

## **Testimony of James Deutsch, PhD**

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Submitted to House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans & Wildlife

On H.R. 4416 Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization and Amendment Act of 2010

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Madame Chairwoman, Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you very much for inviting me to testify before this Subcommittee. I am Dr. James Deutsch, Executive Director of the Africa Program at the Wildlife Conservation Society, which was established as the New York Zoological Society by visionary conservationists such as Teddy Roosevelt in 1895. With a mission to conserve wildlife and wild places globally, the Bronx Zoo-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has, over its 113 year history, expanded operations to include 65 countries today. In Africa, WCS operates one of the largest and most effective field conservation programs of any NGO. Work that began with one of WCS's founding fathers, William Hornday's efforts to help establish Kruger National Park in Southern Africa in 1920, continues to this very day. In Asia, WCS naturalist William Beebe led our earliest scientific explorations surveying pheasants in 1909. WCS has since helped establish a number of Asian protected areas and pioneered hundreds of studies on native wildlife. Similar noteworthy contributions to conservation in Latin America, North America and in the world's oceans add to WCS' long history.

As a leading global conservation organization, WCS has established a comprehensive approach to species and habitat conservation through its Species and Landscapes programs. WCS is committed to the long-term protection of all of the species of African apes as well as orangutans and gibbons in Asia, including addressing the threats and challenges they face such as illegal wildlife trade, hunting for bushmeat, habitat loss due to deforestation and logging, and infectious diseases. In Africa, WCS currently works to conserve great apes in eleven of the twelve Congo Basin Forest Partnership landscapes and in four additional landscapes in Cameroon, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda. In Asia, WCS works to conserve orangutans in both countries where they occur, Indonesia and Malaysia, and gibbons in both of those countries as well as landscapes in Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. Since its inception in 1989, WCS's unique Global Health Program has strived to keep each aspect of the relationship between humans and great apes healthy through preventive medicine, wildlife health monitoring, clinical care, research in zoos and in the field, and collaboration with local communities and scientists. In our own backyard, the award-winning Congo Gorilla Forest exhibit at the Bronx Zoo has not only bolstered support for biodiversity conservation among millions of US visitors, but has also raised over \$10 million for the global effort to save the Congo rainforest. The exhibit has two troops of gorillas, totaling 19 individuals and is one of the largest breeding collections of western lowland gorillas in North America. In the past ten years, 14 gorillas have been born in the exhibit. The WCS breeding programs for these species make significant contributions to the survival of their populations in zoos.

I am here today to testify in support of H.R. 4416, the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization and Amendment Act of 2010. WCS would like to thank Representative George Miller (D-CA), for introducing this critical piece of legislation and Chairwoman Bordallo (D-GU) and the Members of the Subcommittee for recognizing the urgent need to save our closest relatives in the wild. My testimony will focus on the following issues: 1) status of each of the great apes in the wild; 2) importance of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Ape Conservation Fund

(GACF); and 3) the need and urgency for reauthorization of the Great Ape Conservation Act. Given WCS' focus and expertise in great ape conservation, we welcome H.R. 4416's intent to maintain targeted, critically needed and uninterrupted U.S. government support to great ape conservation. In support of H.R. 4416, WCS offers recommendations that are designed to support and improve this legislation particularly as it relates to congressional oversight over the Great Ape Conservation Fund and informing strategic grant-making decisions at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), while identifying areas of immediate need for gorilla conservation.

### **Status of Great Apes in the Wild**

From world-renowned WCS conservationist Dr. George Schaller's seminal studies of mountain and eastern lowland gorillas in the Albertine Rift in 1959 to the 2008 discovery of more than 125,000 western lowland gorillas in the northern Republic of Congo, WCS has led the effort to protect all four gorilla subspecies. WCS' great ape conservation work also focuses on chimpanzees and bonobos—our closest extant genetic relatives—and Asia's orangutans and gibbons. Great apes face grave threats: hunting and illegal wildlife trade to supply bushmeat and pets to urban markets; habitat destruction through logging, mining, and agriculture from local slash-and-burn to large-scale commercial plantations; and devastating infectious diseases. The following paragraphs describe the state of gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans and gibbons in the wild with an intention to articulate clearly the need for continued and immediate US government support for conservation of the world's last remaining great apes.

