

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

TESTIMONY
OF
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&
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before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE
AND OCEANS
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
on
H.R. 3407
THE KEYSTONE SPECIES CONSERVATION ACT
and
H.R. 4320
THE GREAT APE CONSERVATION ACT
June 20, 2000

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to testify this morning on two very important pieces of legislation, HR 3407--the Keystone Species Conservation Act and HR 4320--the Great Ape Conservation Act.

My name is Richard Lattis. I am the Senior Vice President and General Director of Zoos and Aquarium for the Wildlife Conservation Society and the current president of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA).

AZA represents 185 professionally-managed and accredited institutions which draw over 131 million visitors annually and have more than 5 million zoo and aquarium members. Collectively, our institutions teach more than 12 million people each year in living classrooms, dedicate over \$50 million annually to education programs that focus on, among other things, the devastating effects of the loss of vital species habitat and the illegal trade in endangered species parts and products, invest over \$50 million annually in scientific research and support over 700 field conservation and research projects in 80 countries.

AZA member institutions have established the Species Survival Plan (SSP) program--a long-term plan involving genetically-diverse breeding, habitat preservation, public education, field conservation and

supportive research to ensure survival for many threatened and endangered species. Currently, AZA member institutions are involved in 91 SSP programs featuring 120 species throughout the world. A large majority of those SSPs cover species which are listed under the Endangered Species Act or CITES Appendices I, II, and III, including all the great apes--chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans and bonobos (a.k.a., pygmy chimpanzees). In addition, the AZA Ape Advisory Group scientifically manages apes in zoological environments and promotes primate conservation in the wild.

And while AZA zoos and aquariums have become the last stronghold for some species, we fully realize that we cannot save them by zoo propagation alone. AZA and its member institutions will continue to work with Congress, the Federal agencies, conservation organizations, the private sector and the general public to conserve our wildlife heritage. It is in this context that AZA expresses its strong support for the vision and purposes of both HR 3407 and 4320.

Before I briefly discuss these two bills, I would first like to commend Chairman Saxton and Congressman Miller for their enthusiastic sponsorship of the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force briefing which was co-sponsored by AZA and some of the fine organizations at this table. AZA appreciates your support in bringing the bushmeat problem--one of the most significant crises facing international wildlife populations today--into this public forum.

HR. 4320, the Great Ape Conservation Act

Today, in West and Central Africa and other regions of the world, bushmeat (which includes great apes, elephants, forest antelope, porcupine, bush pig, monitor lizard, etc.) is an economically important food and trade item for thousands of poor rural and urban families. Virtually uncontrolled access to forest wildlife, rising demand for bushmeat, lack of economic options for rural communities, the absence of affordable protein substitutes, and the opening up of frontier forests have resulted in a commercial level trade in wildlife that is literally emptying the forests.

While the bushmeat crisis affects more than just the great apes, it highlights these magnificent animals as the identifiable symbol of this emerging wildlife tragedy. To graphically illustrate the urgency of this situation, permit me to read a section of a recent communique that was prepared by the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force based on reports from central Africa.

- In a 1994-1995 survey, approximately 14,900 eastern lowland gorillas were estimated to be found within the Kahuzi Biega National Park- a World Heritage Site-in the Democratic Republic of Congo. 262 of these gorillas were estimated to live in the remote mountainous region of the park.
- By January 2000, nearly all of the known family groups of gorillas in this mountainous region were killed, primarily for bushmeat purposes.
- It would not be unreasonable to assume that half of the park's 14,900 lowland gorillas (7,500 individuals) have been killed in the last two years.
- The fate of the bonobo across its western and central African distribution is yet unknown but seems to be similar *or worse* than those species of gorillas or elephants (which incidentally have experienced a 95% population decline within the park's boundaries).
- The park guards in Kahuzi Biega have been disarmed by warring factions and have no way to protect

themselves or the wildlife.

Mr. Chairman, this is an ecological and societal problem of enormous proportions. It is a problem of political unrest compounded by unregulated resource exploitation through logging, mining, farming and poaching. It is also a problem which is not specifically limited to the African continent as similar situations have arisen in Brazil, Sumatra, and Borneo, where the orangutan population has declined by 90%. We are facing what is now popularly referred to as the "Empty Forest Syndrome," where the trees may be left standing but the endemic wildlife is long removed. And if the essential wildlife--the predators, the prey, the seed spreaders, the natural fertilizers--are gone, the question of ecological balance becomes paramount.

