

Testimony

of

**Dr. John G. Robinson
Executive Vice President, Conservation and Science**

Wildlife Conservation Society

before the

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U.S. House of Representatives**

regarding

HR 4455 Wildlife Without Borders Act

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Madame Chairwoman, Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on the HR 4455, *Wildlife Without Borders Act*. I am Dr. John G. Robinson, Executive Vice President, Conservation and Science with the Wildlife Conservation Society, which was founded with the help of Theodore Roosevelt in 1895 as the New York Zoological Society. Headquartered at the Bronx Zoo, WCS seeks to conserve wild lands and wildlife, and we operate in 64 countries around the world. Over our more than 100 year history, we have helped establish more than 150 national parks, and today help manage scores of others. We work to save some of the world's most charismatic wildlife species across their whole geographic range. Accordingly, we have a keen interest in the *Wildlife Without Borders Act*.

The Wildlife Conservation Society would like to thank Don Young (R-AK), the Ranking Member of the Full Natural Resources Committee for introducing this piece of legislation and the Subcommittee Chair, Congresswoman Bordallo (D-GU) and the Members of the Subcommittee for recognizing the need and urgency expressed in the *Wildlife Without Borders Act*. The Act will provide additional support for global priority species and landscape level conservation beyond our own borders, and recognizes the sentiments of the American people about the desperate urgency to conserve the last remaining wildlife and wild places of our planet. The *Wildlife Without Borders Act* both strengthens in-country wildlife management and global initiatives to address key threats to species conservation, such as climate change, emerging wildlife diseases, human wildlife conflict, and the impact of extractive industries on wildlife habitats.

Congressional authorization for the Wildlife Without Borders program affirms the leadership of the U.S. Government within the international community, underscoring our commitment to our international wildlife treaty obligations, and encouraging coordinated international efforts to save wildlife species. Passage of this legislation supports the objectives of species conservation and capacity building of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

We should conserve wildlife species because they are integral to the functioning of the ecological systems upon which we all depend, they are prized across most cultures, and they are critical to many of the economic relationships that link people with nature. Species are threatened by deforestation, habitat loss, over hunting and fishing, emerging diseases, and the dislocations wrought by climate change. Many of the most critically threatened species are found in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and South America, and as citizens of the world, we have a collective duty to protect this planet's biological richness. The passage of this legislation will take us a step closer in that direction. The *Wildlife Without Borders Act* will complement existing species and landscape-based initiatives and strengthening partnerships between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local governments, conservation organizations, other federal agencies mandated to assist with global biodiversity conservation

My testimony recognizes that the *Wildlife Without Borders Act* will backstop existing U.S. Government commitments to the Multinational Species Conservation Funds through the support of programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to strengthen management capacity in countries with globally important species. That capacity is essential if we are to address global threats to wildlife species.

Wildlife Without Borders Program – Species Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program is recognized as being a leader in the conservation of global priority species, those species which are biologically, culturally, and socio-economically important, and which are subject to both anthropogenic and natural threats. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has provided both funding and technical support to countries around the world. Its cost efficient programs have built technical and management capacity, leverage private and corporate philanthropy, and engaged other federal agencies in efforts to conserve wildlife species.

The impact of the USFWS International Program has been enhanced with the Multinational Species Conservation Funds, which, starting in 1990, has funded successful programs for the protection of tigers, rhinoceros, great apes, elephants and sea turtles. Thanks to the support of Chairwoman Bordallo (D-GU), Rep. Tom Udall (D-NM) and Rep. Henry Brown (R-SC) the House of Representatives has passed a bill just last month to develop another species program for great cats and rare canids.

With your permission, I would like to offer three brief points on the Multinational Species Conservation Funds. The first is to make clear that the enactment of the *Wildlife Without Borders Act* should in no way impact the implementation or limit or reduce the authorization levels of the existing and pending species funds. The second is a plea to increase budget allocations for these funds. Existing Multinational Species Conservation funds have authorized funding levels totaling \$30 million, but only recently have reached \$8 million in the FY08 Interior Appropriations Act. Actual funding levels for existing programs need to be at or near authorized levels. And third, the Wildlife Conservation Society urges a more comprehensive approach to species conservation, augmenting single species or single taxa efforts, with a flexible approach to conserve “flagship” or priority species. I know that with an appropriate commitment of staff and resources a science-based strategy for prioritizing conservation funding for global priority species and the cross-cutting threats to conservation, including but not limited to climate change, emerging wildlife disease and wildlife trade, can be developed.

