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Testimony By Air Force Veteran Scott O'Grady
Subcommittee for Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs
Committee on Natural Resources

Thank you Chairman Fleming, Ranking Member Sablan, and other members of the Subcommittee for Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans, and Insular Affairs, for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Scott O'Grady. I am an Air Force Veteran and I am a conservationist. I passionately believe that we all have a unique responsibility to conserve wild places and wild species. I am a member of many U.S. based conservation organizations including Safari Club International. SCI has a membership of over 50,000 worldwide conservationists and through its affiliated organizations across North America, Europe, and Africa they represent an additional 7 million hunter-conservationists. The Safari Club International Foundation hosts an annual conference in Southern and East Africa. This conference brings together representatives of numerous African governments, professional hunters, and community leaders to share best practices in sustainable conservation. The responsibility to develop sustainable wildlife management programs that protect wildlife habitat and ensure financial stability for communities living with wildlife is a serious task that requires serious consideration. As a conservationist I am proud to see the U.S. Congress hosting this hearing today to discuss vitally important issues of species conservation in Africa.

On February 25th, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued Director's Order 210. The Director's Order includes new staff guidelines that will impact hundreds of thousands, if not millions of unsuspecting U.S. citizens. Director's Order 210 prohibits the importation of antique ivory, as defined by the Endangered Species Act, for commercial purposes. Before Director's Order 210, Americans could import items that contain ivory that were at least 100 years old for commercial purposes. Under Director's Order 210, that is now illegal. Many businesses will greatly suffer due to this change. Director's Order 210 also seems to place a heavier burden on individuals that already own antique ivory and want to sell it. Many Americans own antique jewelry, pianos, musical equipment, firearms, knives, and furniture that contain ivory. Under Director's Order 210, these U.S. citizens can now be prosecuted for simply trying to sell a family heirloom if they do not have sufficient documentation proving it is at least 100 years old. Other than paying to have the item professionally appraised, the Fish and Wildlife Service has not told the American public what is sufficient to prove that their possessions meet the antique exemption. Under Director's Order 210, these U.S. Citizens can now be prosecuted for simply trying to sell a family heirloom. The policies of Director's Order 210 provide no benefit to anti-poaching efforts in Africa.

On April 4, 2014 the hunter-conservationist community was shocked by a decision of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to immediately ban all U.S. importation of sport hunted elephants from Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Neither the hunting community nor the wildlife management authorities of Zimbabwe and Tanzania received any warning of the abrupt importation ban.

For Zimbabwe, the FWS relied on a lack of information to impose the ban, rather than concrete current information about the status of elephants and anti-poaching efforts in the country. Shockingly, the FWS did not even ask for this necessary information until after it shut down elephant importation. What little information the FWS did examine was outdated and inaccurate. And despite the fact that the FWS was well aware that hunting revenues provide the sole source of funding for Zimbabwe's wildlife management authority, the FWS nevertheless deprived its sister agency of the resources necessary to conserve elephants and fight poaching.

For Tanzania, the FWS's failure to communicate with Tanzania's wildlife management authority before making the decision to impose the ban violates a 2009 Memorandum of Understanding signed by representatives of our government and the government of Tanzania. The ban also fails to recognize Tanzania's efforts and successes in battling against elephant poaching.

Instead of helping Zimbabwe and Tanzania fight illegal trafficking and conserve their elephant populations, these bans undermine their efforts, deprive them of the resources they need to protect their elephant populations, and diminish the value of these animals to anyone except poachers. The damage that our government has done with these bans grows greater every day.

I was particularly shocked by this decision. I had recently returned from a three week safari in Zimbabwe, and I can personally attest that their elephant population is not only robust, but is exceeding the land's carrying capacity. By eliminating hunters like myself from the landscape of Zimbabwe and Tanzania, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is doing a disservice to the communities and individuals who work with wildlife in these countries. Without the consistent spending from international hunters, the ability for communities to plan for their future is in doubt. While on my hunt, I was joined by representatives from the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority and by the Forestry Commission. Their responsibility was to make sure that my hunt, just like every other hunt, followed the letter of the law appropriately. These agency representatives were also there to oversee that anti-poaching efforts were in place. I personally witnessed anti-poaching units in the field patrolling the areas where I was on safari. Without the funding from hunting safaris the anti-poaching patrols would not exist and the result would be rampant poaching. The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority and the Forestry Commission rely upon funding each year from safaris to pay for anti-poaching resources. One year without this funding would shut down their operations. The results will be catastrophic to the protection of the elephants, other wildlife, the ecosystem and the economic impact to the local communities if the U.S. FWS continues down its current path.

My safaris were the fulfillment of a life-long dream. I used my savings to pay for the safaris knowing the importance of my finances contributing to the conservation of the local wildlife and economy. The cost of my two safaris for a total of 30 days was US\$75,000. Of this, \$27,000 was for government elephant fees, \$4,500 for Concession fees, \$2000 for Taxes, \$300 for other tags and permits, plus \$5000 for gratuities and other costs for travel. My direct financial contribution ensures that wildlife in Zimbabwe has more value than just meat on the table, or worse – elephants seen as a pest species.

This year my projected income is less than what I spent on the safaris. But I know the money I spent maintains elephant conservation efforts in Zimbabwe and it was absolutely worth the cost. My personal contribution continues to add value to the overall elephant population in Zimbabwe so that Zimbabwe's agencies and local communities can sustain their anti-poaching efforts.

The FWS ban is causing elephants to have less and less financial value. Safari operations will cease to exist and the anti-poaching resources provided by those companies, paid for by U.S. hunters, will also cease. The result will be an open season for poachers, who unlawfully and indiscriminately kill anything for food and money.

The American hunter is not the problem. Instead the American hunter is a part of the solution to protecting and preserving African elephant populations. The FWS ban was instituted without the good faith of working with their colleagues in Africa. It was made without consideration for the real impacts on the communities throughout these two countries who will be forced to convert land away from wildlife to less economically viable uses. It was made with the deliberate act of keeping American hunters, the primary financial institution for anti-poaching in the dark. This ban is focused on eliminating the greatest resource for elephant conservation efforts, which is the American hunter. The ban should be immediately lifted and current scientific wildlife data should be reviewed for proper ecosystem management.

I would like to thank all the committee members for your attendance today and for your willingness to understand a very complicated situation in remote areas of Africa. In the U.S. over 15 million American hunters and 30 million American target shooters pay for the bulk of conservation funding from which all U.S. citizens enjoy an improved outdoors. American hunters play this same role in Africa. I implore you to reverse this ban immediately, rely upon sound scientific wildlife management and the role of American hunters to wildlife conservation and anti-poaching efforts in Africa.