So often we hear the phrase, "a solution looking for a problem," This is not the case. This is a real problem looking for realistic solutions. Those solutions will not be simple because they involve cultural, social, economic and political forces but nevertheless, solutions must be identified. Dr. Jane Goodall, speaking at the recent bushmeat crisis briefing stated, "The long-term implications of the commercial trade in bushmeat are too horrible to imagine. If we do nothing, this crisis could mean the virtual extinction of apes and other endangered species over the next 20 years."

HR 4320 represents a logical next step in addressing the plight of the great apes. The bill creates a conservation fund similar to the successful African elephant, Asian elephant, and Rhino/Tiger Conservation Funds. The Great Ape Conservation Fund is designed to enhance programs for the conservation of great apes by assisting efforts in many worthwhile endeavors. Chief among these are: 1) to address the conflicts between humans and great apes that arise from competition for the same habitat; and 2) to promote cooperative projects among government entities, affected local communities, non-governmental organizations, or other persons in the private sector. These two criteria are essential because it is only through local action, local education, and local support that realistic solutions for saving the great apes can be devised and implemented.

HR. 3407, the Keystone Species Conservation Act

The Keystone Species Conservation Act is a measure which is no less critical or time-sensitive than HR 4320. In the United States, our cornerstone piece of wildlife conservation is the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973. Under the ESA, over 1,050 animal species worldwide have been designated as either threatened or endangered--555 of those are foreign species. However, foreign species do not receive the key protection mechanisms inherent in the ESA such as critical habitat designation or species recovery plans.

Similarly, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), lists over 30,000 species which receive protection through restrictions on trade in parts and products. However, CITES is not designed to offer *in situ* conservation measures for threatened and endangered species.

When we hear of habitat destruction and species loss, we instinctively think of the "charismatic mega-fauna" such as elephants, rhinos, and tigers. The US Congress has taken initial steps to address the threats to these species by authorizing the establishment of the Multi-Lateral Species Conservation Fund which provides conservation program dollars for these high profile species. But there are many other species which may be more endangered than those listed above and actually may be more critical for ecosystem balance than these targeted species. While it is noble to spend limited funds on elephant and rhino/tiger conservation programs, it is equally justifiable to spend funds on lesser species such as the Rodrigues Island fruit bat--a highly endangered species which is essential for seed dispersal and pollination on the Rodrigues Island in the Indian Ocean. However, there is no conservation fund available to pursue such endeavors.

HR 3407 would provide such a mechanism. The bill creates a Keystone Conservation Fund account which would be modeled after the aforementioned elephant and rhino/tiger funds. Funding would be prioritized based on 1) projects that will enhance programs for the conservation of species that are most imperiled and that are supported by the relevant wildlife management authority in the country where the program will be conducted; 2) projects that receive the greatest level of matching assistance from non-Federal sources; and

3) projects that will enhance local capacity for the conservation of the species. Similar to HR 4320, the strength of this bill is the requirement that the local governing bodies and the local community are involved in all phases of the project.

AZA's POSITION:

First let me state that AZA commends both Chairman Saxton and Congressman Miller for these important legislative measures. Both bills address critical funding needs in international wildlife conservation. The question before us today is one of process and not of substance.

In a perfect world with unlimited funds, AZA would generally prefer a multi-species approach, like the Keystone Species bill. The establishment of multi-species conservation funds would obviate the need to return in two or four years to fight for another species-specific bill. However, we don't live in that perfect world and the reality is that for the Keystone bill to be effective, it would need an appropriation of at least \$10 million per year--its authorized level. The current African elephant, Asian elephant and Rhino/Tiger Conservation funds are woefully under-funded at \$1 million, \$700,000 and \$700,000, respectively for FY 2000. Would the Keystone Species Conservation Fund fare any better? I would suspect that given the current funding shortfalls for key Fish and Wildlife Service responsibilities--especially in law enforcement--this would not be likely.

The Great Ape bill holds two distinct advantages at this time: 1) the bill highlights an unfolding ecological tragedy which has captured the public's attention; and 2) the three existing species-specific conservation funds have shown they can achieve success for a relatively small amount of funding.

AZA strongly believes that the Subcommittee should resist any attempt to merge these two bills and thus should move both bills separately through the Resources Committee. Let me assure you that AZA will fully support whichever bill is reported out of the Committee and moved to the House floor. In addition, AZA member institutions will continue to raise the awareness of our 131 million visitors each year to bring focus on threatened and endangered species worldwide for it is public awareness of their plight that has helped engage the U.S. as a major catalyst for world concern.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on these important wildlife conservation measures.

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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