### **Cross River Gorilla** (IUCN Red List Status: *Critically Endangered*)

The rarest of the four subspecies of gorilla, the Cross River gorilla inhabits the fertile mountains and hills on the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. When WCS and our partners first sponsored surveys in the 1980s, this subspecies was thought perhaps to be extinct, the victim of habitat loss and hunting. Initial data suggested that isolated pockets of 10 or 20 individuals remained on the tops of hills, raising concerns about genetic fragmentation and viability. As our knowledge has grown, however, we have learned that gorillas continue to disperse between these groups and that, with about 300 gorillas still living in the wild, this population is genetically viable. Our work with local communities and the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon have helped to bring hunting to a halt, and both Nigeria and Cameroon have recently created new protected areas to safeguard these extraordinary animals. The largest of these, Takamanda National Park in Cameroon, created in 2008, protects about a third of the entire population.

Today, WCS works across the range of Cross River gorillas, helping to coordinate transboundary conservation and cooperation, including the production and implementation of the 2007 Regional Action Plan for Cross River Gorilla Conservation. We help to manage protected areas, to develop inclusive land-use plans, to educate, involve, and benefit local communities, and to carry out long-term studies of Cross River gorillas. Following the recommendations of the 2007 Action Plan, WCS is committed to improving legislation and law enforcement as well as to investigating whether or not ecotourism would be a safe and appropriate way to support conservation and local communities in part of the Cross River gorilla range. WCS has also established extensive educational outreach programs for several communities living in and around Cross River gorilla habitat. These programs inspire local people to work alongside our conservationists, by supporting community-managed protected areas, such as Nigeria's Mbe Mountains, or through joining joint gorilla monitoring initiatives, such as the Gorilla Guardian Network in Cameroon. In 2009, WCS partnered with Hamburg-based NDR Naturfilm to obtain the first video images of this elusive species on a forested mountainside in Cameroon: images

that for the first time are bringing this subspecies and its plight for survival to the attention of the world. Through the years, WCS researchers have developed an effective non-invasive monitoring system aimed at keeping track of the gorillas's status and protecting their health without disturbing them. As a result of these efforts, over the past five years the outlook for Cross River gorillas has changed from a conservation "long-shot" to a likely future success story. A remarkable partnership of local communities, international conservationists, and two African governments has been built, and this has reinvigorated efforts to save the second most biodiverse rainforest region in all of Africa. None of this would have been possible without core ongoing support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who identified this conservation priority early and have continued to provide both vital funding and valuable political leadership.

**Western Lowland Gorilla** (IUCN Red List Status: *Critically Endangered*)

Southeast of Cross River gorillas, in the heart of the Congo Basin rainforest of Western Central Africa lives the most wide-ranging gorilla subspecies, the western lowland gorilla. Their habitat is sparsely populated by humans, and, traditionally, indigenous forest communities have shared the forest in harmony with apes. However, the recent expansion of commercial timber exploitation across the region has brought considerable demographic and socio-economic change and threatened human-gorilla coexistence. Access routes created for the timber industry facilitate the transport of bushmeat from remote forest areas to urban markets, and commercial hunting for bushmeat now represents one of the two severe threats to western lowland gorillas across their range. The other major threat is infectious disease including the Ebola virus which causes high mortality in wild great apes and currently threatens the northern parts of Gabon and the Republic of Congo where the majority of western lowland gorillas live. In addition to the devastating human fatalities, the disease might have the potential to eliminate the largest remaining populations of our close relative.

WCS has been working to protect the western lowland gorilla since the 1970s by implementing conservation and applied research throughout Central Africa. Working with national governments and other partners, we have established national programs and landscape projects to protect the sub-species in Gabon, Cameroon, and the Republic of Congo, which together harbor the largest populations of gorillas in Africa. Throughout the Congo Basin, WCS' conservation efforts include collaborating with indigenous groups and the private sector, notably the commercial logging industry, to establish wildlife management programs at the local community, concession and government level. WCS field veterinarians and staff run gorilla health monitoring programs in sites across Gabon and the Republic of Congo to better understand the patterns of disease transmission and to promote protective measures from the ground up. WCS also continues to reduce the threat of bushmeat hunting by supporting law enforcement programs in the Cameroon, DR Congo, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo. Our conservation efforts incorporate education and outreach programs that focus on the bushmeat trade, and target local communities, transportation routes, and regional urban markets. A remarkable aspect of this program has been a pioneering public-private partnership with the logging industry itself. WCS recognized fifteen years ago that conservation efforts must extend beyond the ten percent of the Congo forest that governments had committed to protect as parks and include as well the majority of the forest that had been leased to timber companies for selective logging. Beginning with the largest timber company in the Republic of Congo, Congolaise Industrielle du Bois (CIB) in the million hectare buffer zone of Nouabalé Ndoki National Park, WCS forged partnerships with companies in Congo and later Gabon to set aside the most biologically important areas within concessions, to reduce the impact of logging, and,

most importantly, to prevent logging roads, logging trucks, and logging company employees from facilitating the illegal bushmeat trade. The result has been documented increases in wildlife populations, including great apes, in the concessions themselves and the neighboring parks and the demonstration that economic development is compatible with protection of wildlife and the natural environment.