Wildlife Without Borders Program – Regional Program

The United States has a long-standing commitment to assist other countries with the conservation of global priority species. Training wildlife professionals with the skills necessary to manage these resources is a hallmark of science-based conservation. The *Wildlife Without Borders Act* emphasizes the focal role capacity building in foreign countries plays in promoting conservation action.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program, beginning in the 1980s, helped establish and support, both technically and financially, graduate training programs in wildlife conservation in Costa Rica, Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina. These programs have provided the foundation for the growing management capacity in Latin America. In India, the International Program was responsible (through its management of India’s repayment in rupees of PL 480 humanitarian assistance) for the establishment and support of the Wildlife Institute of India, as

well as conservation assistance to local non-governmental organizations, state governments and private entities. Strong national programs for the conservation of such species as the tigers, Asian elephants, and Asian lions, were the direct result of this support.

The Wildlife Conservation Society has a long history of working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program. Let me give one recent example. The northern part of Guatemala, an area known as the Petén, is home to the multi-use Maya Biosphere Reserve, established in 1990 to protect approximately 16,000 kilometers of Guatemalan forests. This is the largest protected area in Mesoamerica, and home to more than 95 species of mammals and 400 species of birds. WCS has worked with local partners for over 15 years to protect the wildlife and forests of northern Guatemala from a wide range of threats such as forest fires, unsustainable agricultural expansion, wildlife poaching and poorly planned large-scale development projects. With the help of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, WCS has been able to: (1) plan and monitor the sustainable extraction of non-timber forest resources, including local wildlife management initiatives; (2) train local people in field research, fire fighting and vigilance skills; and (3) monitor populations of key wildlife species.

The *Wildlife Without Borders Act* should continue to support a successful grant program in Africa, a continent characterized by stunning wildlife species living in a huge range of ecosystems, but where many governments lack the capacity to steward their natural resources. The result is that pressures for short-term results to improve living standards often trump sustainable management options. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program has used its limited resources wisely to increase human and institutional capacity, mitigate the impact of extractive industries, address issues of the illegal trade in bushmeat, and develop species specific conservation programs.

The Wildlife Conservation Society would recommend restarting the regional program in Asia, which closed with the exhaustion of PL 480 funds in 2002. Across Asia, ancient cultures and religions evolved with a deep respect for, and dependence on, the natural world. Many of Asia's border regions run along the ridges of some of the world's great mountain ranges – the Himalayas, Pamirs, Tien Shans, Karakorams, and Hindu Kush. These ranges serve as both some of the last great wild places left on earth and home to some of the most majestic wildlife. The continent contains the last great temperate grasslands left on earth – the great steppes of the Central Asian states, Mongolia, China, and Russia – as well as significant tropical forests in South Asia, South East Asia and Indochina. Everywhere, burgeoning populations and expanding economies lead to dwindling natural resources. The Asian medicine trade preys on bears for their gall bladders, tigers for their bones, and rhinos for their horns. Logging demands destroy forest habitats that are home to countless rare wildlife species, and local agriculture draws from watersheds, sucking them dry. And wildlife markets in Asia have helped spawn emerging diseases, such as SARS, that represent a global threat to public health, food security, as well as to conservation itself.

Let me draw on two examples, where the Wildlife Conservation Society is especially active. An expansion of the Wildlife Without Borders Regional Program could support institution and capacity building to help save the unique Pamir Mountains –called “the roof of the world” – shared by Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. This region is renowned for spectacular

scenery, diverse cultural traditions, and a great variety of plants and animals. The snow leopard and the Marco Polo sheep – both symbols of this mountain world – wander across international borders from one country to another, visible symbols of a common resource. A regional program could also contribute to saving Central Asia's great steppes, which represent the last intact temperate grassland remaining on earth. Here, huge herds of Mongolian gazelles still number in the millions, moving across the landscape (and across borders) in a manner comparable to the migratory spectacle of Alaskan caribou or Serengeti wildebeest. Yet for species like the saiga antelope, threats have reduced herds once numbering in the millions by 97% in only 15 years.

In order for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program to effectively administer its Regional Program with the recommended growth areas in India and Asia the authorized funding level would need to be at least \$30 million or roughly \$5 million per Regional Program.

