

Testimony of Dr. Sybille Klenzendorf
Director of Species Conservation, World Wildlife Fund
Legislative Hearing on “Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act of 2007” and “Asian Elephant Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2007”
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans
March 13, 2007

Madam Chairwoman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sybille Klenzendorf and I am the director of Species Conservation at World Wildlife Fund. WWF is the largest private conservation organization working internationally to protect wildlife and wildlife habitats. We currently sponsor conservation programs in more than 100 countries, thanks to the support of 1.2 million members in the United States and more than 5 million members worldwide.

We are pleased to be here today to discuss conservation programs for some of the world’s most endangered species—rhinos, tigers and elephants. The United States, primarily through programs administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service, has played a critical role in the protection and conservation of these highly endangered species. World Wildlife Fund strongly urges that these programs be reauthorized and that H.R. 50 and H.R. 465, be enacted into law, for the reasons outlined below. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Young and Mr. Saxton for sponsoring these bills and also for their continued leadership through the years on these issues.

Why the Multinational Species Programs are Important

The United States, through the various laws protecting rhinos, elephants, and tigers, has provided critical funding for species in crisis that has helped stabilize their populations around the globe.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a major poaching crisis swept through parts of Africa and Asia, decimating populations of African elephant, African and Asian rhinos, and tiger. This poaching was driven primarily by a dramatic increase in global market demand for ivory for use as carvings and trinkets and for rhino horn and tiger bone, which are highly valued ingredients in traditional Chinese medicines, as well as ornamentals. The crisis was made worse in the 1990s by declining economies and political instability in many African and Asian range countries.

The statistics surrounding the wildlife loss were staggering. During the 1980s, half of Africa’s elephants—perhaps half a million animals—were lost to poaching. Black rhinos dwindled from about 70,000 in 1970 to fewer than 2,500 animals by 1992, an astounding 95 percent loss in just two decades. The Asian elephant population in the wild has declined to about one-tenth the size of its African cousin, to fewer than 50,000 animals, due to growing human population pressures in South and Southeast Asia. The tiger population in India was reduced to fewer than 3,000 animals by the late 1980s, while Russia’s Siberian tigers took a major hit in the early 1990s, with numbers falling by perhaps 40 percent to 250 animals by 1993.

Thanks to a broad international response, the situation for most of these species began to improve in the 1990s. CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, banned ivory trade in 1989 and strengthened enforcement efforts to stop the illegal trade of rhino horn and tiger parts. But stopping trade was not enough. Direct action was needed on the ground to protect dwindling populations of these species, and the United States stepped in to help. Congress passed the African Elephant Conservation Act in 1988 to provide small grants to help African countries conserve their remaining elephant populations and help rebuild them. Since the African Elephant Conservation Fund was initiated in 1990, more than 280 grants have been awarded for projects in 31 countries, strengthening enforcement and trade control measures, protecting critical habitat, aiding training programs for park guards and wildlife managers and assisting important elephant research, monitoring and survey efforts.

The African elephant is better off today, in part because of more than 15 years of U.S. government support. Significant challenges remain, however, because of the presence of domestic ivory markets in many African countries, particularly in Central and West Africa, and reemerging markets for ivory in Asia. Just last July, for example, Taiwanese authorities confiscated more than five tons of ivory originating in Tanzania; and in May, 3.9 tons coming out of Cameroon were confiscated in Hong Kong. Stronger enforcement is needed on all fronts – from African elephant range states to consumer nations in Asia, Europe and the United States. But without the U.S. African Elephant Conservation Act, it's fair to say that elephant populations would not be as stable as they are today in much of Africa.

The success of the African Elephant Conservation Act led Congress to pass the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act in 1994. With the establishment of the Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund (RTCF), a steady stream of well-targeted grants has helped avert further losses of these species as well. In recent years, we have seen signs of improvement in the status of tiger populations in Russia, and Africa's black rhino has experienced a modest increase in number in several places. According to Raoul Du Toit, project manager of WWF and the International Rhino Fund's Rhino Conservation Project in Zimbabwe, the RTCF has contributed significantly to black rhino conservation efforts in Zimbabwe in a time of serious crisis when many of the gains made in the mid- to late- 1990s could have easily been wiped out. The various grants have included funds for veterinary field work, procurement of a rhino translocation truck, rhino monitoring, and research on black rhino conservation biology. The support from RTCF has spanned a wide spectrum of rhino conservation needs in Zimbabwe and has contributed significantly to holding the line against attrition of the population of this endangered species in the country.

Asian rhinos, representing some of the most endangered large mammals on Earth, have received invaluable assistance from the RTCF. They remain severely at risk in parts of their remaining habitat fragments in South and Southeast Asia. There is little question that the U.S. programs, as modest as they are, have helped avert disaster for these species—even possible extinction in some cases. For example, FWS has very generously supported conservation of Javan rhinoceroses, the most endangered Asian rhino species, in Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam. There are fewer than 60 of these rhinos left on the planet. Funds have been used to enhance special rhino patrol units by supplying them with necessary equipment like backpacks, raingear, GPS units and camping gear. Funds were also used to run an intensive rhino conservation

awareness campaign, providing educational materials like notebooks and storybooks on rhinos for all children in and around the park. At the moment, the FWS is supporting two rhino patrol units that provide essential protection for the rhinos in Cat Tien as well as collect day-to-day information that gives us a better understanding of the species. The Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund has helped developing country governments and NGOs build more effective conservation programs. They have truly had a multiplier effect, leveraging an impressive return on partner investments and providing an excellent example of public-private collaboration.

