

TESTIMONY OF KENNETH STANSELL, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS, REGARDING ILLEGAL BUSHMEAT CONSUMPTION IN AFRICA

July 11, 2002

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Kenneth Stansell, Assistant Director for International Affairs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the issue of illegal bushmeat consumption in Africa. My testimony will provide the Subcommittee with information regarding the causes of the problems, and the Service=s role in wildlife conservation in Africa and how it helps reduce the bushmeat trade. I will also suggest additional measures to address the issue.

Background

Humans and wildlife in Africa share a long and intimately entwined relationship. Many rural communities utilize wildlife resources to satisfy nutritional, economic, and cultural needs. Some communities are almost entirely dependent on wildlife for their subsistence. Meat from domestic species, sometimes imported over long distances, is usually more expensive in remote areas. Livestock husbandry is extremely limited in the forest zone, and even when present, domestic animals are usually utilized as a living bank account (i.e. to be bought and sold) rather than as a sustained source of animal protein through consumption. Urban dwellers are reported to maintain a preference for meat from wild animals over available domestic meat such as beef, fish, and poultry, and indulge this preference if it is affordable. The contrast between the consumption of wildlife in urban centers and in rural areas, and between legal and illegal exploitation of wildlife, require careful qualification in the context of this discussion. The Service would like to make clear the distinction between the legal harvesting of wildlife on a sustainable basis and the unsustainable, illegal trade that exists in many parts of Africa on such an enormous scale.

The conservation community refers to the problem under discussion as AThe Illegal Commercial Trade in Bushmeat,@ to distinguish it from legal, small-scale hunting for subsistence and use by local populations in the areas of production. Dozens of species, from rodents to elephants, and including numerous endangered and threatened species, are utilized in the bushmeat trade. [A list of such species is attached.] Legally harvested bushmeat forms a major component of many rural household economies and is a vital source of protein, particularly in rural areas in the forest zone, where alternatives are few or expensive. However, the continued legal utilization of bushmeat by local populations is threatened by illegal commercial-scale exploitation.

Outside traders export large quantities of illegally, and legally, taken bushmeat from areas of production using modern technology such as firearms, wire snares, and transport on motor vehicles. Local hunters are often stuck in a cycle of indebtedness to these traders who, along with market sellers, acquire the major share of profits from the bushmeat trade. It is important to note that some cultures, such as the numerous Ba=Aka Pygmy groups indigenous to the Central Africa region, are at risk of extinction as a result of shifting economies and the advent of the commercial bushmeat trade. The underlying factors driving the bushmeat trade -- lack of adequate protected areas for wildlife, lack of protein and economic alternatives for

rural people, lack of law enforcement capacity in regional governments, and increasing demand for bushmeat -- must be addressed if the current unsustainable and destructive practices are to be effectively managed. This requires an innovative collaborative effort not only by governments and conservation professionals, but also development experts from throughout the global community.

The bushmeat problem is by no means unique to Africa; it is widespread throughout Asia and Latin America as well. However, it is in Central and West Africa that world attention has been focused on the illegal, commercial killing of wildlife for meat and its impacts on both faunal integrity and ecosystem functions. Due to the low productivity of tropical forest ecosystems, the impacts of poaching over a relatively short period are threatening many species with local extinction and some species, such as the Great Apes, with extinction in much of their range.

An important question to consider is, what has changed in Africa to cause such a steep decline in wildlife populations? People have hunted and eaten wildlife throughout known history, but until recently, large areas still contained significant wildlife populations. However, economic, technological, and social conditions have changed in ways that make a once localized phenomenon widespread across the continent.

Over history, it is likely there were periodic local increases and decreases of hunting pressure and wildlife population levels. Recent decades have seen a dramatic increase in human population growth rates in Africa and a corresponding increase in demand for meat. Wildlife populations may now be unable to reproduce sufficiently to keep up with this growing demand. They are being adversely affected by a combination of over harvest and reduced availability of undisturbed habitat.

The introduction of modern cash economies and transport networks to once isolated, traditional communities puts a monetary value and trade mechanism on what had been only locally consumed and shared. This opportunity for earning income in areas where virtually no alternatives exist provides motivation for hunting that exceeds meeting the basic needs of family or community. Studies have clearly shown that in some places where economies are rapidly developing, there is an increase in available income. A increase in the demand for and the consumption of bushmeat usually follows.

