

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

TESTIMONY Before The
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES RESOURCES COMMITTEE
**On H.R. 3113, A BILL TO REAUTHORIZE THE RHINOCEROS & TIGER CONSERVATION
ACT OF 1994**
H.R. 2807, A BILL TO FOR A RHINO AND TIGER PRODUCT LABELING ACT

Witness:

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I am Dr. Thomas J. Foose. I serve as the Program Officer for the Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of IUCN - The World Conservation Union and as a member of their African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG). I am also the Program Director of the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), which is an NGO exclusively concerned with rhino conservation worldwide, both *in situ* and *ex situ*, and especially with linking the two approaches. IRF is directly contributing \$ 500,000/year and is coordinating or administering another \$ 500,000/year for a total of \$ 1,000,000 per year on rhino conservation projects. Finally, I am a member of the Rhinoceros Taxon Advisory Group (Rhino TAG) and the North American Studbook Keepers for Rhinoceros of the American Zoos and Aquarium Association (AZA). Today, I am representing the IRF, both Rhino Specialist Groups, and the Rhino TAG.

The organizations I represent greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify before this Subcommittee on rhino conservation in general and specifically in support of HR 3113 to re-authorize the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act of 1994. These organizations also support HR 2807 the Rhino and Tiger Product Labeling Act. My comments will refer mostly to rhinos and apply mostly to HR 3113, in other words the supply side of rhino conservation problems. However, my organizations also strongly support HR 2807, which relates more to the demand side of the problem.

The Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act was passed in a time of crisis for these species. This crisis continues. The Act was also passed at a time of particular budgetary stringency for the U.S. Congress. The efforts of many members of Congress to provide funds for conservation of rhinos, tigers, and elephants in a time of budgetary stress is most commendable, much appreciated, and very effective.

The continuing crisis for rhinos is most cogently and poignantly conveyed by the current estimates of numbers for the 5 species and 11 subspecies of rhinoceros: (Table 1, Figures 1-3):

- (1) Fewer than 13,000 rhinos of 5 species and 11 subspecies survive in the wild.
- (2) However, well over half of these rhinos are of one subspecies, the southern white rhino.
- (3) The numbers of 4 of the species (Black, Indian, Sumatran, and Javan) are fewer 6,000 combined.
- (4) The numbers of all species of rhino combined (about 13,000) and indeed all rhinos and tigers (of which there are an estimated 6,000 worldwide) are fewer in number than the estimated population of either species of elephant, whose conservation the Congress and U.S. Government are also commendably supporting.
- (5) The numbers of the 3 Asian species of rhino combined are about equal to the rarer of the 2 African species, i.e. the black rhino.

Conservation biologists believe that a population of at least 2,000-3,000 and preferably 5,000 or more of each distinct kind (i.e., subspecies or geographical variety) of rhino (and tiger) are necessary for long-term viability. Most of the species and subspecies of rhino (and tiger) are far below this viability level.

Rhinos are capable of recovery. It should be noted that the two kinds of rhino which have prospered the most in recent years, the southern white and the Indian, were almost lost around the start of this century through over-exploitation. Stringent protection in South Africa, India, and Nepal recovered these species in each case from fewer than 100 rhino, perhaps as few as 20 rhino, to their current state of relative prosperity among the rhinos.

There is some further good news amid the generally bad situation for rhinos. There has been some improvement in numbers and status of rhino populations since the Rhino and Tiger Conservation Act was enacted.

The numbers of Black Rhino as a species, as well as most of its subspecies, have stabilized and are indeed recovering. There has been a increase continent-wide for this species in Africa of about 10% to 2,500 from the low point of 2,300 in the early 1993.

The population of southern white rhino continues to grow vigorously, although most of them are in the Republic of South Africa, which has performed magnificently in rhino conservation over the years. But, there are always risks possible when an endangered species is located in a single political unit.

Populations of Indian rhino in India and Nepal have continued to increase, despite substantial poaching pressure and extreme budgetary limitations in these countries.

The establishment of a system of effective rhino protection units (RPUs) in South East Asia seems to be ameliorating the poaching problem for Sumatran rhino, which because of low numbers and intense pressure

from poachers, is probably the most critically endangered of the rhino species. (A summary of the RPU system in S.E. Asia is appended to this testimony.)

A number of range states and regions are actively attempting to develop income generation activities that will contribute to financial sustainability and self-sufficiency of rhino conservation programs. (The efforts toward this objective for the RPU system in S.E. Asia are described in an appendix to this testimony.)

However, there remain critical and precarious areas and trends for rhino conservation:

The northern white rhino is literally on the brink of extinction. This ironically was a success story until the recent civil war in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of Congo. Under strict protection from 1984 to 1994, numbers had doubled. However, there are now no more than 20 surviving and poaching is rampant in Garamba National Park, their last refuge.