But our task is not complete. While we have begun to emerge from a period of crisis for some of these species, their long-term survival is still seriously at risk. The situation for elephants, rhinos and tigers remains serious, but there is hope. The progress over the last few years, thanks in part to the programs authorized by the African Elephant, Asian Elephant and Rhino and Tiger Conservation Acts, demonstrate that, when reliable financial support is available and is used wisely, improvements can be rapid and dramatic. We know what needs to be done to save these species, and our conservation approaches and methodologies are becoming more effective and innovative every day. We have better data on these species and their critical habitats and stronger international collaboration than ever before. We must build on this momentum.

Recent Advances in Elephant, Rhino and Tiger Conservation

The tiger population in the Russian Far East was once reduced to 250 animals in the 1990s due to uncontrolled poaching. Strict protection in an area where habitat and prey was abundant allowed the population to recover to 450 by 2006. WWF scientists in Russia also discovered a range expansion of tigers there. For the first time in more than 100 years, two Siberian tiger cubs were born in southeast Siberia, more than 400 miles outside of their usual range, thanks, in part, to Fish and Wildlife Service funding. Similarly, the white rhino population in southern Africa has grown to an astounding 14,500 animals today—the largest rhino population on Earth—from fewer than 100 animals at the turn of the century. Likewise, greater one-horned rhinos in Nepal, reduced to 100 or so in the 1960s due to overhunting, now number more than 400 animals, despite substantial losses to poaching when the parks were occupied by Maoist insurgents. Fish and Wildlife Service is supporting a bold new plan to establish another population of rhinos in India by translocating individuals from Kaziranga National Park under the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 plan. These efforts are essential to the long-term survival of these rhinos. Rhinos have even begun repopulating areas such as a newly restored corridor between the Nepal and India sides of the Terai Arc Landscape, where for the first time WWF obtained photographic evidence that the corridor is being used by tigers and rhinos. The photos prove the corridor is becoming functional for wildlife movement between protected areas. These success stories demonstrate that a species can come back, if sufficient and sustained protection is provided.

Thanks to increased international support for conservation activities, including from the Multinational Species Programs, the conservation community has been able to implement long-term strategies with stable funding for the conservation of tigers, rhinos and elephants and other large mammals. We are increasingly able to determine where our conservation investments have the biggest long-term payoff. For example, scientists at WWF, Wildlife Conservation Society, the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park and Save the Tiger Fund conducted the most

comprehensive study of tiger habitats ever done, which found that the big cats reside in 40 percent less habitat than they were thought to a decade ago. Tigers now occupy just seven percent of their historic range. However, the study was able to identify 76 “tiger conservation landscapes” that have the best chance of supporting viable tiger populations into the future. Half of the 76 landscapes can still support 100 tigers or more, providing excellent opportunities for recovery of wild tiger populations. We know that we cannot save tigers everywhere and that we must make hard decisions about where our investments are best targeted. Similar analyses have been undertaken for Asian elephants and rhinos, and comparable regional efforts are under way for African elephants.

The Unique Features of the Elephant, Rhino and Tiger Laws

The FWS programs for tigers, rhinos and elephants have a number of unique features that underpin their effectiveness. These include:

- ***Leveraging significant conservation funding and support.*** The FWS reports that from 1990 through January 2006, about 772 grants, totaling some \$34 million have been awarded for elephant, tiger and rhino projects. These together have leveraged over \$100 million in matching funds and in-kind contributions, a 3:1 return. Partners have included conservation groups, corporations, range states and other governments. Few international conservation or aid programs are able to generate this level of matching or collateral support.
- ***Program administration with minimal bureaucracy and cost.*** To date, elephant, rhino and tiger grant programs have been administered at minimal cost—for less than 5 percent of the monies appropriated for the grant programs from 1990 to 2006. In fact, this amount has proven inadequate to cover the costs of full program administration and subsidies have been needed from other FWS programs. Although these grant programs are relatively small, they include several important activities, such as developing and reviewing proposals and reports, issuing and tracking project contracts and payments, communicating with grantees and host governments and tracking and monitoring projects. WWF supports amending the elephant, rhino and tiger acts to ensure a modest increase in the allowance for administrative expenses so that the grant funds are administered with maximum effectiveness. We encourage the subcommittee to include the same language pertaining to administrative expenses as Congress reauthorized last year for the Great Ape Conservation Act, i.e. that the Secretary “may expend not more than 3 percent, or up to \$100,000, whichever is greater, to pay the administrative expenses necessary...” We believe this is a more appropriate formula than now contained in the reauthorization bills being considered today.
- ***Strengthening collaboration among NGOs and governments.*** As both a partner donor and implementing organization for various FWS-supported projects, WWF is very aware of the important role the elephant, rhino and tiger programs have played in fostering collaboration among NGOs and governments. Many of the projects supported by these conservation funds involve multiple partners, and grants provided to NGOs receive approval from range country governments before they are awarded. The FWS programs have thus acted as a catalyst, not only for leveraging funding, but also for bringing important conservation players together in ways that enhance collaboration and conservation impact. One example is the Indian Rhino Vision 2020, which has a goal of attaining a population of 3,000 wild rhinos in the northern Indian district of Assam by the year 2020. Field programs have resulted in some populations

