

TESTIMONY OF JANE LYDER, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE REGARDING H.R. 4416, THE GREAT APE CONSERVATION REAUTHORIZATION AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2010

JANUARY 27, 2010

Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Jane Lyder, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks within the Department of the Interior. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss H.R. 4416, the "Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2010." The Department of the Interior greatly appreciates the Subcommittee's continued leadership in international conservation, and strongly supports this bill.

As a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the United States shares responsibility for supporting and implementing measures to provide for the conservation of hundreds of species of plants and animals, both here and abroad. The Multinational Species Conservation Acts were innovative concepts upon their creation, and their concentration on providing technical and financial support to the field continues to play a critical role in conservation. The growing lists of partners and projects supported by the Multinational Species Conservation Acts, in general, and the Great Ape Conservation Act, in particular, demonstrate that they are a proven and successful means to saving some of the planet's most imperiled species and their habitats.

The Great Ape Conservation Act (Act) was authorized by Congress in 2000 and reauthorized in 2005. The Act created the Great Ape Conservation Fund to assist efforts to conserve gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos in Africa, and orangutans and gibbons in Asia. Efforts to conserve apes are frequently compromised by a lack of awareness and insufficient capacity to enforce laws and manage apes and other wildlife. To address this, the Service, through the Great Ape Conservation Fund, emphasizes a collaborative approach to conservation.

Under the Great Ape Conservation Act, the Service's Division of International Conservation administers a competitive grants program to provide financial and technical support for a variety of projects, including: building institutional and human resource capacity, improving law enforcement, educating local communities about conservation issues, providing economic incentives for conservation, and fulfilling the need for robust scientific data on ape species, including research related to distribution and population status and infectious diseases. Funding is delivered to the field rapidly and efficiently to target the most critical conservation needs. To implement these programs, the Service works with conservation partners within the U.S. and the range countries. These collaborators have vast on the ground experience and are experts on the ecology of the species as well as the human dimensions of conservation.

The Great Ape Conservation Fund has provided much of the support necessary to address the myriad of threats confronting apes worldwide. From 2005 to 2009, the Service funded 265 ape conservation projects in more than 20 countries. Much of the success of the Great Ape Conservation Act is due to its direct and coordinated support of on-the-ground conservation projects in Africa and Asia. Projects are implemented by a diverse array of partners, including NGOs, range country governments, and stakeholders at the local and village levels. All projects receive the endorsement of the relevant host government and are coordinated by an extensive network of experts to address emerging threats, share lessons learned, and take advantage of new opportunities for conservation as they arise. The Great Ape Conservation Fund provides a critical complement to other U.S. foreign assistance programs through its focused approach to delivering field-based conservation. Over the course of its existence, our partners and collaborators have more than doubled the \$12.4 million in appropriations to the Great Ape Conservation Fund through matching contributions.

While we have seen many accomplishments in the field, it is important to note that the future survival of great apes is still in question. Great apes have an inherently slow reproductive rate, making them especially sensitive to human disturbance such as hunting and logging, and limiting their resilience.

Great apes continue to be threatened by habitat loss, illegal hunting and the illegal pet trade. The two countries in Central Africa containing 75 percent of the gorilla population, the Republic of Congo and Gabon, have experienced more than a 50 percent reduction in the gorilla population between 1983-2000 as a result of these threats. Identifying and protecting the last great areas of significant conservation interest is a priority under the Great Ape Conservation Act. The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), a partner in the Republic of Congo, was awarded several small grants over a period of six years. Surveys and other research done by their field teams produced an encouraging estimate of 125,000 western lowland gorillas in a vast area known as the 'green abyss.' While this area was known as having significant potential to hold populations of gorillas and other wildlife, until the forests were studied, no one realized the potential of this and other large areas of intact forest to the conservation of great apes. There are numerous other such places that need surveys and, more importantly, immediate and effective conservation projects on the ground.

While the world focuses deserved attention on the Mountain Gorillas of Rwanda, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo, another subspecies of gorilla, the Cross-River Gorilla, is even more endangered. The Cross-River Gorilla inhabits a remote corner of West Africa, straddling the border of Nigeria and Cameroon. It is estimated today that fewer than 300 Cross-River Gorillas remain in about twelve discrete mountain refuges spread across a 12,000 km² landscape, the size of Connecticut. This is a stark comparison to the nearly 600 Eastern Mountain Gorillas remaining in the wild. Based on the small size of the remaining population, its fragmentation across a large landscape and ongoing threats posed by habitat destruction and illegal hunting, the Cross-River Gorilla is recognized by International Union for the Conservation of Nature as *Critically Endangered*.

