

**TESTIMONY OF KENNETH STANSELL, ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
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INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES,
WILDLIFE AND OCEANS, HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE,
REGARDING H.R. 50, THE MULTINATIONAL SPECIES CONSERVATION
FUNDS REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2007 AND HR 465, THE ASIAN
ELEPHANT CONSERVATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2007**

MARCH 13, 2007

Madam Chairwoman, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss H.R. 50, the "Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act of 2007," and H.R. 465, the "Asian Elephant Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2007" and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) implementation of these conservation Acts. The Administration supports reauthorization of these Acts. We appreciate the Subcommittee's continued support of the Multinational Species Conservation Funds and look forward to working with you on the reauthorization of these Acts.

As members of the Subcommittee are aware, the Service has a long history of proactively addressing international wildlife species conservation. The Service works with private citizens, local communities, state and federal agencies, foreign governments, native peoples and nongovernmental organizations, to promote a coordinated domestic and international strategy to protect, restore, and enhance the world's diverse wildlife and habitats. As a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on Nature Protection and Wild Life Preservation in the Western Hemisphere, and other international conservation agreements, the United States shares responsibility for supporting and implementing measures to provide for the conservation of hundreds of species of plants and animals both here and abroad.

The Multinational Species Conservation Acts encourage and assist efforts to conserve some of the world's most ecologically and sociologically important wildlife species through on-the-ground actions and other related conservation measures. The grant programs established by these Acts provide technical and cost-sharing grant assistance to range countries for conservation of their species and habitats. The projects funded by these Acts represent cooperative efforts involving local CITES Management Authorities and their governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. These Acts reflect our strong national commitment to help support conservation programs of the target species in the wild. Significant funding from outside partners has greatly expanded our efforts for on-the-ground conservation programs. Although serious threats still loom in many areas, the Multinational Species Conservation Funds have made the difference between survival and disappearance for species such as the African elephant, the Asian elephant, the rhinoceros and the tiger.

THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT CONSERVATION ACT

African elephants have had a profound impact on the economic, cultural, and spiritual life of people around the world throughout recorded history. Sought not only for their ivory, elephants have provided a source of food and skins. In the late 1970s, when elephant populations were thought to number about 1.3 million, the value of ivory skyrocketed on international markets from \$7.50 per kilogram to over \$400 per kilogram. An enormous upsurge in organized poaching and ivory trafficking networks fed demand and resulted in a drastic reduction in elephant numbers. In 1989, many countries banned imports of ivory, and the species was listed as endangered on Appendix I of CITES in 1989. In some areas, populations stabilized or recovered. Today, the continental population is thought to be between 500,000 and 600,000.

The African Elephant Conservation Act, authorized by Congress in 1988, provides for the African Elephant Conservation Fund, which plays a critical role in assisting range countries to build the capacity to conserve and manage elephants and their habitats. Between 1990 and 2006, 281 grants in 31 range countries were awarded. Nearly \$17 million has been distributed through these grants, which leveraged nearly \$72 million from partners. In other words for every \$1 distributed, the African Elephant Conservation Fund leveraged an additional \$4.

Grant projects include assisting range countries to build law enforcement and management capacity, mitigating for human-elephant conflict, conducting conservation education, surveys and monitoring, establishing corridors, and utilizing applied research. Our grants provided essential funding to a project in Zambia that facilitates the conversion of elephant poachers to participants in a sustainable agriculture cooperative. A project supported by the Fund has developed capsaicin as an elephant deterrent. Derived from chili peppers grown by subsistence farmers in areas where elephants sometimes damage crops, it is used in combination with other methods to deter elephants from fields and is gaining popularity across the continent. Using this concept, farmers can protect their fields and also gain revenues as excess production from key areas is now sold worldwide as Elephant Pepper Sauce.

