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On behalf of the  
AMERICAN ZOO AND AQUARIUM ASSOCIATION  
before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

H.R. 2693 THE GREAT APE CONSERVATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2005

June 23, 2005

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to testify this morning on this very important piece of legislation, HR 2693--the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2005.

My name is John Walczak and I am the Director of the Louisville Zoological Garden in Louisville, Kentucky. I am here today testifying on behalf of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA)—of which the Louisville Zoo is an accredited member. I currently serve on the AZA Government Affairs Committee.

AZA represents over 210 professionally-managed and accredited institutions which draw over 142 million visitors annually and have more than 8 million zoo and aquarium members. Our institutions dedicate millions of dollars annually to support scientific research, conservation and 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. In 2004, AZA member institutions supported over 1,800 field conservation and research projects in 80 countries.

Over 20 years ago, AZA member institutions 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 over 100 SSP programs featuring more than 160 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 Taxonomic 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 purpose of HR 2693.

AZA wishes to commend the foresight of this Subcommittee and the Full Committee in the establishment and maintenance of the Multinational Species Conservation Funds—which include African elephants, Asian elephants, rhinos, tigers, marine turtles and great apes. AZA also wishes to commend the US. Fish and Wildlife Service for the exemplary manner in which they have administered these funds. Unlike many government grants programs, this funding effort has put real dollars into the field in real time, with a minimum of bureaucratic delay or red-tape. In addition, the Service has been able to leverage these scarce Federal dollars with over three times that amount in matching and in-kind contributions. A very admirable achievement.

HR. 2693, the Great Ape Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2005

Regarding the legislation before us today, I would first like to thank Congressman George Miller for introducing this important bill and for all of his efforts in support of fisheries and wildlife conservation. I would also like to extend my sincerest appreciation to you, Mr. Chairman and Congressman Pallone for your excellent leadership in this area as well.

Mr. Chairman, the magnificent animals featured in the Great Ape Conservation Act of 2000 are still in great peril today. The IUCN (World Conservation Union) Red List categorizes all great apes as either Endangered or Critically Endangered. An "Endangered" listing means that a species' population has declined by 50-80% over only ten years, and a listing of "Critically Endangered" means that a species' population has declined by 80% or more over ten years. Critically

Endangered great apes include the Cross River gorilla subspecies (numbered at only 250-280 individuals), the Mountain gorilla (at 700 individuals), and the Sumatran orangutan (at 7334 individuals). To graphically illustrate the urgency of this situation, here are the most recent estimations concerning population estimates for gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans, and gibbons.

**Gorilla:** For the Western gorilla, including its two subspecies, the total population numbers between 94,500 and 110,000. For the Eastern gorilla, including its two subspecies, the total population is estimated at only 3650 to 5700.

**Chimpanzee:** The chimpanzee and the four subspecies comprising it now collectively number between 172,700 and 299,700. Chimps are now extinct in 4 of the 25 countries they once inhabited.

**Bonobo:** The bonobo, or pygmy chimpanzee, is a distinct species from the Common Chimpanzee and only occurs in one range state—the DR Congo. Bonobo population numbers are estimated to be between 10,000 and 50,000 today.

**Orangutan:** The orangutan is comprised of two species, the Bornean and Sumatran orangutan. The more numerous Bornean orangutans, including three subspecies, number between 45,000 to 69,000. The Critically Endangered Sumatran orangutan is estimated at only 7334 individuals.

**Gibbon:** Twelve species of gibbons, small apes found across Southeast Asia, are listed on the IUCN Red List. Two species, the Hoolock gibbon and the Black gibbon, are classified as Endangered and two species, the Javan gibbon and the Eastern Black Crested gibbon are categorized as Critically Endangered. Current population numbers for gibbons are still unknown.

The estimated population numbers I have listed are just that—estimates. Most global population estimates are extrapolated from small surveys because it is extremely difficult to obtain accurate population numbers and monitor trends for forest-dwelling animals. In some areas, civil conflict has prevented this important survey research. But one thing is certain: ape populations across the world are declining—and they are declining rapidly.

Threats:

Threats to the great apes are numerous. For the African species, including gorillas, chimpanzees, and bonobos, diseases such as Ebola hemorrhagic fever and the commercial bushmeat trade are, by far, the most serious threats. Ebola is only one of at least 100 infectious agents that are shared between humans and great apes. In 1994 and 1996, in northeastern Gabon, western lowland gorillas and chimpanzees were nearly wiped out during human Ebola outbreaks. In a recent epidemic in northwestern Congo, Ebola is blamed for over 130 human deaths and over 600 great ape deaths—over half the great ape population for the region.

Bushmeat is an economically important food and trade item for thousands of poor rural and urban families in West and Central Africa and other regions of the world. 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. 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.

However, disease and the bushmeat crisis represent only two of the many threats to the world’s diminishing great ape populations. Habitat loss and degradation are equally serious threats to the orangutans and gibbons of Southeast Asia. Until its recent protection, Sebangau National Park on the island of Borneo had been degraded by intensive logging. The 1995 population level of 13,000 orangutans consequently shrank to only 6900 today, which is still one of the largest known populations.

Added to these are the threats that plague great apes everywhere—conversion of habitat to agricultural lands, the illegal pet trade, mining, forest fires, and civil conflict. Exploitation of forests for commercial logging and mineral prospecting mean that new access routes are extended into ape habitat, leading to increased bushmeat hunting and capture of animals for the illegal pet trade. Degradation of forest habitat also results in small, unconnected patches that isolate ape populations from each other and put them at an increased risk of extinction from chance demographic factors. The capture of infant chimpanzees, orangutans, and gibbons for the pet trade and entertainment industry frequently involves killing the mother and other adults. Orangutans sold as pets can yield more than \$10,000 (U.S. dollars), but it has been estimated that five animals die for every one that is traded.

Underlying and exacerbating these threats is the fact that great apes have very slow reproductive rates. Most apes do not

reach sexual maturity until between the ages of 8 and 15, and can only bear young every 4 to 8 years. This means that ape populations simply cannot recover from the devastating threats they face on a multitude of fronts.

Finally, the recent tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia could have a devastating impact on both orangutans and gibbons. The problems facing people in this area are expected to intensify pressures on the already imperiled forests, possibly leading to an increase in bushmeat hunting as a supplemental food source, illegal logging for reconstruction materials, and overall further fragmentation and degradation of forest habitat. In light of this, AZA wishes to commend this Subcommittee and the Resources Committee on recognizing conservation needs arising from the 2004 tsunami and the timely inclusion of the provision in this bill.

Mr Chairman, HR 2693 represents a Congressional commitment to continue to address the desperate plight of the great apes. The Great Ape Conservation Fund is a proven formula 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. If one looks at the projects that have been funded to date under the Great Ape Conservation Fund, we see that this mandate has been fully implemented.

AZA strongly supports HR 2693 and encourages its swift passage out of the Committee and movement to the House floor. In addition, AZA member institutions will continue to raise the awareness of our 142 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 this important wildlife conservation measure.

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