

**TESTIMONY OF DR. KAUSH ARHA, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY,
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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL
RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
REGARDING H.R. 4455, THE WILDLIFE WITHOUT BORDERS
AUTHORIZATION ACT**

June 24, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Administration's views on H.R. 4455, the Wildlife Without Borders Authorization Act. The Administration would like to express its support for this legislation. HR 4455 recognizes the crucial role that the United States plays in the conservation of wildlife and natural resources around the globe.

Wildlife and natural resources are under pressure from growing human populations and corresponding changes in land use, pollution, and consumption of natural resources. The complexity and diversity of these challenges require a coordinated approach led by skilled natural resource managers. Unfortunately, many countries containing the highest levels of biodiversity are faced with a shortage of wildlife professionals who have the capacity to lead multifaceted strategies to address the most pressing threats to wildlife.

Protection of domestic wildlife also requires internationally coordinated actions. Many migratory species in the United States, including 340 species of migratory birds, rely on foreign soils to complete some part of their seasonal cycles. In fact, approximately 30 percent of the species covered by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) occur primarily outside of the United States. In addition, our native animals are increasingly exposed to

the possibly devastating effects of zoonotic diseases that can be introduced through trade and human travel. These problems are best addressed in the countries where they begin.

Long-term, sustained wildlife management, capacity building, endangered species conservation, strategic habitat conservation and environmental outreach, education, and training are tools that can address emerging issues in wildlife conservation. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is in a strong position to influence and shape the outcome of wildlife conservation abroad, using expertise in management of refuges, fisheries, endangered species as well as employment of law enforcement techniques and the best available technologies.

Since its inception, the Wildlife Without Borders program's goals have been to initiate, facilitate, and promote meaningful conservation efforts across the globe to help ensure conservation of the world's diverse species. The first conservation grants issued under the program were awarded through the Wildlife Without Borders-Latin America and the Caribbean program, to implement the Convention on Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere and to provide expertise in wildlife and habitat conservation throughout the region. Since that time, the program has supported more than 800 conservation projects around the world.

Wildlife Without Borders projects provide critical capacity building to participants from small grassroots organizations to high level government officials. Through the Wildlife Without Borders program the first Masters level graduate program in conservation in

Latin America was created and has since graduated over 400 students. Similarly, in India, Wildlife Without Borders financially and technically supported the creation of the Wildlife Institute of India, which trains all of the nation's wildlife resource managers. The program also created RESERVA, the first regional program for training protected areas managers of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Wildlife Without Borders also serves a key role within the Service in facilitating bilateral and multilateral dialogues through organization of fora such as the United States-Russian Federation Joint Committee on Cooperation for Protection of the Environment and Natural Resources; the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative; and the US-Mexico-Canada Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management. These fora offer government representatives from various countries opportunities to share experiences, develop best practices and coordinate international wildlife conservation efforts. The Service, through participation in such meetings, has developed an understanding of techniques used around the world and can better facilitate technology transfer, making wildlife conservation more efficient and effective.

HR 4455

HR 4455 would codify the Wildlife Without Borders Program, incorporating various activities of the Division of International Conservation, such as the Multinational Species Conservation Funds and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, into a more unified and cohesive Wildlife Without Borders program. This should provide a coordinated approach

toward existing and emerging international threats to wildlife and natural resources at varying scales.

HR 4455 creates three sub-programs that will operate in concert with one another to address threats at the appropriate level. The Wildlife Without Borders Species program will implement the Multinational Species Conservation Acts and their associated grants programs. The Species Program currently allows specialists to share information, conduct research, and implement management activities on a species by species basis.

The Wildlife Without Borders Regional Program will address grass-roots wildlife conservation problems from a broader, landscape perspective using capacity building and institutional strengthening as primary tools. It will also take the lead in providing assistance to and coordinating with other Service programs in conducting international activities. While the Service is already involved in such efforts, HR 4455 will provide additional flexibility in establishing conservation partnerships.

As noted above, under HR 4455, the Wildlife Without Borders Global Program will implement global habitat and conservation initiatives such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention for Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere. This program will assist the Service in addressing threats to wildlife that are global in nature, such as the spread of invasive species and wildlife disease.

The Service has actively cultivated strong relationships with other Federal agencies, states, foreign governments, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations around the world. The three-pillared approach formalized in HR 4455 will allow the Service to support these relationships in a holistic and comprehensive manner.

HR 4455 also authorizes additional components that could strengthen the role of the Service in international conservation, such as advisory committees that could help ensure that all Wildlife Without Borders activities are strategically developed and implemented. These committees could also provide a venue for information sharing and gap analysis to help ensure that the Service's International Conservation program remains effective and complementary to the work of other federal agencies, state and foreign governments, and outside organizations.

International conservation of natural resources is a complex task. HR 4455 creates a balanced approach to addressing serious global wildlife conservation problems while strengthening the Service's ability to effectively partner with institutions involved in international wildlife conservation. This approach will support efficient use of human and financial resources, development of effective conservation strategies and sustained commitment of partners in maintaining wildlife resources. For these reasons, we support the legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HR 4455. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.