The Fund has helped build capacity throughout the elephant's range by training conservationists and researchers and providing non-lethal material support for anti-poaching teams. The newly-created national park system of Gabon has benefited greatly from the support of the Fund to develop effective management strategies and the training of protected area personnel. Aerial surveys and studies to determine seasonal migrations of elephants in Zakouma National Park, Chad and in Southern Sudan were conducted in 2006 and 2007. Although results are encouraging, they emphasize the need to protect these last remaining large herds in the face of the illegal ivory and bushmeat trades and the proliferation of firearms resulting from years of civil war. This timely assistance from the Fund has allowed biologists to determine where elephants are vulnerable and how to bring protection, without which these last remaining populations would likely disappear.

In Zambia, Tanzania, Botswana, Namibia and Kenya, the Fund works with partners who engage communities to manage elephant populations, to learn ways to reduce human-elephant conflict, and to derive sustainable benefits from living with wildlife. Whether elephants live in high density protected areas as they do in northern Botswana, or in small numbers at the edge of the desert in Namibia or Mali, they require protection and management by dedicated conservationists, based on sound science and effective strategies.

Despite the many successes in addressing the threats facing elephants, challenges remain. These conservation challenges vary throughout the continent. For the majority of countries, wildlife and forestry agencies attempt to stem continued declines in elephant populations. However, in parts of Southern Africa, elephant numbers have stabilized or even increased. In this region, overcrowding of elephants in protected areas is placing increasing stress on the vegetation upon which elephants and other wildlife depend. As protected areas become surrounded by human settlements and increasingly isolated, elephant migration routes are blocked and elephant densities may exceed carrying capacity.

By contrast, Central and West Africa elephant populations continue to decline as these areas are plagued by political instability, civil conflict and a proliferation of firearms that are frequently used to poach elephants and other wildlife. Inadequate capacity for law enforcement and economic hardship exacerbate the problem, leading to an ever increasing illegal trade in bushmeat in some areas. The illegal bushmeat trade is now as serious a threat to elephant populations as the ivory trade. As human populations increase and elephant habitat dwindles or degrades, conflict between humans and elephants also increases. Many areas that have historically been wildlife habitat are now occupied by human settlement and agriculture. As people and elephants come into closer contact, and farmers protect their crops, the results are often tragic for both elephants and humans.

THE RHINOCEROS AND TIGER CONSERVATION ACT

Rhinos and tigers are magnificent creatures—big, powerful, and charismatic. Unfortunately, these qualities make them popular targets. Rhino and tiger body parts are in high demand on the global black market. Tiger organs and bones and rhino horns are used in Asian medicines and sold to consumers who believe these animal products convey strength, health and virility. Rhino horns are also carved for dagger handles as a coveted status symbol in the Middle East.

The Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act, authorized by Congress in 1994, has greatly assisted efforts to conserve the five rhino species and five extant wild tiger sub-species. From 1996 to 2006, the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (Fund) supported 322 grants in 23 countries. The actual on-the-ground resources devoted to species conservation of \$9.3 million were more than tripled by the matching contributions provided by our partners and collaborators.

Grants are awarded for a variety of projects including surveys, conservation education, law enforcement, habitat protection, and capacity building. With respect to rhinoceros, the Fund has supported efforts in Africa and Asia. In Nepal, the Fund is strengthening an organization which works with the wildlife department, the police and the army to assist in the identification and arrest of the poachers who have so badly damaged the country's rhino population in recent years. In Indonesia, the Fund has partnered with the Forest Department and a non-government organization in support of highly effective, critically needed anti-poaching patrols that protect Sumatran and Javan rhinos. In partnership with the Zambian Wildlife Authority, the Service and its partners have provided infrastructure, training and logistical support to strengthen protection of Zambia's North Luangwa National Park. This has allowed the country to protect five black rhino reintroduced into the Park in May 2003. This reintroduction is of major significance as poaching decimated the country's rhino population in the 1980's and by 1998 the animals were declared 'nationally extinct' in Zambia. The five reintroduced black rhino are the only wild rhino known to remain in the country.

