

**Sally Jewell Coxe
President, Bonobo Conservation Initiative**

**Testimony re: the Great Ape Conservation
Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2010 (H.R. 4416)**

**House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
January 27, 2010**

Thank you, Madam Chair Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, Congressman Miller, and other members of the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife for your attention to the great apes and other endangered species, and for the invitation to testify today. My name is Sally Jewell Coxe and I am the president and co-founder of the Bonobo Conservation Initiative, based here in Washington, DC, and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our mission is to ensure the survival of one species of great ape, the bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), and its tropical forest habitat in the Congo Basin.

It's a particular honor to have the opportunity to speak in support of the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2010, because the original bill of 2000 (GACA) and its reauthorization of 2005 have been instrumental to all that the Bonobo Conservation Initiative has accomplished in the past decade. I can't imagine what we would have done without it or what the prospects would be today for bonobos and the other great apes had it not been for the critical, catalytic, and timely support GACA has provided.

While I can attest to the importance of this legislation for all of the apes, I will speak primarily to its pertinence to the issues facing bonobos, which are certainly indicative of the challenges facing the other species. Without intensified efforts to protect them, great apes including bonobos may be extinct in the wild in a generation. The Great Ape Conservation Act is critical to prevent this tragedy.

By protecting the great apes, we are protecting our own heritage, our own extended family. As flagship species, the great apes are also key to the existence and health of some of the most biologically diverse ecosystems on earth, including tropical rainforests in Africa and Asia that are of global significance for their biodiversity, for generating rainfall on continental scales and for moderating the planet's climate.

Tropical rainforests are the "the lungs of the earth," comparable to giant public utilities because of the ecosystem services they provide to humanity. They contain as much as 40% of the world's terrestrial carbon. The great apes that inhabit these forests serve as powerful motivators for rainforest conservation. They also maintain forest health by dispersing seeds. As Ian Redmond, founder of the Ape Alliance and Ambassador for the Year of the Gorilla asserts, great apes are "the gardeners of the forest." Yet both great apes and rainforests are in crisis, threatened by industrial scale logging, agricultural

encroachment, and other destructive uses. Tropical deforestation already contributes one fifth of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, more than the global transportation sector.

The Importance of Bonobos

A photograph taken in the summer of 1923 at a New Hampshire farm shows the American psychologist Robert M. Yerkes, for whom the Yerkes National Primate Research Center is named, seated on a granite boulder with two young apes, both assumed to be chimpanzees, one in each of his arms.

It was not until five years later that the American zoologist and pioneering conservationist, Harold Jefferson Coolidge, looking at museum specimens of skulls and other bones classified as chimpanzees, noticed fundamental differences between the two young apes Yerkes was holding: Panzee, the female, was a chimpanzee, but Chim, at whom Yerkes is gazing, was in fact a bonobo. Coolidge went on to formally describe the bonobo as a separate species in 1933, but it was not until more than forty years later that scientists commenced the first field research on free living bonobos in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Bonobos were the last great ape to be identified and the last to be studied in the wild. Because bonobo research began a decade or more later than comparable studies of their close cousins, the chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans, and was not comparably publicized, many people are unaware of bonobos to this day.

Along with chimpanzees, bonobos are the great apes most closely related to humans. We share more than 98% of our genomes. In fact, bonobos and chimps are more closely related to humans than they are to gorillas or orangutans. They are distinguished by their peaceful, cooperative, matriarchal society, remarkable intelligence, and sexual nature.

Frans de Waal, the primatologist (based at Emory University & the Yerkes National Primate Research Center), wrote in *Our Inner Ape* (2005), "Bonobos fail to fit our established notions about human nature...If studies had found that they massacre one another, everyone would know about bonobos. Their peacefulness is...the problem...If we had known the bonobo first and the chimpanzee only later,...the discussion of human evolution might not revolve around violence, warfare and male dominance, but rather around sexuality, empathy, caring and cooperation."

Bonobos represent the compassionate side of human nature, and as such, we humans have never needed their example more. Just as important, our future depends on the rainforest bonobos inhabit.

Bonobos live in the heart of the Congo Basin, the world's second largest rainforest and the area of greatest biodiversity in Africa. They are found in only one country: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). They inhabit the *cuvette centrale*, or central Congo Basin, a region set apart from the ranges of gorillas and chimpanzees by the Congo, Kasai, and other major rivers.

