

Testimony of  
Mark Leighton, PhD  
Executive Director, Great Ape World Heritage Species Project and  
Member, Scientific Commission, Great Ape Survival Partnership (GRASP)

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Madam Chair Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and other members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Mark Leighton and I have spent the last 30 years involved in great ape and tropical forest conservation research and policy. For most of this period I have taught courses, directed research and collaborated on policy initiatives while on the Anthropology faculty at Harvard University and now in the Program in Sustainability and Environmental Management at the Harvard Extension School. My field research experience and forest conservation activities have been mainly in Indonesia, encompassing both orangutans and gibbons.

I am here today representing two organizations. The Great Ape World Heritage Species Project is a small NGO recognizing that great apes are of universal human value and dedicated to improving the long-term protection of wild populations and habitats of great apes. We facilitate collaboration among scientific, government, NGO and private stakeholders in new policy initiatives that help achieve this goal.

The Great Ape Survival Partnership, GRASP, is a United Nations Type II Partnership formed in 2001. GRASP brings together UNEP and UNESCO in a common Secretariat to help coordinate government, NGO and other partners to improve protection of great ape populations and habitats in the wild. Among other activities, GRASP has funded efforts to encourage the 23 range states in which great apes occur to design and implement national plans to protect their great ape populations, and has intervened diplomatically and financially in some cases to avert crises. GRASP’s activities are guided by its Scientific Commission. The Great Ape World Heritage Species Project facilitated formation of the GRASP Scientific Commission. I served as a founding co-Chair and remain a member. I have been asked by both the GRASP Secretariat and the Chair of GRASP’s Scientific Commission to represent them at this hearing.

Neither of these two organizations I represent here has received funding authorized under the Great Ape Conservation Act. Although GRASP has administered funds for specific field projects designated by donor states, GRASP’s great value lies in international policy, diplomacy, education and other activities that complement funding for field projects.

GRASP is extremely grateful to the US Congress and American public for their generous funding through the Great Ape Conservation Act of 2000. This has enabled the

International Programs of the US Fish & Wildlife Service to play the key role in funding projects to improve the conservation status of great ape and gibbons at a great diversity of field sites.

I am pleased to discuss today the effectiveness of the Great Ape Conservation Act, and the value of H.R. 4416, the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2010.

### The Role of the Great Ape Conservation Act

The Great Ape Conservation Act has been enormously important in two ways. One, the recognition through this and other congressional acts to conserve flagship species has carried moral and diplomatic force in the world, and enhanced the leadership of the United States in international conservation. In addition, the annual appropriations for the Great Ape Fund to administer grants has tangibly improved the conservation of virtually all the species and subspecies of great apes and gibbons, at dozens of sites with wild populations. Because these funds have been spread among worthy projects in all thirty of the range countries of great apes and gibbons, and enabled the work of committed conservationists regardless of citizenship, this act of American generosity has been much appreciated.

There is no doubt that conservation scientists and practitioners around the world recognize the Great Ape Conservation Fund as the most important funding source for projects, large and small, promoting the conservation of great ape and gibbon populations and the habitats on which they depend. Why are the Fund and its administration under Fish & Wildlife's International Programs so appreciated?

First, funding through the Act has been distributed across the diversity of great ape and gibbon taxa and sites. Administration of the Great Ape Conservation Fund puts into funding action the priority view of conservation scientists, including GRASP and its Scientific Commission: conserving great apes requires conserving the genetic and ecological diversity of great apes. For example, there is no one orangutan, but two species, each restricted to one island, Borneo or Sumatra. The genetic diversity of each, and therefore their ability to survive and adapt to climate change, disease or other environmental challenges, is partitioned among the diverse populations across the geographic range of each species. This genetic diversity may be recognized by biologists in defining the three Bornean subspecies of orangutan that diverged in geographic isolation from one another. But important genetic diversity also resides in the ecological diversity of populations that live mostly in peat swamp forests or that range from lowlands up altitudinal gradients in tropical mountains. This diversity is magnified in gorillas and chimpanzees and for that matter, among the gibbons and siamang, where broad geographic ranges and diverse climatic regimes, disease organisms and habitat diversity occurs. There is thus a need to prioritize saving populations across this taxonomic, geographic and genetic diversity, and the Fund has mirrored this conservation need by funding across this spectrum. Further, threats to individual population extinction from climate change, disease and even sociopolitical factors require that we mitigate extinction risk by conserving numerous independent populations.

Second, funding through the Great Ape Conservation Fund prioritizes the critical conservation actions that are specific to different taxa in different countries or at different sites. In one case, this might require funding a field survey to identify if an important population resides in some remote area of a great ape range country. In another case, following arguments for conserving genetic diversity, it means funding a small, isolated gorilla population under high threat, because it is the only one left representing a unique taxon. In still another case, funding might address an overlooked, but critical need that a multimillion-dollar grant at the site cannot address. Or it might fund collaboration among many governmental and NGO agencies to address a common regional threat, such as the bushmeat trade in central Africa.

