

~~—~~PREPARED TESTIMONY OF JAMES A. GRAHAM

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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND &
OCEANS

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 11, 2002

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the committee, I would like to thank you for inviting me to testify about the environmental problems confronting the Congo River Basin in light of the growing trend of bushmeat consumption in the region. As the project manager for the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), I am quite familiar with the problem of commercial-scale bushmeat hunting in sub-Saharan Africa.

While wildlife has been hunted for food throughout the history of human existence, only in the last several years has bushmeat become commercialized ~~[What does this mean, "become monetized"? Can we say this more clearly?]~~, and consequently, an important source of income in Central Africa. Among the rural population in this region, until recently, people made money growing and selling rice, cotton, cacao, coffee, and peanuts. Over the past 20 years, however, livelihoods have suffered as commodity prices have plummeted and increasingly poor road systems have made it more difficult and costly to transport goods to market. With farming unprofitable and off-farm jobs difficult to come by, many rural people with access to the forest have resorted to the commercial hunting and trading of bushmeat.

The move toward bushmeat has occurred because high returns can be

realized from a relatively small investment. Firearms, which have become abundant as a result of assorted civil conflicts, and other items, such as snares, are readily available for use in the hunting of game for bushmeat. Furthermore, wildlife is a free good. Increasing urban populations have fueled the demand for bushmeat and while these populations have grown, their buying power has declined with the weakening regional economy. Families that were once able to afford beef, chicken, and pork have now shifted to typically less expensive wildlife as their primary source of protein. Bushmeat is relatively inexpensive because hunters do not pay the costs of producing wildlife, as do farmers who raise livestock. Moreover, logging companies have opened up once-isolated forests, providing hunters with easy access to abundant wildlife and traders with cheap transportation, which in turn reduces bushmeat production costs and increases supply to urban markets.

Though habitat loss is often cited as the primary cause of wildlife extinction, over the next 5-10 years, commercial bushmeat hunting will constitute the most immediate threat to wildlife conservation in Central Africa. The scale of commercial hunting required to supply large, rapidly growing urban populations with meat is now exceeding levels that can be tolerated by most large-bodied, slow-reproducing forest animals. At current levels of exploitation, this will result in the progressive depletion and local extinction of most species of apes and other primates, large antelope, and elephant from hunted forests. Only small, rapidly reproducing animals such as rodents and the smallest of antelope are likely to survive the pressure from commercial hunters.

Moreover, hunting indirectly impacts the forest by (1) threatening the survival of forest carnivores such as leopards, golden cats, crowned eagles, and snakes that rely on bushmeat species as prey; and (2) significantly reducing the number of seed dispersing animals, thus changing tree species regeneration rates and forest structure and composition. The direct and indirect impacts of this unsustainable hunting will likely have both immediate and long-term adverse impacts on the structure and function of the forest. For example, while the rates of deforestation in the region are currently low, it is estimated by CARPE that forest cover may decline by between twenty-nine and forty six percent by 2050. The transmission of disease from animals to humans is well documented. Bushmeat consumption may, therefore, place people in increased jeopardy of contracting and transmitting animal-derived (zoonotic) diseases or other emerging pathogens.

Today, bushmeat continues to be an economically important food and trade item for as many as 30 million poor rural and urban people in the Congo Basin. In Central Africa, over 1 million metric tons of

bushmeat are consumed each year – the equivalent of almost 4 million cattle. A hunter can make the equivalent of \$300–\$1,000 per year – more than the average household income for the region. This income figure is also comparable to the salaries paid to park officials, leaving them susceptible to graft. Traders, transporters, market sellers and restaurateurs also benefit from the commercial trade in bushmeat, and in combating this problem, the USG must acknowledge that all of these incomes would decline if laws against the trade were strictly enforced. As demand for bushmeat increases, more people will be encouraged to become involved in the trade, increasing the pressure on wildlife populations, threatening the survival of rare species, and jeopardizing access of future families to the nutritional and income benefits from non-endangered wildlife.

Rising demand for bushmeat, lack of income-generating options for rural and urban communities, the absence of affordable and acceptable substitutes, the opening up of "frontier" forests by logging and mining companies, the complicity of government lawmakers and law enforcers, and the fact that almost anyone can go hunting anywhere without restriction are the most important factors driving commercial hunting and working against wildlife conservation. Bushmeat (including the meat of endangered species) is gathered as "value added" to logging activity. Attention devoted to "illegal logging" may in time, however, have a dampening effect on the worst excesses of the bushmeat trade.

International awareness and support for control of the bushmeat trade was virtually non-existent until the late 1990s. Concerned individuals and conservation groups are now working with key decision makers to resolve the bushmeat crisis. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), governments, and industry are awakening to the challenge, and are currently seeking ways to address the bushmeat crisis at the local, national, and international level. Their pilot initiatives include working with logging companies to reduce or halt the flow of bushmeat from concessions and to minimize employee reliance on bushmeat as a source of food and supplementary income; piloting projects to provide consumers with affordable and palatable alternatives to bushmeat; encouraging African governments to develop legislation and law enforcement capacity appropriate to the local context; and facilitating collaboration among the numerous organizations and agencies working in the region.

USAID's CARPE program has supported preliminary initiatives in several of these areas. CARPE partners have recently worked to create the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Bushmeat Working Group (CBWG), which attempts to exchange information on bushmeat activities among the Congo Basin states. The CBWG is composed of representatives from a half dozen Central African

countries. The national representatives are the heads of the respective wildlife divisions of the individual countries and each nation has appointed a national bushmeat officer. The organization plans to set up a regional coordinator in Cameroon who will work with the member countries to develop and execute a series of actions to limit the bushmeat trade. Current efforts include: national wildlife policy reviews; improving local understanding of the details of production sites, transport routes, and border crossing points; a study of the status of various regulatory mechanisms within forestry concessions; and ways to improve information exchange and the harmonization of laws among the countries. The CBWG will also be responsible for developing and implementing a region-wide awareness campaign regarding the bushmeat trade. USAID is also directly supporting gorilla conservation activities that include efforts to ensure that the primates are not hunted for bushmeat in three locations in Central Africa. We have done this by providing U.S. private voluntary organization partners with \$1.5 million in each of the two past fiscal years.

USAID also conducts a number of health and nutrition programs in the Congo River Basin that have the effect of combating the spread of diseases stemming from practices such as the consumption of bushmeat. As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, wildlife, particularly wild primates, harbor viruses that can be transmitted between species. For example, outbreaks of diarrhea have been associated with the consumption of bushmeat. USAID supports a wide range of health and nutrition programs in the Congo River Basin aimed at reducing the morbidity and mortality of infectious diseases. These programs include diarrheal disease control, prevention of tuberculosis, polio eradication and routine immunization, integrated disease surveillance and epidemic preparedness and response.

In conclusion, I would note that the bushmeat crisis is only a symptom of the much greater problem of the lack of sustained development in the Congo Basin. With burgeoning populations, deteriorating terms of trade for most primary products, insecurity, and dilapidated infrastructure, much of the Congo Basin has a lower standard of living than at independence more than 40 years ago. The "solution" to the bushmeat crisis will only be achieved by fully involving Africans in undertaking essential broad development actions, thus raising their overall standard of living to allow them to secure the alternative sources of protein.

Thank you. I would happy to answer your questions.