In 2007, WCS, with support from the GACF (as well as others including USAID's Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)), made an amazing discovery of 125,000 western lowland gorillas living in northern Republic of Congo. These gorillas inhabit two areas: the Ndoki-Likouala area where WCS has been working for twenty years with US Government support to conserve wildlife, and the "Green Abyss", Ntokou-Pikounda further to the south, which had remained unexplored until now because of its remoteness and inaccessibility. The gorilla census was the result of intensive fieldwork carried out by WCS staff and the Government of Republic of Congo. The researchers combed rainforests and isolated swamps to count gorilla "nests" to accurately estimate the population. The last estimates, in the 1980s, put the total population of western lowland gorillas at fewer than 100,000, and since then large numbers have been killed by hunters and Ebola. This new discovery, while in no way lessening the imperative to stem the loss of western lowland gorillas, showed that we still have a chance to save large populations of animals inhabiting the last pristine forests and swamps of the Congo. Today we are working with local communities and the Government of Congo to create a new protected area to safeguard forever the heart of this extraordinary land of gorillas. As recently as 2009, WCS's conservation efforts resulted in another success story for western lowland gorillas. The Government of Cameroon committed to the creation of Deng Deng National Park, a 224-square-mile reserve approximately the size of the city of Chicago, to provide a permanent home for the northernmost population of western lowland gorillas, about 600 individuals.

### **Mountain Gorilla** (IUCN Red List Status: *Critically Endangered*)

Perhaps the best known of all gorilla subspecies, and a remarkable conservation success story, are the mountain gorillas of the Virunga Volcanoes and nearby Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. These two populations, totaling only about 720 individuals, straddle the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Uganda, and Rwanda. In addition to the threats faced by other gorilla sub-species, civil unrest and wars in the region where mountain gorillas live have further contributed to the species' fight for survival, as displaced people settle in parks designed to protect wildlife and armed rebel groups hide in the forests. Additionally, diseases from humans such as measles and scabies have resulted in the severe illness and death of mountain gorillas.

The GACF has continued to support WCS's efforts to provide emergency help and support to rangers in Virunga Park, DR Congo, who have made enormous sacrifices through times of peace and war to protect the gorillas. Since 1996, 120 rangers have died in the line of duty. This conflict and others make it clear that saving wildlife and wild places means maintaining a presence in times of both peace and war. WCS's George Schaller carried out the first studies of mountain gorillas in the 1950s, and WCS helped to create and establish gorilla-based tourism in Rwanda in the 1980s, laying the foundation for the sustainable conservation of this subspecies and their habitat. WCS staff worked on through Rwanda's terrible strife in the 1990s and through two civil wars in DR Congo at the beginning of this century. Today, WCS provides scientific leadership for censusing the gorillas of both the Virungas and Bwindi and, through our

local partner the Institute for Tropical Forest Conservation, we provide the scientific basis for park management and sustainable tourism development. Our 2002 census in Bwindi showed an increase in the population from 320 to 340 individuals, suggesting that, in spite of the challenges, both of mountain gorilla populations continue to grow. Meanwhile, in both Uganda and Rwanda, environmentally sensitive tourism based around gorilla trekking yields huge economic benefits for both local communities and the national governments.

**Eastern lowland Gorilla** (IUCN Red List Status: *Endangered*)

The least known gorilla subspecies, the eastern lowland or Grauer's gorilla, lives only in eastern DR Congo where decades of warfare and insecurity have prevented researchers from determining their exact numbers and range. Eastern lowland gorillas are listed as "Endangered" on the IUCN's Red List, and we estimate they number somewhere between 3,000 and 10,000 individuals. Since Dr. Schaller's first studies and surveys of eastern lowland gorillas in the 1950s, WCS and our partners have sought to protect these animals in Kahuzi-Biega and Maiko National Parks, often with US Government support, and to determine the extent of their range and the most important new areas for park creation and gorilla protection. In 2006-07, with support of the GACF, WCS partnered with the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Program to initiate a comprehensive health protection program for the eastern lowland gorillas in Kahuzi Biega NP. This effort included health programs for park staff to both protect them as well as prevent them from spreading human diseases to great apes. Just in 2009, WCS completed surveys of the Itombwe Massif, an unprotected 14,000 square kilometer (more than 5,400 square mile) mountainous area in DR Congo's Albertine Rift. These surveys suggested that Itombwe may harbor more species of unique plants and animals than any other comparable area in Africa, including chimpanzees, elephants, and eastern lowland gorillas. Surveys had not been possible previously due to civil unrest, and no one knew that eastern lowland gorillas ranged this far to the south. Today we are working with local, national, and international partners to turn Itombwe into DR Congo's newest national park to safeguard forever the home of these eastern lowland gorillas and a globally important repository of biodiversity.

