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|| Introduction ||

On behalf of the Wildlife Conservation Society, I thank Chairman Fleming and members of the Subcommittee for the invitation to testify again before this Subcommittee. I am Dr. John G. Robinson, Executive Vice President and Chief Conservation Officer with the Wildlife Conservation Society, which was established by visionary conservationists such as Teddy Roosevelt in 1895. With a mission to conserve wildlife and wild places, the Bronx Zoo-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has over its 115-year history expanded operations into 65 countries, and today we work in landscapes and seascapes that contain nearly 25% of Earth's biodiversity across Africa, Asia, and the Americas. We are able to do so with the dedicated support of over 4,000 staff including 200 wildlife biologists, landscape ecologists, and field veterinarians. We are a trusted global organization that puts science into effective conservation action and the only organization with a global network of field conservation programs and partners, a wide range of curatorial, veterinary and educational expertise, and a complex of urban zoos that maintain, exhibit, breed, rescue and study a wide range of species.

I testify in support of the enactment of the following pieces of legislation: H.R. 50, *Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act of 2011*, H.R. 1760, *Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2011*, and H.R. 1761, *Marine Turtle Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2011*. I will demonstrate the continued investment of the U.S. government in global species conservation during these tough fiscal times and explain the direct and indirect benefits of such investment to U.S. interests. WCS would like to thank Representatives Don Young, George Miller and Pedro Pierluisi for introducing these pieces of legislation and Chairman Fleming and the Members of the Subcommittee for recognizing the importance of the programs to be reauthorized through H.R. 50, H.R. 1760, and HR 1761.

|| Primary Rationale for Continued Investment: Plight of Global Priority Species||

The Multinational Species Conservation Funds (MSCF) are targeted investments in global priority species such as tigers, elephants, rhinoceros, great apes and sea turtles. This program came about due to strong bipartisan support to address the threats responsible for species declines, which began with the

enactment of the African Elephant Conservation Act in 1988 to answer the illegal trade in ivory. Each of the species supported through these funds are subject to increased pressures from poaching, habitat destruction and other environmental factors. The following paragraphs briefly highlight the status of the species covered under the MSCF that WCS works to conserve in the wild:

Tigers

Wild tigers (*Panthera tigris*) are threatened by poaching and the gradual degradation of their habitat and prey base. Poaching for the international trade to China including Tibet has resulted in decline and local extinction of populations across the tiger's range, and breeding populations in a number of countries, including Cambodia, China, DPR Korea and Vietnam, are no longer self-sustaining. Even in India, which contains half of all remaining tigers in the wild, a number of reserves such as Panna and Sariska in Rajasthan have lost their tigers. Tigers now occupy only 7% of their historical range. Only around 3,000 tigers exist in the wild today, of which only 1,000 are breeding females.

Elephants

Both African and Asian elephant species are protected by MSCF-backed research and conservation programs. African elephants (genus *Loxodonta*) continue to be threatened by poaching and habitat loss. Between 1979 and 1989, the population was estimated to have halved from 1.2 million to between 500,000 and 700,000. The ban in trade in ivory in 1989 halted the steep decline, but over the last three years we have seen a dramatic increase in the proportion of illegally killed elephants, especially in Central and West Africa. This increase is correlated with high levels of poverty at a site level, and increased demand and higher prices for ivory in international markets. West African populations have shrunk to less than 10,000. Central African populations are approximately under 100,000 elephants. For instance, in Zakouma National Park in Chad, the last stronghold for the savanna elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) of Central Africa's Sahel region, fewer than 500 individuals remain, down from an estimated 3,000 in 2006. In Asia, the number of wild elephants (*Elephas maximus*) has been estimated at only about 50,000, but this is a crude guess. The predominant threat to wild populations is the continued habitat loss and degradation. Asian elephants only occupy 9 percent of their historical range, are on the verge of being extirpated in Vietnam, and are already extirpated in Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq.