Although there has been a rapid decline in Cross-River Gorilla populations over the past one hundred years, the results from carefully planned, painstaking research over the last few years have provided renewed hope and direction. The concerted efforts of conservationists and researchers are paying off and the hunting of Cross-River Gorillas for bushmeat has been reduced to the lowest level in decades. Today many key Cross-River Gorilla sites are now under some form of formal or community-based protection. In 2008, support from the Great Ape Conservation Fund helped the government create two new protected areas in Cameroon, benefiting roughly one-fourth of all the known remaining Cross-River Gorillas: the Kagwene Gorilla Sanctuary and Takamanda National Park. Additionally, a trans-boundary management program has been initiated, bringing together government staff on both sides of the border. For the first time in decades, there is real hope for the Cross-River Gorilla and a sense that the final pieces of the conservation jigsaw puzzle can be put into place with concerted action. Applied research, training, outreach, and institutional development of Cameroon's wildlife agency continue to be urgent priorities to ensure the survival of the Cross-River Gorilla and the habitat it depends upon.

In Asia, the Great Ape Conservation Fund is strengthening conservation of both orangutans and gibbons, tackling many similar threats and population declines. The wild population of orangutans is estimated at 50,000 to 60,000 individuals. Orangutans are critically endangered due to habitat loss from logging, peat land drainage, and a rapid expansion in palm oil plantations. In addition, orangutans are killed for meat, medicinal purposes, and for entering agricultural fields, while infants are taken for the pet trade. Left unchecked, such factors will lead to extinction.

In Southwest Kalimantan's Ketapang District of Indonesia, an area that had been recognized as holding some of the highest densities of Southern Bornean orangutan, the Great Ape Conservation Fund has been supporting Fauna and Flora International (FFI) in addressing the threat of large scale conversion of orangutan habitat to oil palm plantations. FFI started an emergency conservation status review in 2007 to identify critical orangutan populations. During the district-wide orangutan population surveys, two new significant populations were discovered. In 2008, FFI followed up with a project that developed an agreement with the district government to stall conversion of forests to oil palm concessions, worked with logging companies to protect high quality orangutan habitat, and developed an awareness program to reduce orangutan hunting by local people. These accomplishments are critical to the conservation of the 2,000 orangutans in the Ketapang District.

Asia's sixteen lesser ape species are known as gibbons, historically ranging widely and abundantly from eastern India, through southern China, throughout Southeast Asia and down to Sumatra, Java and Borneo. However, an expanding human population has obliterated over 90 percent of the forests upon which the gibbons rely. In the last islands of forests that remain, most species of gibbon are hunted for food, and hunted to fulfill the burgeoning demand for gibbons as pets and by consumers of traditional oriental medicine, who believe different gibbon body parts have medicinal properties.

Grants provided by the Great Apes Conservation Fund have been a crucial catalyst in reversing the perilous trend for the Yellow-cheeked Crested gibbon. In the forests of Seima Biodiversity

Conservation Area, WCS has worked with the Government of Cambodia to set up a 3,000 km² conservation area, successfully bringing about drastic reductions in both habitat loss and hunting of all wildlife, including gibbons. In the early years, funding from the Great Ape Conservation Fund was a prominent component of the overall budget and served as “venture capital” that allowed WCS to establish a presence in Seima. Later this funding allowed WCS to document trends in gibbon populations, to work with local communities on reducing their impact on gibbons, and to improve law enforcement at Seima. The annual overall budget for the Seima work is now over \$300,000, an indication of the success of the early investment in the project. Throughout the Seima project, this support was also important in garnering local political support in Cambodia and providing the ability to plan over multi-year time scales. Seima’s Yellow-cheeked Crested gibbons are now on the upswing, with indications of population increases of at least 60 percent since the start of the work seven years ago.