**Chimpanzees** (IUCN Red List Status: *Endangered*)

Chimpanzees, together with bonobos, are our closest living relatives, sharing with us the vast majority of our genetic code, many social and behavioral traits, and susceptibility to most of the same infectious diseases (with more than 140 common infectious diseases already identified). Chimpanzees inhabit a wider range of forest habitats than gorillas, from the remaining patches of coastal rainforest of West Africa to the scrubby forests of western Tanzania. But their accelerating population decline over the past few decades, spurred mainly by habitat loss and the isolation of remnant populations, has led IUCN to categorize them as Endangered. In the much of the central part of their range, the Congo Basin, they are still hunted for bushmeat, pets, and trophies. In Gabon and the Republic of Congo, they have, like gorillas, also been devastated by Ebola. If we allow the last remaining populations of chimpanzees to disappear from the wild, we lose a unique window into our own evolutionary history and sever a vital connection to Africa's tropical forests.

WCS is working to protect and conserve wild chimpanzees in eight African countries, from Cote D'Ivoire in West Africa, through the nations of the Congo Basin, to Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania, frequently with core support from the Great Ape Conservation Fund. Our most exciting scientific discoveries over the past decade have included the extraordinary social and behavioral repertoires of the chimpanzees of the Goualogo Triangle in the Republic of Congo,

who had no previous contact with human beings, the predicted impact of climate change on connectivity of chimpanzee habitat in the Albertine Rift, and entire populations of chimpanzees new to science on both shores of Lake Tanganyika in DR Congo and Tanzania. Conservation success stories have included the creation during the past ten years of 20 new protected areas safeguarding chimp populations in Cameroon, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, documented increases in chimpanzee and other wildlife populations in northern Republic of Congo, and a pioneering US Government-supported chimpanzee tourism program in Nyungwe National Park, Rwanda.

The close relatedness of chimps and humans leads to serious risk of disease transmission between our two species wherever we come into contact. This risk is most severe in the Congo Basin, where 80% of wild chimpanzees occur and where both HIV and Ebola have crossed over from chimpanzees to humans repeatedly. WCS is leading the global effort to understand and prevent such zoonotic disease transmission in order to protect chimpanzees and humans into the future. Since 1999, we have been systematically collecting comprehensive health data on these populations by conducting intensive ecological surveys to observe and obtain data and diagnostic samples from gorilla and chimpanzee carcasses. In addition, WCS' Global Health Program and field veterinarians have been educating park rangers, communities, and field researchers on how to prevent the transmission of Ebola and other zoonotic diseases. With support from the Great Ape Conservation Fund, WCS continues to train field staff to safely obtain biological samples in an effort to shed light on many diseases that threaten wild great apes including chimpanzees, and also pose severe risks to the global human community.

**Bonobos** (IUCN Red List Status: *Endangered*)

Bonobos, sometimes called pygmy chimpanzees, are genetically and behaviorally even closer to humans but are less well known as they occur only in the remote central rainforests of the DR Congo, south of the Congo River. WCS will not discuss bonobos at length today since the Subcommittee will benefit from the testimony of our colleague from the Bonobo Conservation Initiative. WCS is pleased to partner with BCI and other partners, supported by the Great Ape Fund and other donors, to determine the extent of the bonobo's range, to identify the most important areas for protection, to assist with protected area management, to involve and benefit local communities, and to secure a future for the most peaceful and loving of all the great apes. WCS's work on bonobos mainly involves surveys, community education, land-use planning and zoning, and capacity building for the staff of DR Congo's Park Service (ICCN). Over the past five years, WCS has, with US Government support, discovered that Central Africa's largest national park, Salonga, still harbors approximately 40,000 bonobos, far more than previously known. WCS has also identified the area to the east of Salonga, Lomami-Tshuapa, as probably the most important region for protected area creation and bonobo conservation. To the west, in the great swamp forest of the Lac Tele – Lac Tumba Landscape, a WCS-led consortium of partners including WWF has discovered important new bonobo populations and helped to protect their habitat, Africa's most extensive wetland.