The Fund has supported projects throughout Asia aimed at conserving and protecting tigers and their habitat. In India, the Fund has supported many workshops that train teachers to conduct tiger conservation education classes that actively engage students who live near tiger habitats in a compelling learning experience that will build support for tiger conservation. In the Sundarban of Bangladesh, the Fund is supporting an assessment of the status and ecology of the tiger which is yielding information valuable to tiger management in both Bangladesh and India and has led to formation of the first human-tiger conflict response team in that area.

While progress is being made for some species of rhinoceros and tigers, challenges remain. The illegal trade in tiger bones for health tonics and skins for decorative uses are supported by poaching. The deadly results have been underscored by the total loss of tiger populations in places such as India's Sariska Tiger Reserve. Experts estimate that more than 500 tigers are killed each year across their range. At this time, law enforcement efforts are insufficient to stop the illicit trade in tiger skins, and China's great strides in reducing consumption of tiger bone for medicinal purposes are threatened by calls to reopen trade in medicinal tonics produced on tiger farms. In addition to poaching-for-profit, tigers are killed by local villagers who fear attacks on humans or livestock. As human populations expand further into the habitats of wild animals, the resulting conflict poses a serious threat to both human and animal safety.

Wild tigers, once abundant throughout Asia, now live in small fragmented groups, mostly in protected forests, refuges and national parks. While they are recovering in a few places, most populations are in steep decline. Tigers now occupy 40 percent less habitat than they did 10 years ago and only 7 percent of their historic range. There are many threats to the survival of wild tigers in addition to poaching including habitat destruction and loss of prey. Recent surveys indicate the South China tiger may have become extinct in the wild, with only 47 remaining in China's zoos.

Rhinos are also facing a number of challenges in the wild, including poaching, disease and habitat loss. While they can still be found in parts of Asia and Africa, they live in small fragmented populations that may not be viable due to the lack of breeding opportunities and risk of random catastrophic events or disease.

Poaching of the greater one-horned rhinoceros is the most pressing issue facing Nepal's wildlife today. At least 124 rhinos have been killed by poachers in the country since 2000. Overall the country's rhino population shrank by about a third during these years from 612 individuals in 2000 to only 405 in January 2007.

On the other hand, greater one-horned rhino numbers in India's State of Assam have increased in two protected areas to the extent that there are concerns that the carrying capacity of the habitats may soon be exceeded. In such a situation, dramatic losses in numbers of animals may result from the spread of disease. This has led local officials to initiate a program to strengthen law enforcement in unoccupied habitats so rhinos may be translocated out of over-populated habitat into unoccupied habitat. The total number of this species in India and Nepal combined is approximately 2,500.

Fewer than 300 Sumatran rhinos survive in very small, highly fragmented populations, primarily rainforests in Indonesia and Malaysia. Over the last 18 years, the species numbers have declined by 50 percent due to poaching and habitat loss. The Javan rhino, living in lowland tropical forest, has the smallest population of the rhino species with fewer than 60 animals surviving in one population in Indonesia and fewer than ten surviving in one population in Vietnam. This rhino is threatened by poaching, loss of habitat, inbreeding and vulnerability to catastrophic events due to its small population size. Given that growth of this species' small population has apparently stagnated, carefully planned and implemented research and management is needed to enable it to recover from its critically endangered status.

In Africa, there are two rhinoceros species: black rhinos and white rhinos. Before 1900, millions of black rhinos occurred throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa, but between 1970 and 1992, this rhino's population declined 96%. Black rhinos went extinct in many range states, and by 1992, only 2,300 individuals survived in seven countries. But while black rhinos continue to be killed for their horns, improved security and greater anti-poaching efforts have led to increases in some populations over the past decade. The current population of black rhinos is now estimated at 3,610. By the early 1980s, Africa's white rhinos had been decimated by hunting and were nearly extinct with only about 100 surviving in the wild. Now, with enhanced protection and successful management, the subspecies has rebounded from 100 to more than 11,000 and is the most abundant of all rhinos. Recovery of Africa's southern white rhino demonstrates the benefits of strong law enforcement and conservation management.