Wildlife Without Borders Program – Global Program

In furtherance of its mission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service implements initiatives through a variety of domestic laws, international treaties, and voluntary agreements, and build global partnerships critical to benefit international wildlife and wildlife habitat conservation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Programs also works in partnership beyond formal treaties and agreements to address cross-cutting threats such as emerging wildlife diseases, climate change, invasive species, wildlife trade, and human-wildlife conflict. While the section of the bill entitled “Global Program” is crafted in general terms with little criteria, I suggest that congressional authorization would allow the agency to address these types of threats with increased capacity and flexibility. Let me elaborate on three threats in which the USFWS International Program has a special capacity.

Wildlife Diseases

As natural habitat is disrupted, and there is increased contact between wildlife and domestic animals, disease have increasingly threatened wildlife species. The great risk to wild populations from emerging diseases spread through trade is evidenced in part by the declines of 43% of all amphibian species worldwide, with one major cause being *Chytridiomycosis*, a fungal disease believed to have been spread by the international trade in African Clawed Frogs. Avian Influenza threatens a wide variety of different species, often dramatically. For instance, an estimated between 5% and 10% of the world population of the barheaded goose (*Anser indicus*) perished in an avian influenza outbreak at China's Qinghai Lake in spring 2005. Many of these emerging diseases (and perhaps 60% of the 1,400 known infectious diseases) are zoonotic – diseases that can pass from animals to people. Avian influenza, HIV/AIDS, SARS, Ebola, monkey pox and West Nile virus are just some examples of the link between the health of people, domestic animals, wildlife and the environment. More than 35 new infectious diseases have emerged in humans since 1980– one new infectious disease in humans every 8 months. Consequences of new, more virulent and mutating pathogens can be devastating for humans and animals. An estimated 40 million people worldwide live with HIV/AIDS, a disease that came from wild primates and spread to people through the consumption of primates, with 3 million AIDS-related deaths reported in 2006. Infectious diseases affect food production, food security

and impact virtually every major global industry—including financial, travel, trade, and tourism sectors worldwide. In the current avian influenza crisis, with hundreds of millions of domestic fowl culled to date, direct economic costs are already in the tens of billions of dollars.

Emerging wildlife-related disease threats, including but not limited to those arising at the wildlife / livestock / human interface, should be addressed at national, regional or global levels as needed through adequate surveillance, science-based policy and interdisciplinary response to reduce the risk of negative impacts on wildlife conservation, livestock agriculture, and/or public health. The Wildlife Conservation Society recommends that the *Wildlife Without Borders Act* strengthen increased capacity building for wildlife diseases monitoring and surveillance activities and lay the foundation for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a comprehensive worldwide wildlife health surveillance system to enhance preparedness. We believe that the Service is strongly placed to coordinate interactions and dialogue between other U.S. government agencies, multilateral institutions, national governments, conservation organizations, veterinary and medical schools, and other partners.

Illegal Wildlife Trade

The illegal trade and unsustainable hunting of wildlife pose critical threats to biodiversity around the world. While ecologically rich tropical forests tend to be the genesis for most of global wildlife trade, the practice has become extremely pervasive with illegal wildlife and wildlife products being traded in markets around the world and often transported to countries such as the United States in large quantities. The problem has escalated dramatically in recent years with depleting forests and massive economic development manifested through construction of roads that have opened up forests to loggers and other resource extractors. Hunting rates by local people rise as they hunt increasingly for sale as well as for subsistence, and as new roads facilitate access to better hunting technologies.

The result is that, across the landscape, both inside and outside parks and reserves, people are harvesting wild species at ever-increasing rates. A voracious appetite for almost anything that is large enough to be eaten, potent enough to be turned into medicine, or lucrative enough to be sold, is stripping wildlife from wild areas – leaving empty forests and an unnatural quiet. This not only is a conservation crisis but also remains a key issue of global health and security as wildlife and animal products transported around the world could potentially can transmit serious diseases.

Due to existing U.S. Government and international investment such as the Coalition Against Wildlife Trade (CAWT) and the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES) a global effort to curb illegal wildlife trade is currently underway. WCS recognizes the leadership of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in addressing this crisis through the existing species funds and the regional programs. I urge this panel to ensure that illegal trade of wildlife and wildlife products remain a priority concern for the *Wildlife Without Borders Act* and support to curb these activities continue to be funded at maximum levels.

