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BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS
HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

REGARDING H.R. 2693, THE GREAT APE CONSERVATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2005 AND H.
R. 518, THE NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2005

JUNE 23, 2005

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss H.R. 2693, the "Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2005" and H.R. 518, the "Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Improvement Act of 2005" and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's implementation of these conservation Acts. The Administration supports both bills with some suggested minor changes, and looks forward to working with the Subcommittee on the reauthorization of these Acts.

As members of the Subcommittee are aware, the Service has a long history of proactive programs addressing the international conservation of fish and wildlife species. The Service works with private citizens, local communities, state and federal agencies, foreign governments, and nongovernmental organizations, to promote a coordinated domestic and international strategy to protect, restore, and enhance the world's diverse wildlife and habitats.

As a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Ramsar Convention, four bilateral treaties on migratory birds and other international conservation agreements, the United States shares responsibility for supporting and implementing measures to provide for the conservation of hundreds of species of plants and animals both here and abroad. Both the Great Ape Conservation Act and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act are designed to encourage and assist efforts to conserve some of the world's most ecologically and sociologically important wildlife species.

The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the Great Ape Conservation Fund provide technical and cost-sharing grant assistance to range countries for conservation of the respective species and their habitats. The goal of these programs is to provide support for on-the-ground actions and other conservation related measures often in concert with existing or proposed long-range activities or until such long-range activities are in place. A key element of these Acts is the authorization of financial resources, which reflects the strong national commitment to help support conservation programs of these species in the wild. The United States' funding, combined with the significant funding these programs have leveraged from outside partners, has resulted in direct, on-the-ground conservation benefits that have proven essential to the survival of these species.

The Great Ape Conservation Act

Today, the world's ape populations are threatened by a number of factors. One of the greatest threats to gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos in West and Central Africa, and to a smaller degree, orangutans and gibbons in Southeast Asia is the demand for bushmeat. As a result of their rarity, apes comprise a small proportion of bushmeat production, however, ape meat commands a high price, and has come to symbolize wealth and status in cities. The consumption of bushmeat from apes is also a direct threat to human populations as some scientists have linked it to viruses such as Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever and HIV/AIDs. Most of the recent Ebola outbreaks in Central Africa have been traced back to the handling of infected gorilla or chimpanzee carcasses. Thus, preventing Ebola infections in apes may also be a powerful tool for preventing human deaths, just as vaccinating dogs has led to a significant decline in human infections by rabies. The spread of Ebola is taking a devastating toll on apes as well as people. For example, following the passage of the disease through a study area in the Republic of Congo -- an area where 143 gorillas lived in 2001 -- exhaustive searches have only been able to identify seven remaining gorillas. In the Minkebe National Park in Gabon, a comparison of ape estimates before and after an Ebola outbreak indicated a drop of 99 percent.

Ape populations are also threatened by a loss of habitat, civil unrest and the illegal pet trade. For example, in the Republic of Congo and Gabon, two countries in western equatorial Africa that have about 80 percent of the gorilla population, the combination of these threats reduced the gorilla population by more than 50 percent between 1983 and 2000.

The Great Ape Conservation Act, authorized by Congress in 2000, has greatly assisted efforts to conserve gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans and gibbons. Administered by the Service's International Affairs Program, grants are awarded for a variety of projects including research related to infectious diseases, safeguarding habitat, strengthening

law enforcement, and increasing public awareness. Much of the success of the Great Ape Conservation Act has been a direct result of the unique small project focus on on-the-ground conservation projects in Africa and Asia.

From 2001 to 2004, the Service funded 110 projects in 22 countries. Each project is a cooperative effort with local CITES Management Authorities, other foreign governments, non-governmental organizations, or with private sector entities. No in-country project is approved unless it has the full support of, and has been identified by, that country as a priority for conservation. Through this cooperative approach, the actual on-the-ground resources devoted to species conservation by appropriations of \$4.3 million were more than doubled by the matching contributions provided by our partners and collaborators. The program has achieved significant results including identification of a globally significant orangutan population in Indonesia's Sebangau Swamp which in turn led to creation of a new national park; development and implementation of a collaborative management strategy that is protecting one of the world's most endangered primates, Vietnam's black crested gibbon; creation of safe corridors between important seasonal feeding areas for chimpanzees in West Africa; surveys to find and assess previously unknown ape populations; and a collaboration among several governments to protect the remaining 600 mountain gorillas in the Albertine Rift of East Africa. The conservation efforts funded by this program have also indirectly benefited other species such as monkeys and rare forest antelopes as well as the rapidly disappearing forests that provide habitat for many endemic plants and animals.

Regarding H.R. 2693, the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2005, the Administration supports this legislation with minor changes. H.R. 2693 will enable the program to be even more responsive to the threats facing ape populations throughout Africa and Asia. Section 2 of H.R. 2693 would allow the Service to respond, as necessary, to the post-tsunami needs in the Aceh province of Indonesia. As a result of the tsunami last December, there is a concern that the humanitarian crisis will accelerate pressures on Aceh's forests, and as a result increase the threats to significant populations of orangutans, gibbons, Sumatran rhinos, Sumatran tigers, and Asian elephants (all target species of the Multinational Species Conservation Fund program). Plans to resettle coastal communities further inland, demand for land for fields, and construction of new infrastructure will all place pressure on wildlife habitats and biological and hydrological systems for some time. We note that there may be other areas that were impacted by the tsunami, and we recommend that the language in section 2 be amended to allow other areas to be addressed, as well.