Great Apes

Great apes face grave threats: hunting and illegal wildlife trade to supply bushmeat and pets to urban markets; habitat destruction through logging, mining, and agriculture from local slash-and-burn to large-scale commercial plantations; and the spread of devastating infectious diseases such as Ebola. The rarest of the four subspecies of gorilla, the Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*), which is

found on the border between Nigeria and Cameroon, has a population of less than 300 individuals. Mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*), which total only about 720 individuals, are threatened by encroachment into protected areas. As for chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*), the population is 80 percent lower than 50 years ago, even with strong recovery programs in place. Fewer than 7,000 Sumatran orangutans (*Pongo abelii*) remain in the wild. Population decline is primarily a consequence of the accelerating destruction of their native forest habitat by loggers, small-scale farmers, and agribusiness.

Marine Turtles

Seven species of marine turtles currently navigate the oceans of which six species are listed in threatened categories on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List and included in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES): green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), the loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), the hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), the Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), and the olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). All marine turtles require 10-40 years to reach sexual maturity, nest on beaches, and are found from inshore reefs to deep oceans, making them vulnerable to a wide range of threats throughout their lives, including human and animal predation of their eggs, hatchlings and adults, oil spills, climate change, and being killed as bycatch. The IUCN global assessments for sea turtles, conducted over the past decade, show a 48 to 67 percent decline in the number of green turtle females nesting annually over the last three generations, and an 84 to 87 percent decline for hawksbills over the same time period. For leatherbacks, scientists in the 1990s estimated over 70 percent in reduction of the global population of adult females in less than one generation.

Every species and subspecies protected by the MSCF continues to face significant threats, but this U.S. government investment provides critical intervention to populations that still exist in the wild. Targeted investment in conservation programs globally can produce successes, as noted below. It would be improper to conclude that conservation projects are ineffective merely because these species are still at risk. Without support from programs such as the MSCF, these animals could have already disappeared from our planet.

|| Why Invest in the Multinational Species Conservation Funds in this Fiscal Climate? ||

Conservation is an American tradition respected the world over and proudly supported at home. For example, a strong constituency for conservation exists among the domestic outdoor recreation, fishing and game industries, which annually contribute \$730 billion to the US economy, and support 6.5 million jobs.

Although preservation of biodiversity and prevention of species extinctions are the central benefits, conservation programs are multifaceted investments that aid U.S. global policy priorities at various levels:

Global conservation maintains the U.S. legacy and model of protecting species:

The United States was the first country to make conservation of nature a national goal and as a result, current generations benefit from wild landscapes and charismatic species such as elk, pronghorn and bison. On an international scale, our prominent conservation tradition provides inspiration and guidance to other nations, which have followed American values and strategies by establishing national parks or refuges, designating wilderness areas, monitoring threatened species, and limiting or preventing habitat degradation and destruction. U.S. leadership in conservation enables us to uphold rigorous standards in negotiating several international treaties and commitments impacting species conservation, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which came about as a result of U.S. leadership in 1973.

Wildlife conservation programs are a modest but essential piece of the United States' engagement with the developing world. Through the MSCF programs, the U.S. supplements the efforts of developing countries that are struggling to balance the immediate economic needs of their populations and the need to maintain ecosystem services and conserve biodiversity. MSCF programs help to sustain wildlife populations, address threats by controlling illegal poaching, reducing human-wildlife conflict, and protecting 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. As former Speaker Newt Gingrich noted in 1995 on the House floor "this is a very small amount of money, but it is symbolically very important because of the signal it sends to people, particularly in Africa and Asia, about whether or not the United States is prepared to reach out and be helpful."

Americans support the Multinational Species Conservation Funds:

No other developed nation makes a strategic investment in global species conservation the way the U.S. government does through the MSCF program. This program has always enjoyed strong bipartisan support in Congress and is represented by a diverse coalition comprised of 32 national and international groups representing more than 20 million Americans. WCS is proud to be an implementing partner of this program and works with other institutions on the coalition such as the World Wildlife Fund, Safari Club International, Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Feld Entertainment, and others. This program has also attracted partners including other developed countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, France, United Kingdom, and the European Union, private corporations like Exxon-Mobil and Disney, and range state governments. In the House of Representatives, MSCF enjoys strong bipartisan support with champions like former

Speaker Newt Gingrich, Representatives Jim Saxton and Wayne Gilchrest and former chairs of the House Natural Resources Committee –Representatives Don Young and George Miller and former leaders of this Subcommittee –Representatives Henry Brown and Madeleine Bordallo. Every original authorization and reauthorization legislation for this program since 1989 has had strong bipartisan support.

