

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

**Statement of
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Before the
FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS SUBCOMMITTEE
Of the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
The Great Ape Conservation Act
And
The Keystone Species Conservation Act
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Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, good morning and thank you very much for the opportunity to testify regarding the Great Apes Conservation Act and the Keystone Species Conservation Act. My name is Cyril Kormos, I am the Director of the Conservation Policy Program at Conservation International (CI). I am testifying on behalf of Dr. Russell Mittermeier, CI's president, who unfortunately could not be here today. CI is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity hotspots and tropical wilderness areas. We have offices in twenty-three countries worldwide and we support projects in the three major wilderness areas and in eleven hotspots.

The two acts before us today would expand the scope of the excellent work that has been carried out by the Fish and Wildlife Service under the African and Asian Elephant Conservation Acts, and the Rhino and Tiger Conservation Act. The successes resulting from projects funded under these acts certainly bode well for H.R. 4320 and H.R. 3407, and we are very grateful for the subcommittee's leadership on the issue of wildlife conservation.

I would like to begin by focusing on the Great Apes Conservation Act. Although both bills are critically important, in CI's view, the great apes Act is the more immediately pressing of the two.

The Great Apes Conservation Act

This is a crucial moment for the conservation of primates around the world. To the best of our knowledge, no primate species or subspecies has become extinct in the past century. However, a recent assessment by the scientific community indicates that we could lose more than 100 primate taxa in the 21st century if actions aren't taken to ensure their survival. The great apes - chimpanzees, orangutans and gorillas - with whom we share more than 98% of our genetic material are among the most endangered. This legislation is therefore urgently needed.

The proposed Act correctly identifies primate hunting and habitat loss as the key threats to the Great Apes, and also identifies the range of measures necessary to mitigate those threats. CI would therefore suggest only minor modifications to the proposed Act, and a few areas where emphasis might be added, perhaps in report language. First, the definition of "conservation" should be amended so that it includes actions necessary to sustain viable populations of great apes even after populations have recovered. This is an important point as donors often cease funding for successful conservation projects too soon. It would also make the definition more consistent with Sec.2(b), which states that the goal of the Act is indeed to perpetuate viable populations. In addition, although the definition of "conservation" includes education and awareness, it would also be worth noting in report language that education and awareness will be particularly important elements of any strategy to reduce the bushmeat trade, in particular in West and Central Africa.

With respect to allowable uses of funds, report language should make clear that captive breeding programs should be a strategy of last resort when conservation efforts in the field appear to be failing and extinction is imminent. The subcommittee should also consider increasing the maximum amount that can be used for administrative expenses at the FWS (as does the Senate version of this Bill). Among other things, this would allow the FWS to convene expert groups to review priorities periodically, to set or revise clearly defined standards for projects, and to evaluate successes and failures under the program. This will help ensure the transparency and the quality of the decisionmaking process. Thus, as the FWS increases its responsibilities in conducting international wildlife conservation, it would seem appropriate to also increase their administrative resources.

Finally, CI would issue a caution regarding government support and consultation provisions (4(b)(2)(F) and Sec.4(c)(2)(A)). While consultation with government is clearly preferable prior to any project, delays may result simply because the government in the recipient country lacks the administrative capacity to respond quickly. Although these provisions do not appear to have been problematic for the other flagship species conservation acts, the FWS should continue to be flexible on these requirements.

In the final analysis, this is a much-needed piece of legislation that CI fully supports.

Keystone Species Conservation Act

Umbrella legislation for endangered species that would provide the FWS with the flexibility to address the most pressing conservation priorities beyond those identified by the flagship species approach, would be extremely valuable. Indeed, it would most likely be a more efficient approach than drafting legislation ensuring protection species by species. CI is therefore grateful for the subcommittee's proactive approach on this issue.

However, we believe that umbrella legislation for endangered species under the proposed format may not be appropriate. The primary reason for this assessment is that for such legislation to be successful the focus of the act would need to be narrowed, and mechanisms would need to be provided for at the FWS to successfully administer a more complicated program. In addition, appropriations for such legislation would likely need to be significantly larger than they have been for the elephant, rhino and tiger funds.

Thus, a number of measures would need to be taken to strengthen the proposed legislation. A narrower definition of "keystone" would be the first step. This would ensure that the Keystone Species Conservation Account would focus on conservation of those species that are most seriously threatened, and whose preservation would also have the greatest overall conservation impact. The second step would be to establish

a mechanism to select among the endangered species that fit the keystone definition. This would most likely require establishing a permanent expert board that would help prioritize, as well as assist in developing project standards and monitoring and evaluation criteria.

It is also worth noting that it will be difficult for a Keystone Species Conservation Account to achieve the same degree of visibility and leveraging power achieved by the African and Asian Elephant Conservation Acts and the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act. Thus, CI believes that a keystone approach should not exclude the flagship species conservation approach, which has proven highly effective and quite popular. These Acts should rather be viewed as complementary mechanisms, each with its own comparative advantage, rather than as alternatives. It would therefore be unfortunate if a Keystone Species Conservation Account were to divert appropriations from the elephant, rhino, tiger or great ape funds.

A restructured Keystone Species Conservation Act would be very valuable. Not all endangered species are flagship species, and it is clearly not realistic to draft flagship species legislation on a routine basis. The FWS should therefore have at its disposal a flexible mechanism it can use to catalyze conservation projects for the many critical species that might otherwise not receive the necessary attention. CI would respectfully suggest that this legislation would benefit from continued dialogue between this subcommittee, the FWS and outside experts to explore further options. CI would be pleased to contribute to this process as appropriate.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity to testify this morning. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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