remaining stable and even increasing, but long-term success is only achieved where there is a broad landscape-level conservation vision with buy-in from stakeholders, and many grants have gone to this purpose.

- ***Providing international leadership.*** By passing the African Elephant, Asian Elephant and Rhino and Tiger Conservation Acts and implementing the programs they authorize, the U.S. Congress and Fish and Wildlife Service have together staked out important leadership roles in international conservation. This has helped bring the plight of these endangered species to the attention of governments worldwide, including both range and donor countries, which have increased their support for conservation programs accordingly. It has helped make these species a higher priority on policy and philanthropy agendas in the private sector, leading to an increased public support for conservation programs. It has also helped by encouraging and supporting local leaders such as Sunarto, a student from Indonesia who, with support from FWS, is working toward his PhD through Virginia Tech. Sunarto is currently doing research for his dissertation on the ecology of tigers and their prey in his home country, where WWF works on tiger conservation.
- ***Increased public awareness.*** Over the past decade, the American public's interest in and concern for the future of these endangered species has grown. This is clearly the result of the combined efforts of non-governmental organizations such as those testifying here today and the efforts of the FWS and Congress. All of us receive a regular stream of letters of concern about, and in support of, these species. There is little question that the American public cares deeply about the future of elephants, tigers and rhinos and expects and encourages us all to do more on their behalf. Public contributions to many of the organizations here today are a strong sign of the importance the public places on efforts to protect these species, and have enabled civil society to work hand-in-hand with the government on conservation efforts.

The Need for Continued Support: New Data on the Tiger Trade

As described above, tigers were heavily poached for tiger bone trade into China and the population in the Russian Far East was as low as 250 animals. With support from the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act and several NGOs, the Russian government created Tiger Antipoaching Brigades that were able to reduce poaching and save the Siberian Tiger from extinction. A range-wide survey in 2006 showed the strong recovery to about 450 animals. These remarkable results were also aided by a tiger parts trade ban that China instituted in 1993. The U.S. government was instrumental in getting this ban instituted under the Pelly Amendment, but all the efforts and money that have gone into this effort to date are now under threat. China is considering reversing this ban which will lead to tremendous pressure on the remaining tigers in the wild.

A new report released today by TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network of WWF and IUCN-The World Conservation Union- entitled "Taming the Tiger Trade" reveals that the Chinese ban on domestic tiger trade has been very successful since it was imposed in 1993. Today there appears to be little current demand as measured by willingness of shops to sell tiger bone illegally. The success in reducing demand for tiger medicines is commendable, but it doesn't mean that demand for tiger products has stopped. In fact, since 1999, China has led the world in seizures of tiger parts. This shows significant investment in law enforcement and vigilance, but it also indicates that China is still a large consumer country for tigers.

Reopening even limited legal trade in tiger products from farms would reignite a demand for tiger products among China's 1.3 billion increasingly-wealthy consumers and undo 15 years' worth of public education and law enforcement to reduce demand for tiger products. Experts agree that lifting China's trade ban would be the death knell for wild tigers.

It is imperative that the United States promote and fund cross-border cooperation and law enforcement among tiger range states to stop the illicit trade routes that allow poachers to kill tigers in India, Russia and other countries and smuggle them into China. In January, Russian law enforcement officials seized three Siberian tiger skins, eight tiger paws and 332 tiger bones as well as 531 saiga horns and 283 Asiatic black bear paws near the Russian border with China, making it one of the largest busts of its kind in at least a decade. The seizure took place in a village near Russia's eastern border with China in an area where WWF and its partners work with government authorities to combat the illegal trade of wildlife products.

The Need for an Increase in Appropriations for the Multinational Species Fund

From 1990 to 2006, just half of the proposals for rhino, tiger and elephant grants have been funded, leaving a large backlog of unfunded conservation work. The total amount of funding authorized by Congress is \$20 million. Last year, just \$4.4 million was appropriated. While reauthorization of these programs is critical, the authorization provides few on the ground benefits to these species if it is not followed by sufficient appropriations. We strongly encourage you to work with the appropriators, and as a committee, request adequate funding levels for this year. Otherwise, your good work in reauthorizing these vital programs will be in vain.

Conclusion

In sum, the activities funded through the elephant, rhino and tiger programs have been vital to the conservation of those species around the globe. My testimony today seeks to underscore the fact that these programs remain every bit as vital today as they were when they were first enacted into law in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Madam Chairwoman, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee today. I will be happy to answer any questions.