Another economic change in some areas of Central Africa that exacerbates the crisis is the collapse of commodity prices on the world market for crops such as cacao. Previously productive plantations now stand idle and overgrown in many places. Even crops such as oil palm nuts are now produced and shipped more efficiently in West Africa or Asia, thereby rendering these economic alternatives unattractive.

Another cause of the problem is the ease of access to wildlife populations. Historically, access to distant tracts of forest was very difficult, and the ability of poachers to kill, process, and transport large quantities of bushmeat was limited. Today, roads penetrate into previously inaccessible forests. In addition, the technology used to kill wildlife has also changed dramatically in recent times.

Underlying these changes in Africa is the political and social backdrop. Recent decades have seen abrupt and unpredictable, as well as chronic civil conflict. With the breakdown of law and the displacement of large numbers of people, hunting for bushmeat increases dramatically. This is well illustrated in recent years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaïre. National parks and protected areas are settled by refugees and rebel soldiers who turn to wildlife for money and sustenance. Enormous commercial operations in the eastern parts of that country even export bushmeat northward to countries that have already exterminated their wildlife.

The effects of the over harvest of wildlife for the commercial bushmeat market may include species extinction over large areas or entire ecosystems. Some species are more vulnerable than others. Long-lived and slow-reproducing species such as elephants and apes are the hardest hit. Elephants are usually the first species to be taken when a new area is opened to bushmeat hunting. Until recently, elephants were poached primarily for ivory, with their meat being a by-product for local consumption or left in the forest. Now, because of the increased demand for bushmeat, and the ease with which it can be transported and sold -- often across international borders -- bushmeat commerce may be a greater threat to the remaining elephant herds than ivory trading.

Gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos are all illegally hunted for bushmeat, and they are particularly sensitive to disturbance. As species populations come under illegal hunting pressure, they often move into the territory of a neighboring population. This may provoke additional stress, including fighting, among individuals from the two groups. Because of the slow reproductive rate, the loss of even a few percent of a population of these species each year over long periods is sufficient to drive species such as the bonobo to local extinction. Chimpanzee and gorillas are prized by some bushmeat consumers and often fetch the highest price on the market. Some hunters specialize in hunting apes with devastating effects on local populations.

Many more endangered or threatened species are also victims of over-exploitation, including numerous species of monkeys and three species of crocodiles. Thousands of dwarf crocodiles are captured each year in some areas and shipped live to markets in urban centers days or weeks away by riverboat. Our Congolese colleagues inform us that dwarf crocodile numbers are plummeting, and they now are absent from much of their range. This carries serious implications for the aquatic ecosystem.

Role of the Fish and Wildlife Service

The Service is an active participant in a variety of conservation activities with a range of partners in the governments of developing countries and with international and national non-governmental organizations. The Service is responsible for the implementation of the African Elephant Conservation Act of 1989 and the African Elephant Conservation Fund (AfECF) created by the Act, as well as the Great Ape Conservation Act of 2000 and Great Ape Conservation Fund (GACF) created by that Act. With authority under these and two additional Multinational Species Conservation Acts, the Service is forging effective working relationships with range country governments and non-governmental organizations (NGO) active throughout Africa and Asia. Our Division of International Conservation is also a partner in U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE), a collaboration of US-based NGOs and government agencies working for conservation in the Central Africa forest zone. Our experience in working with partners to conserve and manage wildlife and their habitats in Africa continues to grow. Through our involvement on the ground and in developing networks, the Service has gained some valuable but alarming consciousness about serious wildlife conservation issues.

The African Elephant Conservation Act

Central Africa has been a major focus of technical and financial support through AfECF. One project developed and implemented in cooperation with the World Wildlife Fund and the government of the Central African Republic emphasizes conservation of elephants and their habitats in protected areas such as the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park. During the course of this project, an ecoguard force was trained and equipped, and thousands of wire snares and dozens of illegal firearms have been confiscated. Work with local communities has also led to a better understanding, and increased level of cooperation, among

villagers and park personnel. The control of illegal bushmeat trade has been greatly improved through this project.