The primary threats to bonobos are hunting by people, both for sustenance and for the commercial bushmeat trade, and habitat destruction from logging, agricultural expansion, and other forms of human encroachment on the forest. These threats vary across the range of the bonobo, as do the beliefs, attitudes and practices of local people toward bonobos. Some ethnic groups maintain traditional taboos against hunting bonobos, others do not.

When the Great Ape Conservation Act was passed in late 2000, and for some time after, bonobo researchers and conservationists were unable to work in the bonobo habitat, due to the civil war then raging in the DRC. At that time, we did not know where bonobos still existed, apart from a few research sites that had been monitored, and areas that had been identified through previous anecdotal evidence. Although bonobos were protected by national and international statutes, there was little local awareness of their protected status, and inadequate support for enforcement. The war made matters much worse.

When the first version of the GACA was introduced in the Senate in May 1999, the international conservation community had only recently learned about the grim significance of the expanding market for bushmeat and its effect on great apes and other species. This led to the formation of the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force. We had founded the Bonobo Conservation Initiative a year earlier to address the many threats facing bonobos. Thanks to the U.S. Congress's enactment of the version of GACA introduced and supported by the leadership of this Committee in 2000, the prospects for meeting these challenges improved vastly. That critical recognition of the threats to great apes, and the constructive and imaginative response by the US government, had a profoundly positive effect on the conservation of great apes and their habitats. It also formed a foundation for a collaborative model of rainforest conservation that involved the ultimate stewards of these forests, i.e., the people who inhabit them, in their protection.

Bonobo Conservation

The Bonobo Conservation Initiative's first grant from the Great Ape Conservation Fund was awarded in 2002, just as the Congo War was beginning to wind down in the bonobo habitat. It funded the first surveys and "information exchange" with the local people at Kokolopori and Lac Tumba. Our proposal originated in collaboration with two knowledgeable and passionate Congolese conservationists: Albert Lokasola who had founded his own local conservation NGO, Vie Sauvage, and Dr. Mwanza Ndunda who directed the Congolese Institute for Research in Ecology and Forestry. That first grant provided the foundation for ongoing efforts and long-term partnerships which have led to the creation of protected areas and enabled us to test and prove the effectiveness of a community-based model for conservation.

Working with Congolese partner organizations, GACF's catalytic support enabled the development of a vision for bonobo conservation that is now becoming a reality: the Bonobo Peace Forest, a constellation of community-based reserves and conservation concessions, linked by habitat corridors and supported by sustainable development. This

project has been endorsed by DRC President Joseph Kabila, who embraced the idea from the outset as providing a practical and conceptual link between the wise management of natural resources and enduring peace in the DRC, given that the war in Congo was driven in large part by exploitation of the country's natural riches.

A telling development is the self motivated decision by the Congolese partners of the Bonobo Peace Forest to unite in a coalition to work towards common goals in an efficient way. The Coalition for the Community Conservation of Bonobos (CCCB) (see appendix for map and table) exists thanks to the demonstration effect of USFWS / GACF funded BCI programs.

Since then, through direct support from GACF, the Bonobo Conservation Initiative and our Congolese partners have discovered or confirmed the existence of bonobos in eleven strategic regions, including areas where bonobos were not previously known to exist. This led to local agreements to protect bonobos in all areas surveyed and the establishment of two legally protected nature reserves: the Sankuru Nature Reserve and the Kokolopori Bonobo Reserve. Together, these reserves span 13,650 square miles—an area greater than the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.

The five grants we received from GACF since 2002 have also supported training and ongoing support for bonobo monitoring teams, and habituation of bonobos for research and tourism and capacity building and training of Congolese organizations and community leaders. The GACF has also made it possible to raise awareness of bonobos and laws against hunting them in the DRC locally, regionally and nationally, and helped fund the first institute of higher learning in the heart of bonobo habitat, the Djolu Technical College for Conservation and Rural Development.

Those first five grants totaled \$416,000 and leveraged over a half million dollars in matching funds and in-kind support for those particular projects alone, but much more as well, by catalyzing funding from other donors.

The professional staff of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's International Division have provided ongoing and consistent support and input, for which we are extremely grateful. This provided a framework that allowed us to develop innovative conservation programs involving Congolese nongovernmental organizations and rainforest communities in all aspects of project development and implementation.

Cost-effective, far-reaching results

GACF's support has also catalyzed international investments in community development programs in bonobo habitat. Kokolopori is a great example.

