conserve and restore populations of critically endangered species. The bill authorizes \$5 million per year through fiscal year 2025, which matches authorization levels for the other Multinational Species Conservation Funds.

From 2009 to 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service managed the Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Fund, which funded more than 100 projects addressing many of the key problems causing the decline of around 70 species. Grants were leveraged with almost double their amounts in matching funds.

This fund was among the most popular and competitive of all international grants programs and a vital addition to the existing Multinational Species Conservation Funds, addressing threats from illegal wildlife trade, improving wildlife health, mitigating

human wildlife conflict, adapting to climate change, and removing invasive species.

While funding for the program lapsed in 2015, it is a critical piece of the Fish and Wildlife Service's international conservation portfolio, as noted in this support letter from 20 major international conservation organizations. They write: "Whereas the Multinational Species Conservation Funds supports iconic species...the Critically Endangered Animals Conservation Funds covered imperiled species...that desperately need active help to prevent further loss in the wild." I'd like to enter this letter for the record.

The U.S. plays an important role in wildlife conservation around the world, and this bill would help continue this leadership role and build capacity in communities around the world.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today.