AfECF funds two important bushmeat control projects in the Republic of Congo, both led by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Congolese Ministry of Water and Forests. One is a seminal project to regulate bushmeat production and trade in a logging concession south of the Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in northern Congo. In addition to controlling bushmeat poaching and traffic, the project is making significant progress developing a model for the relationship among a logging company, local communities and hunters, and an international conservation NGO to minimize illegal trade in bushmeat. The model will play an important role in the re-examination of policies and regulations relating to logging concessions to address wildlife management and exploitation concerns.

The other project is in the Lac Tele Community Forest Reserve in the northern Congo. Because there are few roads in this remote area, the river network is used to illegally transport large quantities of bushmeat northward to markets in the Central African Republic. The AfECF grant assists the reserve's warden and his team from the Ministry of Water and Forests with controlling key points in the river system that traverses the reserve. In addition, the project has a community awareness component that seeks to inform villagers of the need to conserve wildlife for the long-term, rather than merely as a means for immediate reward.

These three examples of joint projects pursued under AfECF demonstrate that there are ways to help build law enforcement capacity among African government agencies, and to support the development of effective legal hunting and trade regulation systems in the near term.

In the longer term, the training and education provided by these projects will yield sustained benefits to conservation efforts. As the ability of the government to analyze and deal with emerging problems increases, more effective conservation will follow.

The Great Ape Conservation Act

The GACF currently supports 18 projects in 15 countries in Africa. An integral component of some of these projects is conservation education and bushmeat awareness programs. These programs inform local communities that the Great Apes are often targeted as bushmeat species, and are particularly hard-hit by poaching. The Cameroon Wildlife Aid Fund, a national NGO with a conservation education program at the Yaounde Zoo, runs a project that educated an urban audience about the bushmeat trade and its impact on apes and other wildlife. This project is particularly valuable because urban audiences have been largely neglected in most countries in Central Africa.

Another important contribution to public awareness of the crisis is a wide-reaching project in partnership with the Bonobo Conservation Initiative (BCI). BCI a small international NGO that is working with the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, local NGOs, and communities in the area to the north of Salonga National Park. The Salonga area and its surroundings comprise the entire range of the bonobo. Therefore, protection and management of the area is critical to the survival of the species. This BCI program studies bonobo distribution north of Salonga NP and has a major component to exchange information with communities about the threat posed to bonobos by poaching. The BCI also plans a major radio campaign to raise awareness at a national level and has established an excellent working relationship with Congolese governmental agencies.

The Service's Division of International Conservation is a CARPE partner and is now in its second year of working with many partners from government agencies, NGOs and academia. Our broad range of partners include U.S. Department of Agriculture/Forest Service, Peace Corps, and the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA); World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Conservation Society, Conservation International, African Wildlife Foundation, World Resources Institute, and Innovative Resources Management; and, the University of Maryland. The focus of the Service's efforts under USAID's CARPE project is to support the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Bushmeat Working Group (CBWG). The CBWG was formed in response to an adopted proposal at the Eleventh CITES Conference of the Parties, April 2000. The proposal's mandate is to find ways to address the illegal trade in endangered and threatened species (CITES Appendices I and II) across international borders as bushmeat, and the conditions that foster illegal trade in the countries from which the animals originate.

The CBWG is composed of representatives from six Central African countries including the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa), Gabon, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea. The national representatives are the heads of the respective wildlife divisions, and each country has an appointed national bushmeat officer. A regional coordinator is planned for Yaounde, Cameroon, who will work with the member countries to develop and execute a series of priority actions to address this trade. In addition, the CBWG Regional Coordinator will work closely with the CITES-Monitoring of Illegally Killed Elephants Coordinator for Central Africa to assure a harmonization of effort regarding monitoring of elephant killing and law enforcement patrols.

The Service is working with the governments of these six range countries, the United Kingdom, and international NGOs such as the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force, to support the CBWG and its work. Current efforts include: national wildlife policy reviews; understanding the nature and details of the production sites, transport routes and means, border crossing points, and other information that can be used to control the illegal trade; a study on the status of various regulatory mechanisms within forestry concessions, how they are designed and work, and how they can be improved; and, ways to improve information exchange and the harmonizing of laws among countries in the Central African sub-region. In addition, the CBWG will be responsible for developing and implementing a region-wide awareness campaign regarding the bushmeat trade, which has been identified as a critically important and effective mechanism for effecting beneficial change in behaviors with regard to wildlife use.