Building upon our first GACF grant and three subsequent grants, the Kokolopori Bonobo Reserve was officially gazetted by the DRC government in May 2009. It harbors more than 1000 bonobos, including three groups that are fully habituated to human presence, making it one of the few sites where bonobos can be observed easily. Kokolopori is the

pilot and model for the Bonobo Peace Forest, a constellation of community-based reserves, linked by habitat corridors and supported by sustainable development.

Working with our local partner organization, Vie Sauvage, we have funded and implemented an array of livelihood programs, including a health clinic, sustainable agriculture programs, micro-credit projects for women's cooperatives, aid to local schools, and establishment of Djolu Technical College. The Kokolopori Bonobo Reserve's model has become self-replicating in that it has motivated other communities in the region to establish community-based bonobo reserves as well.

Kokolopori has catalyzed investment from Australia, and the establishment of the Bonobo Conservation Initiative-Australia. It inspired the Kokolopori-Falls Church Sister City Partnership—the first such partnership between the DRC and USA—which is contributing critical support to livelihood and cultural exchange programs. Thus, GACF has helped to build alliances and strengthen the best aspects of the American spirit represented by these projects.

The Sankuru Nature Reserve also illustrates the power of the great apes as flagship species and the community based conservation model. Our work in Sankuru began at the invitation of a local Congolese NGO, ACOPRIK, "Community Action for the Primates of Kasai." It was founded by Andre Tusumba when he was serving as the Vice Governor of the Kasai province during the Congo War. A native of the area, he was appalled by the horrific amount of wildlife showing up in the bushmeat markets, especially bonobos. So he contacted BCI, seeking our help. GACF funding for the Bonobo Peace Forest grant supported the first field surveys in Sankuru, which revealed extremely rich biodiversity, including the presence of okapi, also endemic to the DRC but not known to exist so far southwest, various other species of primate, and elephants, which have been hunted out in most other areas of the bonobo habitat.

Surveys, combined with information exchange with the local people of the area, resulted in agreements from local villages to protect bonobos and the forest and work to establish community based reserves.

When the DRC park authority came to inspect the Sankuru work, they deemed it an urgent priority to preserve the uncommon biodiversity of this area and decided to increase the size of the reserve in order to protect a valuable watershed and carbon stock under a unified legal administration. Thus, the Sankuru Nature Reserve was established at 30,560 km², making it the world's largest contiguous protected area for the great apes. As this model develops further, it will become the first large-scale community-managed protected area in the DRC, and as such heralds a new paradigm for conservation.

Protecting the Sankuru forest will contribute significantly to stabilizing the global climate, of obvious importance to all life on our planet. Keeping this rich tropical forest intact will make an important contribution to global efforts to reduce emissions while simultaneously conserving biodiversity. The Sankuru Reserve stores up to 660 million tons of carbon, which if released by deforestation would emit up to 2 billion tons of carbon dioxide, comparable to emissions from 38,000,000 cars per year for 10 years. The

Sankuru is now one of the first pilot REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) projects approved by the DRC government. This promises millions of dollars in private investment over the next 25 years, destined to benefit the local communities who will manage the reserve, with desperately needed opportunities for sustainable community development. All of this grew out of targeted investment from the GACF.

Toward a Sustainable Future for Bonobos

Support for great ape conservation has laid the groundwork for other pilot projects for innovative long-term financing mechanisms, including conservation concessions, and has leveraged bilateral support from other countries, notably the UK and Norway. The Bonobo Conservation Concession, a collaborative project that BCI is undertaking with Conservation International, is the first conservation concession in the DRC. This is just an indication of the fundamental and catalytic benefit GACA has provided to BCI's efforts for bonobo conservation.

Other critically important work is being accomplished by other GACF grantees elsewhere in bonobo habitat, some of whom will speak at this hearing. The Milwaukee Zoological Society, the World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Conservation Society and the International Conservation and Education Fund have utilized GACF funding for surveys, law enforcement and education in the Salonga National Park—the only national park in the bonobo habitat. Recent survey work conducted by the Lukuru Wildlife Foundation in the easternmost portion of the bonobo range has provided detailed bonobo survey data from a previously unexplored forest block and may lead to the establishment of another protected area in the Maniema province. The Lola Ya Bonobo Sanctuary in Kinshasa, the only sanctuary for orphaned bonobos, is also increasing awareness of bonobos through their education programs, and is now beginning the first effort to reintroduce orphans to the wild, which is supported in part by GACF.

