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Hearing: US consumer demand for wildlife products that are traded illegally or unsustainably.

## Oral Presentation

Madame Chairwoman, Honorable Members thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

I speak to you today as the Deputy Director of WildAid, a conservation organization dedicated to ending the illegal trade in wildlife; and for the Animal Welfare Institute. I also deliver the profound apologies of Ms. Bo Derek, a WildAid board member who was hoping to address you today, but has been seriously ill. I am happy to report Bo is well on the way to recovery.

In the previous hearing you heard from Assistant Secretary of State Claudia McMurray and other witnesses about the devastating impact of the illegal wildlife trade and how the United States currently addresses the problem. Initiatives include: the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking, the ASEN WEN initiatives, and the State Department naming of Bo Derek as the Special Envoy regarding wildlife trafficking. I strongly urge you to push for the continuity of these important programs now and throughout the next Administration. In addition, I would like to bring to your attention an additional way that Congress might lead: funding consumer awareness programs in the US.

Congressional laws in this field are among the best in the world and are largely up to the task of enforcing anti-poaching measures – therefore the primary need going forward is for adequate financing both of their enforcement and to raise awareness with the general public to reduce demand for these products.

The illegal wildlife trade thrives on three factors: need, greed and ignorance.

The financial **need** of the poor in developing nations creates the incentive to poach. This can be addressed by not only increasing field enforcement, but by developing alternative sources of income. The US has been a leader in these efforts through US AID and by Congressional support of the Rhino and Tiger Conservation Act and other financing mechanisms through the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The **greed** of professional poachers, smugglers and illegal traders can only be addressed through law enforcement and reducing demand. As the US Fish and Wildlife Service will undoubtedly talk about their effective enforcement measures in their testimony, I only want to stress the importance of their work in stemming the illegal wildlife trade and urge this committee to keep them adequately funded. But enforcement is only part of the solution.

The efforts against drug trafficking have shown that even billions spent on enforcement alone will have little effect if demand remains strong. As long as strong demand keeps prices high, illegal activity will continue – no matter how many poachers are caught, fined, or imprisoned. I understand that a number of members of this Committee raised the demand issue at your previous hearing.

Lastly, the **ignorance** of consumers perpetuates this trade. This ignorance lies in the impact their consumption has on wildlife, the laws and the species that they protect, and in the potential health risks linked to consumption. The illegal wildlife trade will continue if consumers are unaware of their impact.

When the State Department convened an interagency meeting with NGOs to address this, three groups each independently identified the greatest priority as “increasing public awareness.” Yet, to date, the vast majority of public and private resources have focused on study, monitoring, and supporting law enforcement. While this is important, it is only the first step in fully eradicating the illegal wildlife trade and saving those species threatened by it. If we ignore demand we will fail.

As the second largest consumer of illegal wildlife products, the US has a special duty to address this demand, which comes not just from our economic power, but also from our cultural diversity. While all American tourists might buy products like coral and ivory, certain products are very culture specific, such as those used in traditional Chinese medicine or exotic products valued as an affluent delicacy. Therefore, demand reduction efforts must address these communities specifically as well as the general public.

## VIDEO STARTS FROM THE CASCADES OF STARS

WildAid has been a leader in this field internationally, not only in engaging a wide range of cultures by recruiting their highest profile celebrities as spokespeople, but also by reaching up to 1 billion people a week world wide by leveraging millions of dollars of donated production and media space.

To date, our main focus and efforts have been in Asia and I would like to show the Committee the kind of materials and programs that could be possible in the United States if financial support was available.

The video you are seeing features some of the world’s top celebrities and Olympic gold medalists from the US, China and other countries, all delivering the message “**when the buying stops, the killing can too**”.

Top advertising agencies have donated their time.

World class productions have been done at less than cost by US production companies.

Because of the quality, originality and star power, the media space and airtime has been donated. In China alone, the official government media has donated over five million dollars of airtime.

Here in the US, CBS, Fox, CNN, National Geographic and other networks have carried some of these messages as well.

Due to limited funding, WildAid’s primary effort has been in China, but the model could be easily replicated here.

One obvious focus point could be our primary international airports. In China, through a partnership with Air Media, WildAid messages reach 93% of domestic air travelers through videos on planes and in airports.

Some of our airports do carry modest displays of wildlife products, but this could be greatly enhanced with celebrity video messaging, more engaging presentations and media launches.

In short, the opportunity exists for a high profile, highly leveraged, star-studded, multi-cultural awareness program.

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This public private sector collaboration could reach tens of millions of Americans for a few million dollars, but there are currently no financial mechanisms for Congressional support of such a program in the US.

By creating a mechanism for Congress to fund such outreach efforts, I believe this Committee could take a lead in reducing our nation's role in this illegal trade.

Thank you Madame Chairwoman and Honorable Members