Recommendations

The Service recommends the following to address the bushmeat problem: (1) sustaining collaborative efforts such as the Multinational Species Conservation Acts and CARPE Partnership; (2) Central African wildlife policy review and revision, wildlife monitoring and sustainable management, and strengthening the protected areas system in Central Africa; and (3) licensing and regulation of hunting seasons and wildlife trade should be based on science and practicality.

In Central Africa, as elsewhere on the continent, laws exist to regulate hunting and commercial exploitation of wildlife and other forest products. Certain species cannot be hunted, such as the great apes; and some areas are off limits to hunters, such as national parks and other protected areas. In some countries there are closed hunting seasons, and legal methods of hunting and quotas for some species are limited. In most areas, hunters must be licensed and their firearms registered by the authorities. In other places, hunters may only employ traditional means such as crossbows, spears, or nets made of natural fibers. Although the law regulates the commercialization of wildlife, the means to enforce laws and to regulate hunting and trade in wildlife products is very limited. Enforcement of existing laws is needed to regulate hunting and trade so

that it is sustainable over the long term.

The CBWG, in cooperation with the CARPE partnership, will conduct policy review and revision in the coming year. Within existing resources, the Service will examine ways to further support this work with technical advice and to assist the range states, when asked, to develop optimal wildlife policies that are harmonized across the sub-region.

In order for wildlife to be sustainably used for food or recreation, monitoring of populations, including threats, health status, off-take, and habitat condition, must be carried out. The Service supports monitoring elephant populations in this area through the CITES Monitoring of the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) project. As part of this program, information acquisition, transmission, storage, analysis, and interpretation is being developed. This approach is an efficient way to monitor certain bushmeat species in key areas. Within existing resources, the Service could be of assistance in building these essential capacities among range states and local communities. Linking this effort and the CBWG mandate would enable a harmonization of efforts and efficient use of limited resources and personnel.

Protected areas form the nucleus of wildlife management in Central Africa, and may play a vital role in a source and sink model. This model describes a system that allows protected areas to act as sources of wildlife, that when reaching carrying capacity, could move outward into multi-use forests, where they could be sustainably harvested by local people. This model requires sound scientific information, including wildlife monitoring, socioeconomic information about local conditions and attitudes, and the ability to regulate hunting and trade.

In some respects this situation is not unlike that which faced the United States prior to the institution of scientific wildlife management in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time market hunting and loss of habitat had eliminated or nearly eliminated many species here in the United States. Initiatives taken by American hunters and their organizations led to the Migratory Bird Treaty, creation of State fish and wildlife agencies, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program, and establishment of National Wildlife Refuges and state wildlife management areas to protect habitat.

With the resulting increase in knowledge of how to manage wildlife, dependable funding and continuing strong support from the hunting community, even once severely depleted species of game animals are now plentiful. Few Americans, even hunters, know that there were fewer than 500,000 white-tailed deer in the entire United States in the 1920s, and that most States east of the Mississippi had no or very limited deer seasons. At that time, hunting of wood ducks was banned, and it was feared they would go extinct. They are now the most common breeding waterfowl in the East.

While the American conservation experience cannot be transplanted wholesale to Africa, we have acquired a tremendous body of knowledge relating both to wildlife management and to fostering a conservation ethic among the hunting community which can serve as models to be adapted to local conditions elsewhere. Equally important, we know from our own experience that these measures can work.

Finally, although anecdotal evidence identifies there is an existing problem concerning importation of bushmeat into the United States, there has yet to be a definitive review of the extent of the problem. It is important to work with partners internationally to identify how bushmeat is entering the United States and to develop training programs for customs agents in the countries of origin to control the export of bushmeat from the source.

Mr. Chairman, the Service appreciates your interest in the critical problem of illegal bushmeat consumption and trade. We look forward to working with you and members of the Committee to seek ways to address this crisis. This concludes my testimony. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

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