Two more national protected areas were established in the bonobo habitat: the 3525 km² Lomako-Yokokala Faunal Reserve and the 7500 km² Lac Tumba-Lediima Nature Reserve, through the efforts of the African Wildlife Foundation and WWF with support from USAID/CARPE and the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, in coordination with GACF. Together with the Kokolopori and Sankuru Reserves, an additional 46,370 km² of bonobo habitat has been legally protected in four new reserves in the past decade. That is progress!

In addition to supporting individual projects, the USFWS-Great Ape Conservation Fund is also supporting the development of a coordinated plan for bonobo survival. Recognizing the need for a stronger and more unified conservation movement, the USFWS, in collaboration with the IUCN Primate Specialist Group and the ARCUS Foundation, hosted a conservation workshop in Arlington, VA in 2009 to begin the process, which will continue this year with conservation challenge groups and a comprehensive workshop to be co-hosted with the DRC Ministry of Environment in

Kinshasa. We are deeply grateful for the foresight, leadership, and commitment of the US Fish & Wildlife Service in leading this critical initiative.

While the major threats to bonobos from bushmeat hunting, habitat destruction from agriculture and logging remain in force and there are still tremendous challenges to be overcome, substantial progress has been made over the past decade to mitigate these threats in key areas of the bonobo habitat. Continued and increased support from the US government through the GACF is critical to maintain the level of progress attained thus far and to expand and achieve greater levels of effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

BCI endorses the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2010 (H.R. 4416) and its constituent amendments.

- (1) Multiyear grants are of particular use and importance in the conservation of great apes. Projects addressing larger, longer lived species living in remote areas with limited governance or existing political infrastructure require a more substantial start up period and initial investment than those dealing with other types of species in other circumstances. BCI's experience with bonobo conservation in the DRC supports the value of a steady and secured initial investment. Specifically, longitudinal programs will foster on-going leveraged investment, development of relationships with the relevant others, and building coalitions and capacity on the front lines, a process that can not be achieved short-term.
- (2) Required periodic meetings of a panel of experts on the conservation of great apes, (particularly if it includes members from the range states), who are required to take stock of action plans and strategic documents developed by the world's acknowledged authorities, will not only ensure that the work of the GACF is in synch with the latter, but will help foster and maintain continued communication between the various relevant sectors of great ape conservation. Further, it will allow for coordination with comparable panels for the other USFWS species funds, such as for African elephants, and improve coordination and efficiency of efforts where apes and other taxa are conspecific.
- (3) The USFWS has a very admirably low percentage of its funds values going to administration. Nonetheless, with increasing awareness of the funds, increased numbers of proposals, of projects funded, and of related conservation activities world wide with which to coordinate, an increase in administrative expenses is well merited.
- (4) Finally, and importantly, the amount authorized for the conservation of great apes should be increased. The program is efficient, cost effective, and is a catalyst for matching funds, for political and social change requisite for effective conservation action, and by any reckoning, is a great success. Its unique structural position allows its managers to work at the forefront of enlightened program and policy approaches to conservation, with NGOs, local and international, with

governments, and with multilaterals. Each year, acceptable proposals cannot be funded, and proposals that are funded receive less than they merit, due to limited budgets. The benefits that would accrue from having the capacity to fund these projects overwhelmingly exceed the cost of bringing funding to a level commensurate with the opportunity GACF, and the people of the United States of America, have to secure the future for great apes and their habitats. The cost of not doing so is incalculable.

Coda:

Earlier this month, I was delighted to receive a letter from David Yerkes, the son of primatologist Robert Yerkes. David was 11 years old in 1923 when he spent that summer with the young bonobo and chimpanzee whom his father was studying. Now 99 years old, he closed his letter by stating that “considering the position of the bonobo in the scale of animal life, its extinction would be a tragedy.”

His letter was followed by an email from an extraordinary 12 year old, James Brooks, who signs his messages “Bonobo Fan.” James has started his own website, “Ape Aware” and has launched a project “by kids and for kids” called 1000 Classrooms, to support children and widows of murdered park rangers in the eastern DRC, who died protecting gorillas. James has been selected as one of Canada’s “Top 20 under 20” and is spreading the word about the great apes. He said that if the US Congress passes the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act that he will contact his parliamentary representative in Canada (with whom he has been corresponding) and ask for Canada to follow suit.

The great apes have taught us much about ourselves since David Yerkes was James’ age. Thanks to this legislation, there is considerably more hope that James’ children will benefit from knowing our simian cousins too.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.