Section 4 of H.R. 2693 would expand the types of project that the Service could fund through the Great Ape Conservation Fund increasing the Service's ability to address important threats such as illegal bushmeat and Ebola. In addition, the Service could increase its efforts to improve the regional capacity for conservation, thereby helping to assure the continued existence of these important species. The Service will continue to involve outside partners to help ensure that the Act is carried out with the best scientific, on-the-ground information. However, the Administration does not support the language in section 4 requiring the Secretary to convene an advisory group. We believe that the Secretary should have the discretion to create an advisory group and therefore suggest that section 4 be changed to read, "The Secretary may convene an advisory group to identify the greatest needs for the conservation of great apes. The Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 App. U. S.C.) shall not apply to such panel." Section 5 of H.R. 2693 would increase the funds available for administrative expenses. This increase is not consistent with the Administration's FY 2006 budget request.

The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act

Through bilateral treaties with Canada, Mexico, Japan and Russia, and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Service has responsibility for maintaining healthy populations of hundreds of native migratory birds, including 341 species that migrate from or through the United States to Latin America and the Caribbean and are covered by the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

Migratory birds help control agricultural pests, pollinate many commercially valuable plants and provide bird-related recreational opportunities for millions of people. Unfortunately, many migratory bird species are declining as a result of habitat loss and degradation, particularly in the Caribbean and Latin America. The fact that many, if not most, neotropical migratory bird species have "two homes," the United States and a Caribbean or Latin American country, serves to increase the challenges associated with conserving them.

In authorizing the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 2000, Congress provided a mechanism for coordinating and funding the conservation of neotropical migratory birds and their habitats throughout Latin America, the Caribbean and North America. Modeled after other international conservation programs including the Multinational Species Conservation Funds and the North American Wetland Conservation Act, the Act recognized the need for international cooperation of these conservation efforts and established an effective and targeted matching grant program. The Service strives to implement the Act as a complement to other programs that seek to protect and restore neotropical migratory bird habitat in the United States.

Administered by the Service's Migratory Bird Program, grants are awarded for projects that promote the long-term conservation

of migratory birds through partnership. These projects protect and manage bird habitat, conduct research and monitoring, support law enforcement, and provide education and outreach.

In 2004, the Service's Migratory Bird Program underwent review using the Administration's Program Assessment and Rating Tool (PART), and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Program was included in that assessment. As a result of that review, the 2006 President's Budget includes revised long-term outcome and annual goals developed during the PART process, and requests additional funding to develop and implement management plans for five migratory bird species to help achieve the program's long-term goal of increasing the percentage of migratory birds that are healthy and sustainable. The program plans to develop baseline data and revise targets as necessary for the new performance measures and schedule and carry out independent program evaluations.

Since receiving appropriations in FY 2002, the Service has funded 146 projects, throughout the United States, Latin America and Caribbean with more than \$13 million. In FY 2004, 140 grant proposals were received and 40 were funded. While the statute currently requires a 3:1 match for all grant requests, partners have contributed nearly \$80 million in matching funds representing a match of more than 4:1. As a result, the program has achieved some significant on-the-ground results including protection of grassland bird habitat in Colorado and Chihuahua, Mexico, research into communication tower lighting to minimize bird collisions in the United States and restoration of a freshwater wetland in Costa Rica. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act is helping the United States and our international partners address the threats to neotropical migratory birds and hopefully reduce the likelihood that they will need the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

With respect to H.R. 518, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Improvement Act of 2005, the Administration supports this bill with minor changes. H.R. 518 would ensure that we are able to continue to provide on-the-ground support for projects that benefit neotropical migrants. Section 2 of the bill would redefine the Caribbean to include Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Previously these two territories were considered part of the United States, thereby requiring them to meet the Acts 3:1 match requirements in cash. By including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands as part of the Caribbean, H.R. 518 will better enable them to qualify for grants under the Fund.

Section 2(e) would require the Secretary to convene an advisory group. The Administration does not support this change as we believe the Secretary should continue to have discretion to create an advisory group. Therefore, we suggest that section 2 (e) be deleted from H.R. 518, and that the language of the Act remain unchanged. The Service will continue to involve outside partners to help ensure that the Act is carried out with the best scientific, on-the-ground information.

Section 2(g) of H.R. 518 would increase the funds available for administrative expenses under the Act. This increase is not consistent with the Administration's FY 2006 budget request. Section 2(g) of H.R. 518 also establishes a separate fund in the U.S. Treasury for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, thereby officially separating it from the other Multinational Species Conservation Funds. Consistent with the Administration's FY 2006 budget request, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund should remain in the Service's Multinational Species Conservation Fund. Finally, Section 2(h) of H.R. 518 authorizes funds to carry out the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act in the amount of \$10 million in FY 2008 and \$15 million in FY 2009. These amounts are not consistent with the current authorization of \$5 million or the out-year projections in the Administration's FY 2006 budget request.

CONCLUSION

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the concerns recognized by Congress in establishing the Great Ape Conservation Act and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act five years ago remain today. Many countries do not have sufficient resources to properly manage, conserve, and protect their great ape and neotropical migrant bird populations. While much has been accomplished, much remains to be done. While we recommend changes to these bills, the Service supports reauthorization of both programs as they each help ensure the conservation of these species in the wild. Both Acts have served, and will continue to serve, as catalysts for cooperative conservation efforts among the governments of the world, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to work together for a common goal – the conservation and continued healthy existence of ape and neotropical migratory bird populations.

We look forward to working with the Subcommittee to reauthorize the Great Ape Conservation Act and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. I would be happy to answer any questions.