THE ASIAN ELEPHANT CONSERVATION ACT

Large herds of elephants once roamed freely throughout the forests and savannas of Asia. Today, however, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants exist in the wild, half of these in India. With mature bulls weighing as much as 11,000 pounds, elephants require ample natural resources to survive. Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every day, and each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles.

The Asian Elephant Conservation Act, authorized by Congress in 1997, has greatly enhanced the conservation status of the Asian elephant. From 1999 to 2006, the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (Fund) awarded grants for 171 projects in 12 countries. The actual on-the-ground resources devoted to species conservation of \$7.8 million were more than doubled by the matching contributions provided by our partners and collaborators.

The Asian Elephant Conservation Fund has awarded grants to a wide range of partners to train wildlife professionals, improve law enforcement capacity, mitigate human-elephant conflict, establish community development programs, undertake applied research, raise awareness of elephant conservation issues, provide education programs, establish elephant corridors that minimize habitat fragmentation, and support the ongoing efforts of all 13 range country governments to survey, monitor and develop effective elephant management strategies.

Throughout India, the Fund is supporting efforts to identify and manage wild lands that are important to elephants. The establishment of wild lands has resulted in the creation of buffers that have helped reduce human-elephant conflict while providing better elephant habitat. On the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, human-elephant conflict in previous decades had led to the disappearance of at least nine populations of elephants. To ensure the survival of the remaining three elephant populations, the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund is supporting a promising new strategy that incorporates a training program, community guards, alarm systems, and elephant deterrents in five target villages around Way Kambas National Park. In Sri Lanka, the Fund supported a project to monitor elephant movement and behavior within Yala National park and surrounding lands to develop an appropriate buffer zone to mitigate human-elephant conflict outside the park. The results of the project have not only yielded benefits for elephants and local communities in and around Yala National Park but have also changed the overall approach to elephant management in Sri Lanka. The Asian Elephant Conservation Fund has also played a key role in developing the Asian program on Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants, commonly referred to as MIKE. Through MIKE, Asian range countries have increased their capacity to systematically survey, monitor, and build host country capacity to manage elephants. Additionally MIKE provides the crucial forum to facilitate cross border dialogues between range countries.

Unfortunately, Asian elephants continue to face a number of threats. Continued destruction of habitat and increased human settlement in areas previously occupied by

elephants has resulted in rising incidents of crop-raiding and subsequent conflict with human communities. Similar to some African elephant populations, frequent raids by elephants into agricultural fields, coupled with attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy for both elephants and humans. Poaching poses a serious threat as well. Asian elephants differ from African elephants in several ways, including the lack of tusks in female Asian elephants. Centuries of targeting male Asian elephants to obtain their tusks have left some elephant populations severely unbalanced with 50 females to every male “tusker.” In parts of India, the poaching of male tuskers is altering the male Asian elephant population to include mainly tusk-less males known as “mukhanas.”

CONCLUSION

In closing, Madame Chair, I would like to reiterate our support of H.R. 50 and H.R. 465. The future for sustaining these magnificent species in the wild is dependent on a number of factors including, an international commitment to conservation, effective implementation of existing international and national laws, and strict implementation of CITES by all range countries. Of equal importance will be cooperation among range countries in combating poaching and trade in products, rigorous efforts to protect existing populations and their habitat, and international financial support for conservation in the range countries. We firmly believe that these Funds are the most effective instrument in existence to provide immediate and long-term benefits for the conservation of these species.

Recognizing the importance of future conservation efforts, the Service is embarking on a strategic planning process that is focused on our international conservation efforts. Our goal is to ensure that we are effectively addressing the threats facing international species and their habitats under the jurisdiction of the Service. As part of the strategic planning process focused on international conservation efforts, we will involve our many partners.

Madame Chairwoman, and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my statement and I would be happy to answer any questions.