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Opening Statement by
The Honorable Don Young
At the
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 50,
the "Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act"
July 28, 2011

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for scheduling this hearing on my bill, H.R. 50. This measure will extend the authority to approve conservation grants under the African Elephant Conservation Act, the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act and the Asian Elephant Conservation Act.

In your invitation letter, you asked our witnesses why this Congress should continue to appropriate money to these conservation funds at a time when our national debt exceeds \$14 trillion dollars. Mr. Chairman, that is a fair and appropriate question.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that without the grants, the populations of African and Asian elephants, rhinoceros and tigers would continue to decline. By investing a small amount of U. S. taxpayer money we have slowed their slide toward extinction.

In 1988, in a rare moment of agreement, representatives of the Humane Society of the United States and Safari Club International came together in support of legislation to try to stop the slaughter of African elephants. The result of that agreement was the African Elephant Conservation Act. In the past twenty three years, Congress has extended this law on four separate occasions and we have authorized \$120 million to conserve this species. In reality, however, we have appropriated slightly more than \$1 million a year and, more importantly, this \$26 million has been matched by over \$90 million in private funds.

The battle to save the African elephant is far from over. In fact, the price of elephant ivory is now more than \$700 dollars a pound and 100 elephants are poached every day throughout Africa. They are being killed for their ivory which is financing the terrorist activities of many rebel groups including some associated with al-Qaeda.

H.R. 50 also extends the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act, which was first enacted 17 years ago. Since that time, the Congress has authorized \$170 million, appropriated \$21 million and funded 505 conservation grants to assist highly endangered rhinoceros and tigers. These taxpayer funds were matched by \$34 million in private matching money.

While these grants have been helpful in stabilizing the population of several subspecies of rhinoceros, sadly, the future of wild tigers is increasingly bleak. In fact, the number of wild tigers has declined to as few as 3,000. It is essential to extend the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act because this Fund is the only permanent source of money for these species and it is a lifeline for the survival of wild tigers.

Finally, my bill reauthorizes the Asian Elephant Conservation Act. During the past 14 years, the Congress has authorized \$75 million for the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund. However, just like the other two funds, significantly less has been actually appropriated. In fact, \$20 million has been allocated or about \$1.5 million per year. These funds were matched by \$19 million in privately raised money. Together, these funds allowed the Secretary of the Interior to finance 307 conservation grants in 16 range countries.

Under the terms of the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act of 2011, these three conservation laws, which are strongly supported by nearly every hunting, conservation and animal rights organization, would be extended at existing funding levels for an additional five years. Each of these funds supports animals that are keystone - which means they are essential to the survival of hundreds of other species.

For many range nations, a small grant of \$25,000 represents the only hope they have of stopping heavily armed and organized poachers who are intent on killing the last African elephant, rhinoceros and tiger. These three laws have been extremely effective but the job of saving these species is not yet finished.

Some years ago, Speaker Newt Gingrich spoke in support of the African Elephant Conservation Act. In his remarks, he noted that: "This is a very small amount of money, but it is symbolically very important, and symbolically important in part for the signal it sends to people in Africa and Asia."

I agree with the views of Speaker Gingrich and I am pleased that H.R. 2584, the Interior Appropriations bill, allocates \$7.8 million for these Funds and those affecting Great Apes and Marine Sea Turtles. Like many of my colleagues, I am committed to reducing our staggering national debt. However, we are not going to accomplish that goal on the backs of these landmark species. By spending this small amount of money, we are contributing to local economies which helps to stabilize governments thereby minimizing potential national security costs for our taxpayers in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.