**Bornean Orangutan** (IUCN Red List Status: *Endangered*)

The three sub-species—eastern, western and southern Bornean orangutans—are all listed as endangered by IUCN. WCS's conservation efforts on the species in Malaysian Borneo date back to the 1960s when Dr. Schaller conducted pioneering surveys of orangutans in Sarawak. In the 1990s, WCS worked with the Sarawak Government to prepare and implement the State's official wildlife policy which included wide-ranging measures to conserve wildlife, including greatly

strengthening its legislation to protect orangutans and other species. Today, with the ongoing support of the GACF, WCS' conservation work to conserve Bornean orangutans continues in the Batang Ai Lanjak-Entimau Protected Area complex, the largest of its kind in Sarawak and the largest refuge for a subspecies that is jeopardized in other parts of its range by illegal hunting and habitat loss. WCS conservationists survey the area's orangutan population and its habitat, assess the major threats it faces, and works with the Sarawak Forestry Corporation and local communities to address them. This includes raising awareness of the threats and support for conservation of the orangutans among local communities and schools through conservation education programs. WCS also works with local ecotourism companies to further enhance support for conservation, including future plans to extend the protected area complex.

**Sumatran Orangutan** (IUCN Red List Status: *Critically Endangered*)

North Sumatra is the last stronghold for the Sumatran orangutan, but even here increased human spread of industrial plantations for rubber, oil palm and wood pulp continue to reduce and fragment vital orangutan habitat. The Sumatran orangutan shares 96 percent of the human genetic makeup. Today it is believed that fewer than 7,000 Sumatran orangutans remain in the wild, a consequence of the wildlife trade, hunting, and accelerating destruction of their native forest habitat by loggers, small-scale farmers, and agribusiness. WCS has worked continually in Indonesia since 1995, from Sumatra in the west to Papua in the east, and all major islands groups in between. WCS works with the government and other partners in Gunung Leuser National Park, last stronghold of the Sumatran orangutan. There, WCS conducts wildlife surveys, and also addresses illegal wildlife trade through Wildlife Crimes Units. Wildlife trade is a major threat to wildlife in Indonesia, a country considered to be Southeast Asia's largest exporter of wildlife, both legal and illegal. There is also a thriving domestic market for wildlife. While national laws support control of this trade, there are many barriers to effective legal enforcement, including sparse resources. Several orangutan populations are caught in the midst of this crisis since, when young, the animals are thought to be very appealing pets, even though the trade is illegal.

**Gibbons** (IUCN Red List Status: *Endangered*, Black Crested Gibbon: *Critically Endangered*)

All of the 11 species of gibbons currently recognized are endangered or, for one species, critically endangered. WCS has a long history of conservation success across Southeast Asia where gibbons occur, and is committed to reducing the primary threats that face all gibbon species, mainly hunting, and habitat loss and degradation through logging. In addition, in recent years, gibbons have become unfortunate victims of increasingly criminalized syndicates that conduct illegal wildlife trade in Southeast Asia. The Yellow-cheeked gibbon has declined in numbers by more than 50% in recent years, due to hunting and habitat loss, and is a major focus of WCS's work in Cambodia. In 2008, WCS supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and in partnership with the Royal Government of Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries searched an area of 300 square miles within the Seima Biodiversity Conservation Area and discovered 2,500 Yellow-cheeked crested gibbons, the world's largest known populations of the species. WCS believes the total populations within the 1,150 square-mile landscape surrounding Seima might be even larger. Prior to this GACF funded discovery, the largest known population was believed to be that of 200 animals in adjacent Vietnam. Despite this good news in Cambodia, the area still remains at risk from conversion of forest to agro-industrial plantations for crops, including biofuels, and commercial mining. WCS remains committed to continuing to work with the Cambodian government to ensure that these globally important primate populations remain secure through innovative programs that could result in payments for avoided deforestation. This involves measuring carbon stocks in the forest to

determine the amount of greenhouse gas emissions the forest keeps out of the atmosphere. WCS, through its Carbon for Conservation initiative is helping to provide economic incentives to people living in high-biodiversity landscapes such as Seima Protection Forest via the implementation of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) projects. With the support of the GACF and USFWS Multinational Species Conservation Fund programs, WCS also works to conserve landscapes in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Lao PDR which, between them, protect significant populations of most of the other gibbon species, and we work with a range of government agencies in Vietnam to tackle illegal wildlife trade, including of gibbons for the pet trade.