The northwestern subspecies of black rhino, which survives only in Cameroon, is almost gone.

Numbers of Sumatran and Javan rhino remain precariously low and at best are only now stabilizing, with potential recovery still in the future.

Much of the success for rhino conservation in Africa has occurred in 4 or 5 countries: in eastern Africa in Kenya and in southern Africa in the Republic of South Africa, Namibia. While all of these countries have plans to move toward more self-sufficiency, all are still greatly dependent on support from their governments to sustain the level of protection they have been providing for rhinos. However, other immense and increasing priorities in rhino range states are causing substantial reduction in government appropriations for conservation, e.g. the reduction is about US \$ 1,000,000 this year in Natal province of South Africa.

Analogously, the economic crisis in South East Asia is likely to diminish what the governments of range states in this region can allocate to rhino conservation. Adequate support from internal government sources is also problematic in India and Nepal.

Hence, there should be no complacency. The next 5-7 years are going to be critical in terms of whether the rhino species and subspecies survive.

The Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund has been contributing significantly to the stabilization and recovery of rhinos. The support from the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (RTCF) has been catalytic and crucial to many rhino conservation programs as the testimony submitted by the USFWS documents. Moreover, in addition to the benefit of the funds, the RTCF has served an extremely significant function to help better coordinate and improve the quality and rigor of many rhino conservation programs.

A prime example is their role in Javan Rhino Conservation. Through support for and participation in a Javan Rhino Colloquium which assembled the many parties involved with this species and through RTCF review and critiques of project proposals, a much improved and coordinated program for this species has emerged.

The organizations I represent commend the USFWS for the manner in which it has administered the RTCF.

It should be noted how linked rhino conservation has become with global political and economic events, e.g.

- The northern white rhino in Congo with the civil wars and strife in this region.

- The Sumatran and Javan rhino with the economic crisis in S.E. Asia.

This linkage reinforces the justification for global efforts to help these species.

It should also be noted that the private sector in partnership with range state governments has played and will continue to play a vital role in rhino conservation in both Africa and Asia, e.g.

- The private sanctuaries in Asia and the conservancies and ranches in southern Africa.
- The involvement of NGOs and private partners in S.E. Asia to support rhino conservation and develop its financial sustainability.

The RTCF of USFWS has become an important partner to both range state governments, NGOs, and private parties in these endeavors.

The AsRSG and AfRSG have assisted range states to formulate continental and national action plans, to prioritize specific programs and projects, and to calculate the costs of rhino conservation and particularly the needs of range states for external support. Details are available in the Action Plans developed by the AsRSG and AfRSG. (An executive summary of the AsRSG Action Plan for Rhino Conservation is appended to this testimony.)

Basically, over the next 5-7 years, there is need for at least:

\$ 3 million/year in external support per year for rhino range states in Asia

\$ 3 million/year in external support per year for rhino range states in Africa.

The private sector can provide some of these funds but it is vital that the U.S. Government and the RTCF also continue to contribute, and if possible at an increased level. The organizations I represent would encourage an increase in appropriations for the RTCF to at least \$ 1,000,000 in Fiscal 1999 and perhaps \$ 1,500,000 in subsequent years to be distributed among rhinos and tigers between Asia and Africa. This amount would complement and stimulate continued matching funds from other NGOs and private partners to achieve the levels of external funding the range states need. The ratio of RTCF funds to matching funds in projects the RTCF has supported to date has been about 30% RTCF : 70% Other Donors.

Of course, all appeals to the Federal Government for funding are considered important and immediate by their advocates. However, some needs are intrinsically more immediate than others. The simple fact is that substantial support for rhinos and tigers is needed now. If adequate funds cannot be provided, the need will disappear because the rhinos and tigers will have vanished.

In summary,

Rhinos and tigers are still in crisis but stabilization and some recovery of numbers have commenced.

Support from the RTCF has been a critical and catalytic factor in this improvement.

There is need for support from the RTCF to continue and if possible to increase over the next 5-7 years.

Therefore, the IUCN/SSC Asian and African Rhino Specialist Groups and the IRF encourage Congress to:

Reauthorize the Rhino and Tiger Act through 2004.

Increase the amount of the appropriations to at least \$ 1 Million for 1999 and perhaps more in subsequent years toward a goal of \$ 1,500,000/fiscal year.

Enact the Rhino and Tiger Product Labelling Act.

As final comment, may I observe another reason that support from the United States for rhino conservation in Asia and Africa is both appropriate and ironic considering the history of the rhino family. The United States was long ago the center of rhino distribution on this planet. Rhinos were the most common large mammals in North America from about 40 until about 5 million years ago, when we lost our native rhinos. Through the RTCF as well as the efforts of AZA institutions and their Species Survival Programs for rhino, the United States has the opportunity to help save these venerable species from extinction.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Sub-Committee.

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