The Multinational Species Conservation Funds are a targeted U.S. investment:

The MSCF are an efficient means of meeting the need for international conservation of critical species. Given that the U.S. dollar can be leveraged significantly in developing countries, modest investments in MSCF have reaped unmatched benefits for species conservation. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers the program with great rigor and clearly articulated goals and priorities with minimum overhead costs. In FY2010 alone, MSCF supported only 57 percent of proposals received (216 of the 379 grant proposals) indicating a substantial growing demand to support species conservation as well as a highly competitive and rigorous application process. Low administrative costs ensured that 97 percent of the funds appropriated by Congress were distributed through grants. The MSCF are particularly efficient because they provide a multiplying effect to recipient organizations. For every dollar appropriated by Congress, grant recipients leveraged an additional 1.6 dollars in FY2010, together raising nearly \$19 million in additional funding. Between FY1990 and FY2005, Congress appropriated \$37 million for MSCF, allowing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to make incremental increases in the annual number of projects funded and partners added. During this time, matching and in-kind contributions from partners generated more than \$100 million, supporting projects that could have otherwise been neglected. Without the U.S. Congress's foresight and the U.S. government's leadership, populations of some of the Earth's most revered species would have been extirpated.

The Multinational Species Conservation Funds provide high value at low cost:

There are few programs that can boast of a consistent track record of providing direct conservation assistance to wildlife species as well as the communities involved in saving them and protecting their habitat. The MSCF program exemplifies this strong conservation and fiscally responsible ethic. Foreign assistance costs approximately 1.3 percent of the federal budget, and MSCF comprises only .02 percent of foreign assistance spending.

On June 21, 2011, the Department of the Interior (DOI) released a report on its economic contributions detailing the financial impact of DOI bureaus and programs to the nation's economy. The MSCF program, specifically mentioned in the report, is noted as contributing to U.S. jobs and economy in FY2010. With the \$11.5 million appropriated by Congress, the DOI has calculated the MSCF's economic impact at \$22.6 million while supporting 207 U.S. jobs. The average grant under this program often ranges between \$25,000- \$40,000 while the smallest grants to

recipients have been \$5,000. This reflects the focus of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in supporting on-the-ground conservation projects that are fiscally responsible and have a strong conservation impact, and that they have been poised to respond with rapid action when called upon, for example providing surveillance support in response to organized syndicates poaching for elephant ivory. Apart from the inherent value of wildlife conservation and research, programs funded through MSCF have furthered U.S. interests by supporting American businesses. For example, specialized equipment deployed by wildlife biologists in the field such as dart guns, veterinary devices, mapping, graphics support, etc., is often produced by American manufacturers across major manufacturing states such as Texas, Wisconsin, Michigan and New Jersey.

MSCF help fight the spread of deadly infectious diseases:

As a result of global transport and trade, global health threats can quickly spread from wildlife to human populations. Butchering and eating wild animals (known as bushmeat), especially great apes and other primates because of their genetic similarity to humans, is a particular risk. Emerging infectious diseases such as Ebola are widespread in tropical rainforests and are deadly to both humans and great apes. There is currently no available treatment for those infected with Ebola and the mortality rate can be as high as 90 percent. For the past decade WCS's Animal Health Monitoring Network, funded in part by the Great Ape Conservation Fund, has encouraged rapid reporting and response to wildlife mortalities and illnesses. This network has provided critical information to researchers and public health agencies including the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health, and serves as an early-warning system to possible future outbreaks in human communities. Human cases of measles, influenza, and tuberculosis—infectious diseases which are also extremely dangerous to great apes—are common in communities living near or in great ape habitat. Over the past seven years, WCS has sustained a highly efficient wildlife health surveillance program in the Republic of Congo which has resulted in over 40 great ape carcasses recovered and tested. In 2005, an estimated 5,000 gorillas in northern Congo disappeared, apparently as a result of an outbreak of Ebola, making a strong case for monitoring wildlife and disease in tropical forests to prevent transmission to humans.