### **Importance of Great Ape Conservation Fund**

In response to these many pressing threats faced by Great Apes across Africa and Asia, the U.S. Congress passed the Great Ape Conservation Act in 2000 which created the Great Ape Conservation Fund at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for conservation of gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans and gibbons. The USFWS, which manages the Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF) program for elephants, rhinos, tigers, sea turtles and great apes, has significantly furthered the conservation of all of these species groups by providing grants on a competitive basis for applied research and direct conservation implementation activities that will lead to their long-term survival. Activities funded include infectious diseases monitoring and intervention, strengthening law enforcement, conservation education, safeguarding habitat, training range-state nationals as conservationists and building the capacity of both individuals and institutions, and much more. Since 1990, the U.S. Congress has provided approximately \$68 million to MSCF, which has leveraged an additional \$140 million in partner contributions, and is the only continuous source of revenue in the world focused exclusively on the conservation of these species in the wild. For these reasons, the Congressional Research Service noted that although MSCF is a relatively small program within the Fish and Wildlife Service, it has nevertheless generated enormous constituent support, chiefly concerning its funding levels (CRS Report RS21157 Updated January 17, 2008). Despite this targeted investment supporting more than 1,500 conservation projects so far, the USFWS has been unable to support an additional 1,300 project applications, many of which proposed activities that would have contributed directly to the conservation of these global priority species.

With ongoing species and landscape conservation programs around the globe, WCS faces a considerable challenge in mobilizing and targeting scarce resources where they can have the greatest possible conservation impact. To this end, we have begun to determine the investment required to achieve our ten year conservation objectives in each of our highest priority landscapes. For example, in order to conserve the Ndoki landscape in the northern Republic of Congo (roughly half the size of New York State and home to more than half of the world's gorillas) and achieve ten-year conservation objectives there, we estimate approximately \$7 million per year is required in total public and private investment. Support from the GACF towards achieving these objectives is valuable out of all proportion to its actual dollar amount for four reasons: 1) it leverages and matches support from private individuals, charitable foundations, and other governments (including the Government of Congo itself); 2) it supports core species-conservation priorities including biological survey and monitoring, disease interventions, support to law enforcement, and capacity building; 3) it is ongoing and reliable over decades; and 4) it is provided by an expert scientific staff at the USFWS who are able to identify key priorities, provide valuable advice, and represent the US Government in interactions with other donor and range-state nations.



For example, in FY08, the USFWS, with augmented support from USAID, invested \$4.4 million through the GACF, thereby leveraging an additional \$5.2 million in matching and in-kind funds to support 63 projects in Asia and Africa. Much of this leverage came from private foundations, conservation organizations such as WCS and private charitable donations. The Great Ape Conservation Fund continues to complement other sources that focus on sustainable and improved livelihoods for local communities. Conservation of great apes has also helped address new and emerging threats, most notably that of climate change. Wildlife conservation generally, and great ape conservation specifically, has captured the imagination of people around the globe, and the resulting 20 protected areas WCS has helped to create in Central Africa over the past decade are now contributing to decreases in deforestation rates and the prevention of millions of tons of CO2 emissions from forest destruction and degradation.

### **Why is Enactment of H.R. 4416 Critical?**

WCS supports the reauthorization of Great Ape Conservation Act through the timely enactment of H.R. 4416. In addition to the Act's substantial impact on great ape survival in the wild, enactment will allow the GACF to continue to leverage broad global conservation benefits:

#### *Addressing the key conservation issues at a landscape scale*

WCS practices conservation through a landscape approach targeting four key global conservation issues: the relationship between conservation, sustainable development, and human livelihoods; global climate change; health and well-being; and natural resources use and exploitation. In recent years, threats to great apes have magnified due to increased human footprint on tropical forests through activities such as illegal logging, other legal and illegal extractive industries, hunting and wildlife trade, the spread of industrial-scale agriculture, and infrastructure development. Deforestation and land use change not only contribute to nearly 20-25% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, but wildlife including great apes are being stripped of their critical habitats in the forests of the Central Africa and Southeast Asia at a rapid pace. In the face of these threats, the GACF through its targeted approach of addressing threats makes an indelible mark on protecting great apes and their habitats across Asia and Africa, a critical need more today than ever before.

#### *Providing benefits to local communities*

Protection and expansion of forests is essential to conserve great apes across their entire range, and also provide numerous additional environmental, economic, and social benefits to some of the world's poorest communities and nations. Healthy forests protect biodiversity and watersheds, maintain soil fertility, provide clean water, and enhance incomes for the rural poor through the availability of non-timber forest products. These ecosystem services will provide communities with a safety net to protect against the impacts of civil unrest and climate change. Since WCS' Global Health Program expanded operations to combat Ebola and other infectious diseases in the Congo, not a single human mortality has been attributed to these deadly diseases. Our health programs supported by the GACF have trained park guards, hunters and local villagers to become part of disease surveillance networks to provide early detection and warning about disease outbreaks that can affect great apes as well as humans. Other funded activities include training former poachers and illegal wildlife tradesmen to work as park rangers and wildlife criminal unit informants. Local communities have benefited from well managed eco-tourism and related infrastructure development across GACF funded WCS projects in Africa and Asia as illustrated through specific examples above.