Third, the Fund has been highly successful in leveraging other funds through their grants. This explicit criterion for proposal evaluation cannot help but enhance the effectiveness of grant recipients, as they must think through how they might acquire partner funding.

The summary reports on the Great Ape Conservation Fund for 2001-2007, and for FY2008 and FY2009 bear testimony to the number and diversity of projects and populations that have been funded. For the period 2004-2008, 241 grants were awarded, with another 63 in FY2009, totaling nearly 20 million dollars. No other funding program comes close to serving this need for a highly leveraged, broad spectrum funding effort.

#### Effectiveness of the program

There are two relevant metrics to apply to judge the effectiveness of the Great Ape Conservation Act and the Great Ape Conservation Fund. By my calculations from the figures in the FY2009 report, the cost of administrating the nearly 15 million dollars in grants was only 2.9% of the total. This seems remarkably efficient in getting funds directly into projects.

But a more important evaluation should be how well the funds target conservation priorities for the taxa and populations that the Great Ape Conservation Act is meant to address. As I detailed above, in my view and the view of GRASP, the Fund has been following a prioritization model of extraordinary effectiveness. Funded proposals address key threats to populations and their habitats, so are logically consistent with funding for greatest conservation effectiveness, and conserving the genetic and ecological diversity of great apes and gibbons are addressed.

Further, it has made a difference that the target of the funding has explicitly focused on conservation of great apes and gibbons. This has allowed funding to be targeted to maximize the long term viability of a genetically diverse set of great ape populations, and other clear goals, unencumbered by the type of international conservation funding that has mixed and sometimes contradictory goals.

## Adequacy of current funding levels

Having strongly endorsed the effectiveness of funding, we nonetheless recognize that the levels of funding authorized in previous years has not come close to meeting the goals of the Great Ape Conservation Act. The number and diversity of populations needed to secure the conservation of great apes in the future remains tragically under-funded.

Over the last decade, and despite favorable conservation steps at many sites, many well-known threats to great ape populations remain undeterred and new ones have emerged. Strategies to deal with bushmeat poaching or conversion of habitat to oil palm plantations have been developed and are showing success. But both long-term conservation investments at specific sites and for broader policy changes that would assist many populations within a country or region are needed.

GRASP's Scientific Commission has conducted preliminary analysis of the conservation needs of great apes. The consensus is that well over 100 different populations, spread across the geographic ranges of the six great ape species, have been identified as priorities for the conservation of great ape genetic and ecological diversity. These populations range from well-funded and well-protected sites to those where habitat destruction or poaching proceeds without any conservation planning or presence on the ground. The fact of the matter is that we have not yet surveyed all the possible habitat areas to determine where conservation opportunities lie, or what the status is of many current populations. Recently identified populations of lowland gorillas and Bornean orangutans are examples.

We should also bear in mind that this is also a time of opportunity for enhanced tropical forest conservation of biodiversity. There is increasing recognition that large landscape-level forests, comprised of diverse interconnected habitats, should be a special focus of conservation. These landscapes typically extend outside of protected areas, as do the habitat blocks that delineate the populations of great apes. Effective models for private enterprises, such as the certified timber and palm oil industries, to be drawn into stewardship roles in these landscapes are being implemented. There are opportunities to ease the costs of protection of these forests through carbon financing. We would like to see the Great Ape Conservation Fund and funding from other government agencies engage these opportunities and seek maximum benefit where possible for additional protection of great ape habitat. Enhanced funding to meet this challenge can help guarantee great apes a place at the table.

GRASP and its Scientific Commission believe that increased funding administered by the Great Ape Conservation Fund can play an enormously important role in meeting these conservation needs. Whereas it may seem that this funding is dwarfed by the millions of dollars allocated to single sites, in fact, the targeted nature of these funds, their spread among diverse sites, and their efficient administration gives them comparative value far beyond dollar by dollar matching to other global initiatives for tropical forest conservation.

The Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2010

We fully support the reauthorization of the Great Ape Conservation Act and its specific amendments. Increased funding is in keeping with the experience over the last decade, both in the needs identified to counteract the great ape conservation crisis, and the effective opportunities for targeted funding to help address this.

The GRASP Scientific Commission fully supports engagement with the Secretary of the Interior as part of a panel of experts to help advise priorities according to the schedule outlined in the Amendments. This cannot help but improve the effectiveness of funding and activities by all international agencies committed to great ape conservation. The leadership of the United States in this endeavor has been and should continue to be of inestimable value.

I am very grateful to the Subcommittee for this opportunity to express these views on behalf of the organizations I represent.