Climate Change

Recent estimates suggest that up to 10% of the world's biodiversity may be directly threatened with extinction over the next 100 years by global warming. Mitigating the impact of climate change on wildlife species will require the maintenance of connectivity across the landscape. Global warming is a threat equal to deforestation and habitat loss in many areas. Species living in high latitude and high altitude environments will be the first to see rapid changes in their habitat. The iconic Polar bear is just the harbinger of a wider problem that is already directly affecting the health and persistence of many species. And of course as climate changes, so does the distribution of pathogens and the vectors that carry them, reinforcing the importance of emerging and resurging diseases to conservation, agriculture, and of course human health and well-being.

Climate change related legislation proposed in both the House and the Senate have included provisions for wildlife adaptation. Strategies to direct general revenue generated from the sale of emission allowances to a Wildlife Adaptation Fund should include both wildlife in the United States as well as global priority species around the world. In 2007, WCS joined 20 other member organizations of the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Coalition to urge Chairman Rahall to include wildlife adaptation funding through the *New Direction for Energy Independence, National Security and Consumer Protection Act* to benefit key programs administered the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program. I include a copy of this letter in the appendix section of my testimony. Such wildlife adaptation set asides are likely to generate significant new resources for wildlife related programs, and I encourage this panel to ensure that programs administered by the USFWS International Program and outlined in the *Wildlife Without Borders Act* continue to be considered in these strategic investment decisions.

In order for the USFWS to effectively administer its Global Program with the recommended growth areas to address cross-cutting threats related to climate change, emerging wildlife disease and illegal wildlife trade the authorized funding level would need to be at least \$50 million or such sums as are necessary.

Strengthening Coordination of U.S. Government Investment in Wildlife Conservation

The U.S. government invests significantly in global biodiversity conservation, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the U.S. State Department and other agencies. Such investment is important for (1) directly supporting the conservation of biological diversity, globally important wildlife species, and significant wild lands and ecosystems, (2) promoting good governance and management capacity in countries around the world, and (3) supporting peace and security initiatives. Supporting and promoting transparent and equitable resource governance systems has beneficial social, economic, and environmental consequences, and is an important pathway towards democracy at local, regional, and national levels.

The success of the Wildlife Without Borders program has traditionally been in providing support for capacity building, long-term in-country wildlife management, endangered and migratory species conservation, strategic habitat and natural area conservation, and environmental outreach, education and training. Leveraging funds granted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program has been one of the hallmarks of the department's success. Since 1990,

the Multinational Species Conservation Funds has provided \$73 million in grants for programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America and leveraged \$225 million in partner contributions. Wildlife Without Borders has made \$18 million in grants and generated \$54 million in matching funds.

Grants from the U.S. Government funds can also amplify fund raising opportunities for other organizations. For example, funding from the Rhino-Tiger Conservation Fund has been instrumental to the Wildlife Conservation Society in the development and on-going implementation of tiger conservation projects across the range of the species. The funds have directly leveraged private support from the Save the Tiger Fund of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation which receives funds from ExxonMobil. In addition, early support from the U.S. Government has helped WCS develop our *Tigers Forever* initiative which, in turn, has garnered commitments of \$10 million over the next decade. Leverage can also be measured through long-term sustainable partnerships. Our experience working in partnership with implementing agencies of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership and the Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative have led us to believe that a coordinated effort in cooperation with other federal agencies, foreign governments, international institutions and non-governmental organizations ensures the maximum utilization of limited financial resources. The Congo Basin Forest Partnership and the Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative--made up of a consortium of international institutions, national governments and international NGOs--has leveraged millions of dollars and has institutionalized the protection of valuable tropical forests.

Because of the pivotal and catalytic role played by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Program, I am confident the *Wildlife Without Borders Act* will help develop new relationships and strengthen existing ones through increased collaboration among U.S. Government agencies. I also urge the Subcommittee to take note of the success in leveraging private donations, matching grants and in-kind contributions by conservation groups, corporations and other private entities.

Conclusion

I appreciate the opportunity to come before this distinguished panel to share my experiences and expertise on global wildlife conservation. The Wildlife Conservation Society appreciates the continued support provided by the U.S. Government to wildlife conservation, and we strongly support the reauthorization of the *Wildlife Without Borders Act*. We also urge that you consider authorizing a budget of between \$30 and \$50 million, which would allow strengthening Regional Programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and develop Global Programs that would be able to address cross-cutting global threats such as emerging wildlife diseases, the illegal trade in wildlife species, and climate change. I would be happy to answer any questions