### *Building political will across range-states*

Perhaps the single most influential result of the Great Ape Conservation Fund has been its ability to empower local conservationists to build grassroots ground-up support for great ape conservation which on many occasions has led to range states dedicating additional resources, protecting vital habitat, strengthening local law enforcement and building goodwill and long-term partnerships with the U.S. government. Across Central Africa and Southeast Asia, WCS uses U.S. government support to work with national governments in the regions to create national parks and protected areas as outlined in specific examples above.

### **Great Ape Conservation and Connections to the American Public**

*Bronx Zoo's Congo Exhibit:* While the rainforests of Africa and Asia may seem far from the lives and concerns of most Americans, great apes provide a powerful intellectual and emotional connection to these forests and to global conservation issues such as climate change for millions of zoo visitors each year. At WCS's headquarters at the Bronx Zoo, we witness this connection every day. Since our Congo Gorilla Forest exhibit opened in 1999, nearly 7 million visitors who have chosen to allocate a portion of their admission fee – a total of more than \$10.6 million – directly to field conservation projects in Central Africa's Congo Basin. These funds have helped to create 18 protected areas, including Lopé, Waka, Birougou, Ivindo, Cristal Mountains, Mayumba, Loango, Batéké Plateau, Akanda, Pongara, Moukalaba Doudou, Mwangne, and Minkebe in Gabon; Mbam Djerem, Takamanda, and Deng Deng (in progress) in Cameroon; Itombwe (in progress) in DR Congo; and Nyungwe in Rwanda. WCS's five "living institutions" attract over 4 million visitors each year with an annual economic impact of \$414 million in the tri-state area. Visitors from across the nation and the globe learn about the key challenges our species faces in living sustainably with the natural world, and they leave motivated to contribute to our conservation mission. WCS's Bronx Zoo headquarters is also a global center of excellence in wildlife biology, landscape ecology, and wildlife health.

*Potential disease transmission across continents:* WCS is also working to prevent zoonotic disease transmission into the US, an issue of grave public health and national security concern. As a result of global transport and trade, emerging health threats can spread as never before to the U.S. Butchering and eating wildlife (bushmeat), especially great apes and other primates which are genetically similar to humans, is a particular risk. Rural communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America are historically dependant on wildlife as a source of protein. Today's bushmeat "industry" which provides meat for large urban markets is depriving these forest communities of their basic nutritional needs, contributing to disease risks (especially when immune systems are depressed), and raising longer-term food security concerns. As millions travel the world, diseases spread rapidly across international borders. As one of the largest ports in the country, New York receives several million tons of cargo each from all around the world. This has the potential to carry pathogens that could have devastating impacts on humans worldwide including here in the United States.

Emerging infectious diseases, such as Ebola, anthrax, are widespread in tropical rainforests and have proven deadly to both humans and great apes. The Ebola virus is an especially troublesome example, as there is currently no available treatment for those infected and the mortality rate can be as high as 90 percent. WCS's Animal Health Monitoring Network, funded in part by the Great Ape Conservation Fund, encourages rapid reporting and response to wildlife mortalities and illnesses. This network has provided critical information to researchers and public health

agencies and serves as an early-warning system to possible future outbreaks in human communities. Human cases of measles, influenza, and tuberculosis—infectious diseases which are also extremely dangerous to great apes—are common in communities living near or in great ape habitat. Over the past six years, WCS has sustained a highly efficient wildlife health surveillance program in the Republic of Congo which has resulted in over 40 great ape carcasses recovered and tested. In 2005, an estimated 5,000 gorillas in northern Congo disappeared, apparently as a result of an outbreak of Ebola making a strong case for monitoring wildlife and disease in tropical forests to prevent transmission to humans. The Great Ape Conservation Fund is not only a targeted investment in species conservation by the U.S. Government but a proactive investment to combat threats facing apes, ecosystems, and local and global communities.