MSCF contribute to national security by encouraging alternative channels for diplomacy, respect for rule of law in conflict-prone regions, and alternatives to joining militias:

Long-term investment by the U.S. government in species conservation has several direct benefits. For instance, training of Russian and Chinese personnel in Management Information System (MIST) law enforcement techniques, stewards transboundary collaboration between these governments and provides significant leverage to the U.S. in negotiating broader issues of mutual interest. Additionally, successful anti-poaching efforts inculcate respect for rule of law. MSCF funds

enabled Wildlife Crimes Units in Indonesia to continue to arrest scores of illegal wildlife traders, and the arrest to prosecution ratio is nearly 70 percent (as compared to the national average of 5 percent). U.S. support for global conservation has allowed U.S.-based NGOs to strengthen local governance structures and management capabilities of park rangers, law enforcement units, indigenous governments and local municipalities.

At the strategic level, conservation programs support the establishment of good governance, with concomitant impacts on natural resource management, social security, and economic sustainability. At the tactical level, global conservation programs provide education and jobs that help to stabilize war-torn regions and employ local citizens who might otherwise be recruited by local militias. For example, strengthening the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo provided jobs for hundreds of rangers during that nation's long civil war. These rangers both protected mountain gorillas and their habitat and helped control illegal logging and charcoal manufacturing that provided revenues to the insurgencies.

MSCF support sustainable alternative livelihoods for local people in impoverished regions:

Conservation programs provide livelihood opportunities to local people. For instance, since 2004, with support from the Marine Turtle Conservation Fund, WCS has trained 180 individuals from local communities across Africa and Central America, resulting in both long and short-term employment for local people as researchers. Sixty local women have joined research projects in Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo and other sea turtle sites with support from this fund. WCS's efforts on Ebola surveillance in the Republic of Congo alone has supported 62 eco-guards, training for 20 researchers in carcass sampling and 30 field team leaders in health and biological sampling techniques; and educational programs on Ebola for over 915 hunters across 71 villages. Besides providing these services, the Great Ape Conservation Fund sustained and provided assistance to hire 4 field assistants, part-time employment for 74 porters and 2 U.S. veterinarians and biologists, 2 U.S. educators and 4 part-time Congolese biologists.

Strong MSCF success stories contribute to U.S. leadership, goodwill and commitment to conservation:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a strong record in choosing projects for funding which will have the strongest conservation outcome. Since 2007, the MSCF has supported WCS operations in 12 African nations, helped in training 2,420 staff, generating nearly \$7 million in matching funds for U.S. funds and sustaining 44 partner organizations. In Asia, the MSCF has supported WCS operations in 10 countries, training over a thousand staff and sustaining 42 U.S. wildlife biologists and field veterinarians while providing local employment opportunities for 166 essential personnel such as eco-guards, law enforcement personnel, porters,

technical assistants. These sustained partnerships have resulted in longstanding friendship and cooperation between the U.S. and range state wildlife protection and natural resource agencies.

WCS appreciates that the partnership with MSCF has allowed us to achieve significant successes on the ground. These successes include:

- In the world's newest democracy, South Sudan, WCS has collaborated with the government and local stakeholders to establish a foundation for natural-resource management, land-use planning, and conservation to reduce conflict and catalyze economic development. WCS surveys in 2007 with help from the African Elephant Conservation Fund found 8,000 elephants and an annual mammal migration that rivals in animal numbers those of the Serengeti. Large tracts of savannas and wetlands have survived decades of war and provide a real opportunity to create a thriving tourism industry. The catalytic role of the U.S. government in conservation has promoted the conditions for a long-term success which hinges on the country's natural endowment.
- This year, the Republic of Congo is in the process of creating Ntokou-Pikounda National Park, which will protect an additional 15,000 western lowland gorillas from habitat loss and poaching. The establishment of this area derives from a grant from the Great Ape Conservation Fund, which tallied in 2008 more than 125,000 western lowland gorillas in the larger landscape of 18,000 square miles.
- MSCF helped WCS conduct research and support frameworks to create the Ulu Sebuyau National Park and the Sedilu Orangutan Sanctuary for the protection of orangutans in Malaysia.
- Due to MSCF funds four Tiger Reserves in India were made significantly larger. The MSCF supported the Indian scientists who gathered the technical information on tigers, elephants and other wildlife and who led the efforts to expand Anshi-Dandeli Tiger Reserve, Bhadra Tiger Reserve, Nagarahole Tiger Reserve and Bandipur Tiger Reserve.
- MSCF funds supported the discovery of the world's largest nesting site for leatherback sea turtles in Gabon on the West Coast of Africa. Without MSCF, fewer than half of the nesting beaches currently protected would be safe for reproduction of this endangered species, and thousands of turtles would perish each year.

