

Committee on Resources,

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife & Oceans

[fisheries](#) - - Rep. Wayne Gilchrest, Chairman

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Statement

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Rep. Jim Saxton
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans
March 15, 2001
H.R. 700, Asian Elephant Conservation Reauthorization Act

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you to the witnesses for joining us here today. I appreciate you taking the time out of your schedules to be here. I am pleased to be able to speak in support of the reauthorization of the Asian Elephant Conservation Act.

Four years ago, I introduced this bill, because I was startled to learn that there were less than 40,000 Asian elephants living in the wild. Furthermore, nearly fifty percent of those elephants were living in various national parks in India, while the remaining animals were scattered in fragmented populations throughout twelve other countries in South and Southeast Asia.

The primary reason for this serious decline in population was the loss of essential habitat. It is no secret that elephants and man are in direct competition for the same resources. In most cases, it was the elephants who lost in those confrontations. In addition, Asian elephants are poached for their bones, hide, meat and teeth; they are still captured for domestication; and conflicts between elephants and people are escalating at an alarming rate.

Furthermore, it was clear that millions of people were not aware of the plight of Asian elephants and that range countries lack the financial resources to help conserve this flagship species.

Without an international effort, the future of the Asian elephant was in serious jeopardy. In response to this problem, I, along with a number of other Members, proposed the establishment of an Asian elephant consortium fund.

This concept was modeled after the highly successful African elephant conservation fund, and the fundamental goal of my legislation was to obtain a small amount of Federal assistance for on-the-ground conservation projects.

Fortunately, this important legislation was overwhelmingly approved by both bodies, and it was signed into law on November 19, 1997. Under the terms of P.L. 105-95, the Congress could appropriate up to \$25 million to the Asian elephant conservation funds until September 30, 2002. In fact, some \$1.9 million in Federal funds has been allocated and those moneys have been matched by an additional \$1.1 million in private donations.

Those funds have been used to underwrite 27 conservation grants in 9 different range countries. The type of prospects funded have included: develop an elephant strategy in Sri Lanka; identification of a suitable

managed elephant range in Malaysia;

molecular tools for the local population assessment of Asian elephants; school education to support Asian elephant conservation in India and trace the mobility patterns of Sri Lankan elephants. These projects were carefully analyzed and competitively selected from a list of nearly 100 proposals that were submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

While the early indication is that the world-wide population of Asian elephants has stopped its precipitous decline, it is unrealistic to believe that \$3 million can save this species from extinction. Nevertheless, this law sent a powerful message to the international community that we must not allow this flagship species to disappear from the wild. The United States must continue to play a leadership role in this effort.

I am pleased to have introduced this reauthorization and will push for its passage.

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