In a far-off corner of Cao Bang Province, in northeast Vietnam, one indomitable population of Cao Vit gibbons (also known as the Eastern Black-crested gibbon) has survived the ravages of deforestation and human development to maintain their home on the border with China. This is the only known population of the Cao Vit gibbon, which is the rarest ape in the world after its closest relative, the Hainan gibbon. Since 2002, with funding from the Great Ape Conservation Fund, biologists from FFI located this last remaining population, initially estimated its size as at least 26 individuals, established community patrol groups, supported local communities in reduction of their impact on the forest, conducted long-term strategic planning to look at conservation of the species, and established a protected area for the species. In 2007, a transboundary gibbon census recorded 110 individuals in 18 groups. A longer-term vision is required to expand and regenerate its habitat and ensure ongoing support for conservation is sustained. Funding support of the Great Ape Conservation Fund has been at the core of the success of conservation efforts so far, and continued support is needed to maintain the long-term conservation vision for the survival of the Cao Vit gibbon.

Perhaps the greatest threat to gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos in Africa, and to a lesser degree, orangutans and gibbons in Southeast Asia, is the illegal trade in bushmeat. Although apes comprise a small proportion of bushmeat production, poachers target them as their meat commands a premium price.

Hunting apes for meat poses more than just a threat to ape numbers. Scientists have linked the consumption of bushmeat from apes to human contraction of the Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever virus. With support from the Great Ape Conservation Fund, our partners such as the Wildlife Conservation Society’s Global Health Program and the government of Congo conducted extensive field studies and established a rapid-response capacity in the event of further outbreaks. Working with African health officials and local communities, they made significant strides to create a first line of defense against this devastating disease that severely threatens both apes and humans. In addition, there is convincing scientific evidence linking the origin of HIV/AIDS to the consumption of chimpanzee meat. The risk of viruses of Ebola and HIV/AIDS being transferred between species poses incalculable danger to humanity. Ape bushmeat, as a known vector of fatal viral infections between gorillas and people, is therefore one of the greatest dangers to both wildlife and people in Central Africa.

Another issue of great conservation and ethical concern is the subject of orphaned and illegally-held apes. In some cases, their growing numbers represent by-products of the bushmeat trade. However, many orphaned apes were taken from the wild for sale as pets. When juvenile apes are taken, members of their social group are often killed as they try to defend their young. Once grown, apes kept as pets become dangerous and owners may seek to dispose of them. The Great Ape Conservation Fund provides us an opportunity to reduce this situation at its roots—the bushmeat and illegal pet trade.

Amidst the chaos caused by the bushmeat and illegal pet trade, progress is being made. The Service works with organizations such as the Pan African Sanctuary Alliance, the Jane Goodall Institute, Les Amis du Bonobo du Congo (ABC), and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (DFGFI) to rehabilitate, and in some cases, reintroduce apes into the wild. In the last five years, grants from the Great Ape Conservation Fund have played pivotal roles in places such as the Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and perhaps most significantly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). At Mombengele, near Basankusu, DRC, the first group of captive bonobos has been experimentally reintroduced to the wild by ABC. Near the Tayna Community Reserve in eastern DRC, the first sanctuary for eastern gorillas is being built by DFGFI.

As previously stated, the Administration strongly supports H.R. 4416, the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2010. Section 2 of H.R. 4416 clarifies the Secretary's authority to issue multiyear grants, enabling the program to be more flexible in meeting the needs of grant recipients and allowing for increased capacity and stability to long-term projects in high priority areas. Overall, these provisions will position the Service to better address the long-term threats facing ape populations throughout Africa and Asia.

In closing, Madame Chairwoman and Subcommittee Members, we greatly appreciate your leadership and the support of the Subcommittee for the conservation of species internationally. The Great Ape Conservation Act, along with the other Multinational Species Conservation Acts, has formed the foundation for hundreds of projects around the world to address the needs of highly endangered species. The work supported by these Acts also benefits untold number of other species that share their habitat. The Great Ape Conservation Act provides an excellent example of how to produce focused and efficient means to support the conservation of species that are ecologically important and aesthetically invaluable to the American public and people around the world. The Service welcomes the opportunity to continue working with experienced individuals, local communities, state and federal agencies, foreign governments, and nongovernmental organizations, to promote a coordinated domestic and international strategy to protect, restore, and enhance the world's diverse wildlife and habitats.

The Administration strongly supports H.R. 4416. I would be happy to answer any questions.