|| Recommendations to the U.S. Congress||

As demonstrated through this testimony, the MSCF conserves gravely threatened elephants, tigers, rhinos, great apes and marine turtles and further research and conservation is necessary to secure their important roles in ecosystems. Functional ecosystems in turn are critical to provide the services necessary for human well-being. To this end, WCS requests the U.S. Congress to act swiftly to reauthorize this program with the following considerations:

Maintain existing authorization levels: WCS understands the tough choices that the Congress needs to make in light of policy and fiscal priorities. WCS requests the Subcommittee closely consider the current funding levels for the MSCF, which average roughly around 35-40 percent of their existing authorization levels. Maintaining existing authorization levels would allow the MSCF to grow in the future enabling the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to award more grants and specifically help in achieving conservation successes. Cuts to authorization levels would not guarantee savings to the federal budget. On the contrary, cuts would certainly limit the growth of this invaluable and fiscally responsible program when our budgetary climate stabilizes.

Enhance discretion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service remains deeply committed to the conservation of global species under the MSCF program. WCS requests the Subcommittee to protect its administrative functions and costs while maintaining its discretion to fund projects in high priority geographical locations. Such discretion would not only continue to foster partnerships with U.S. based NGOs and other entities but would amplify the reach of the program in range states that are political, military and economic allies of the United States.

Expand the scope of the Marine Turtle Conservation Fund (MTCF) to freshwater turtles and tortoises and limit its jurisdiction to sea turtles occurring in U.S. territories: Like marine turtles, tortoises and freshwater turtles are long-lived species that mature late in life and are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Today their respective habitat is being increasingly fragmented, polluted or destroyed. Of about 318 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises, 168 have thus far been assessed as threatened with extinction and are listed on the IUCN Red List. Of the estimated 90 species in Asia, more than 50 percent are considered to be either critically endangered or endangered according to the IUCN. An overwhelming number of freshwater turtles and tortoises are collected, traded in the illegal pet trade; and killed, and consumed as food and in traditional medicine—this is happening at an unsustainable rate. Some species of freshwater turtles and tortoises are down to their last few individuals and stopgap measures, including captive breeding, are underway to prevent their extinction. Together with the China Zoo Society, Changsha and Suzhou Zoos, WCS is helping with captive breeding techniques to save the Yangtze giant soft-shell, (*Rafetus swinhoei*)—the last chance of survival for the world's largest freshwater turtle. WCS endorses the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's desire to conserve freshwater turtles and tortoises and recommends that H.R. 1761 expand eligible species accordingly while ensuring such action does not diminish the modest level of funds allocated to marine turtles.

An analysis of annual federal spending on sea turtles reveals that the MTCF is extremely targeted in terms of investing where the greatest needs exist. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service cooperates with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to invest in sea turtle conservation in the United States

totaling over \$25 million annually compared to \$1.4 million on threatened species globally. Should H.R. 1761 expand the jurisdiction of this program, WCS recommends that such expansion be limited to sea turtles occurring in U.S. territories only.

Maintain Multinational Species Conservation Funds as an umbrella program: While Congress has considered each species fund authorization at different periods of time, collectively the MSCF program has gained name recognition widely in Congress, within multiple Administrations and among partners. The Congress has a rare opportunity to reauthorize this program through H.R. 50, H.R. 1760 and H.R. 1761 together under the banner of the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act. WCS requests that H.R. 50 be amended to incorporate H.R. 1760 and H.R. 1761 to reflect this recommendation. This would not only ensure continuity of strategic investments but would also place these programs on the same reauthorization cycle.

In conclusion, congressional action on H.R. 50, H.R. 1760 and H.R. 1761, will reaffirm the leadership of the U.S. Government within the global community, underscore U.S. commitment to international treaty obligations, and encourage coordinated efforts to save the world's global priority species. WCS urges the Subcommittee and the Congress as a whole to act quickly and positively on the reauthorization of these critical pieces of legislation. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and to work with you on this issue.