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**Testimony before the
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Committee on Natural Resources**

**Hearing on H.R. 3086,
the Global Wildlife Conservation, Coordination, and Enhancement Act of 2009**

Tuesday, July 28, 2009

Madame Chairwoman, Honorable Members thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I speak to you as a board member of WildAid, a conservation organization dedicated to ending the illegal trade in wildlife and on behalf of the Animal Welfare Institute. I am not speaking in my capacity as "Special Envoy to the Secretary of State for Wildlife Trafficking", a position created under the last Administration and continued under this one. However, my duties in this role have taken me across the United States and internationally to broaden my understanding of, and passion for, this important issue.

Madame Chairwoman, wildlife knows no borders and nor should wildlife conservation efforts. The United States has long been a leader in this field by encouraging other nations and by providing vital technical and financial support. This bill would help to ensure we continue to lead in a way that is greatly appreciated and builds goodwill and strong bridges with other nations in a very positive manner.

It is also an insurance policy against loss of biodiversity, species extinction, wildlife crime and the very real risk of the emergence and spread of a serious new disease epidemic. In the hard economic times, it is perhaps even more important to have insurance against potential disasters. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and the programs proposed under this bill could help to prevent billions of dollars of remedial measures down the line, whether from expensive species recovery plans, invasive species entering the United States or from the costs of a disease outbreak. Illegal wildlife trafficking is an almost perfect vector for a new epidemic. The origins of SARS were traced back to exotic wildlife trade and that was estimated to cost Asian economies some US\$60 billion. So perhaps instead of can we afford this, the question should be can we afford not to take this action?

I would like to offer a concrete example from my own experience in the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador on the positive impact our support can make. The marine reserve there is one of the largest in the world and when establishing it in 1998 Ecuador made an appeal for outside support. There were almost no resources available for law enforcement in this World Heritage Site. This is a typical situation in less wealthy nations. While they are prepared to forego converting wilderness into farmland or short term gains from fisheries exploitation, pressing human needs mean they find it hard to finance adequate protection for these areas. Meanwhile on the other side there was a fleet of foreign and Ecuadorian boats raiding the reserve for shark fin, tuna and sea cucumbers on a daily basis. Now with US assistance from both private and public sources, it has some of the best marine protection capabilities anywhere in the world. The US has provided officers from our Fish and Wildlife and Parks Services for training rangers building strong ties with their Ecuadorian counterparts and increasing their professionalism and morale. We have financed vital equipment, such as GPS, binoculars and even a floatplane. In the last two months, specially trained sniffer

dogs have detected an illegal shark fin cache, while in its first month of operations a state-of-the-art satellite vessel monitoring system provided by US NGOs has lead to the capture of four boats illegally fishing. Thanks to assistance in vessel maintenance, they are now carrying out more patrolling with less staff and other costs. What was a free for all, has become a truly protected area thanks to the support of the United States.

Often the wildlife ranger is the only law enforcement official in these remote regions and supporting them will have an impact on other security issues, such as drug trafficking. Again, in Galapagos their wildlife protection assets have lead to the interception of cocaine in a number of cases.

This Committee has previously heard how the United States is thought to be the second largest importer of illegal wildlife after China and I believe it is essential that we not only address the problems abroad, but here, too. We can help our international partners by reducing demand for illegal wildlife here and helping them do the same in their countries. Unfortunately, budget pressures have made it very hard for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to maintain its activities in this area. To this end, I have myself seen how public/private partnerships can be the most cost effective method. The State Department's public service message with Harrison Ford carried out in partnership with WildAid has reached hundreds of millions around the world and cost the taxpayer less than \$100,000, while projecting a positive image of the United States.

In my dialogue with wildlife management professionals, members, staff, NGOs and other interested parties I find a tremendous consensus on the need for this bill. As currently drafted, there are a number of concerns that have been expressed to me from institutional issues to concerns that the current cost and complexity may prevent it moving forward.

On the cost issue, I believe a less ambitious program now can always be enhanced down the line upon proven success and that this issue should not be allowed to prevent the bill's swift progress.

Frankly, given the overwhelming support for the core goals; none of these issues seem to be too difficult to reconcile with some concerted dialogue and I believe that with the Chair's leadership and input from both sides of the House and interested agencies we can rapidly arrive at a bill that can enjoy all our support and move with the unstoppable momentum that it needs.

Just as wildlife has no geographic borders, conservation knows no political borders; it is absolutely a bi-partisan issue with passionate advocates from both parties and I would urge both sides to unite and confer for the passage of this bill and fight for the resources necessary to make it a reality.

Thank you Madame Chairwoman and members of the Committee for the opportunity to discuss this important bill.