## **Recommendations**

WCS applauds the leadership of Congressman Miller and Chairwoman Bordallo for their tireless work on behalf of global species conservation and in advancing H.R. 4416 in particular. WCS extends its support to the legislative principles enshrined in H.R. 4416, particularly those that relate to additional administrative and management costs to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The successes of the past decade of implementation of the GACF have demonstrated that threats posed to great apes across their range are not intractable but can be overcome by sustained efforts. Though hugely valuable, the resources available to date have not been sufficient to stem the continued loss of great ape habitat or the threats to apes from hunting for bushmeat and from diseases such as Ebola. The reauthorization of the GACF through H.R. 4416 (with minor recommended modifications) affords Congress the opportunity to bolster the global effort to make a future for mankind's closest relatives in the wild and simultaneously to benefit global conservation, development, and public health.

### *Advisory Panel*

WCS appreciates the Congress' efforts to insure effective oversight of the Great Ape Conservation Fund. The efficiency, transparency, and scientific soundness of USFWS's decision-making processes continue to benefit the conservation community. One of the hallmarks of the GACF and the MSCF is that expert, impartial USFWS staff-members make funding decisions entirely on the basis of a transparent, competitive, and equitable application system. An additional advisory panel besides being unnecessary could divert limited resources otherwise needed to fund conservation in the field and potentially, introduce favoritism and bias into a competitive grant-making process. The intent to create an advisory panel for the GACF was left to the discretion of the USFWS per the previous reauthorization of the Great Ape Conservation Act in 2005. WCS respectfully submits that this intent remain intact.

### *Use of Strategic Plan*

The GACF is highly strategic, repeatedly identifying key ape populations, sites, and issues before other donors. An example is the Cross River gorilla, now recognized as a global conservation priority, but neglected for years by donors other than USFWS. The GACF is also flexible, able to respond rapidly to changing circumstances in the field and to adjust priorities in light of funding availability from other sources. This strategic focus and flexibility have made USFWS's funding disproportionately valuable to effective ape conservation projects of WCS and of myriad other organizations and many of the successes and discoveries in great ape conservation over the past decade would not have happened without this leadership. Moreover, GACF clearly articulates in every grant-making cycle its priorities that guide conservation assistance. WCS believes strongly in strategic planning, having recently completed our own

global strategic plan and playing an active role in virtually all great ape action plans and other international planning efforts such as through developed by the Global Strategy for the Survival of Great Apes and their Habitat (GRASP) and IUCN's Primate Specialist Group. H.R. 4416's mandate to USFWS on use of select strategic plans and engaging in a strategic planning process for the GACF risks replicating existing efforts within USFWS and internationally; diverting valuable funds from the field, and, potentially, introducing controversy and bias in allocating funds. WCS expresses strong support for the Great Ape Conservation Fund as currently managed by USFWS and requests that vital conservation dollars provided by Congress are maintained to fund individual site-based great ape conservation projects. Creation of new strategic plans for the GACF is likely to pose additional administrative costs to the USFWS and as such WCS submits that H.R. 4416 not mandate the same.

#### *Multi-year Grants and Increased Funding Ceiling*

WCS strongly supports H.R. 4416's inclusion of multi-year grants. Multi-year funding allows grant recipients and their partners to plan and act over time frames appropriate to the context of conservation, which is rarely achieved over a 12-month time period but rather requires longer-term planning and commitment. Such commitment integrates scientific knowledge, livelihood considerations and strong local partnerships needed to ensure long-term and sustainable impacts. Multi-year funding would also reduce the administrative costs of grant-making, allowing the greatest possible percentage of funds to reach projects on the ground. Given the complexity of challenges that face great apes and the increasing costs of conducting conservation on-the-ground, WCS welcomes the scaled increases in funding levels beginning with \$5.5 million in FY11 and culminating in a \$7.5 million ceiling in FY15 as proposed by H.R. 4416. These additional, although not guaranteed, funds would allow the GACF to award more grants and particularly help in achieving conservation successes such as creation of new national parks as in the case of the Ndoki landscape, Itombwe and Deng Deng; continued support to community based conservation incentives in landscapes such as Nigeria's Mbe Mountains and Malaysia's Batang Ai Lanjak-Entimau Protected Area complex; and combat threats such as the spread of the Ebola virus by supporting an advanced-warning monitoring and response system in the Congo basin. In all, increased funds would provide great hope and encouragement to support the charismatic and iconic great ape species that we all deeply care about.

In conclusion, congressional authorization for H.R. 4416, the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization and Amendment Act of 2010, will reaffirm the leadership of the U.S. Government within the global community, underscore U.S. commitment to international treaty obligations, and encourage coordinated global efforts to save the world's last remaining great apes. The very survival of gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans and gibbons in the wild rests in the hands of our generation. Given the enormity of this responsibility, and the urgency of the need for increased conservation, WCS urges the Subcommittee and the Congress as a whole to act quickly and positively on the enactment of this critical piece of legislation. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment and to work with you on this issue.