



**Testimony of**

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Before the  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans

Hearing on  
“The US Consumer demand for wildlife products that are traded illegally or  
unsustainably”

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Madame Chairwoman and members of the subcommittee, I am Kaddu Kiwe Sebunya, Director of Technical Design at African Wildlife Foundation (AWF).

Founded in 1961, the African Wildlife Foundation is the leading African and international conservation organization focused solely on the African continent with a 45-year track record of facilitating practical, field-based solutions to global and local sustainable natural resource management and wildlife conservation challenges in Africa.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing on what African Wildlife Foundation believes is one of the most important conservation challenges we face today - the connection between the conservation of biodiversity and the economic aspirations of the people, in our case Africans. Our view is that wildlife conservation and development are inter-linked, and that truly sustainable wildlife conservation must provide for the needs of local people.

The underlying theme for this hearing is on “consumer demand of illegal wildlife in USA,” but I am going to focus my statement on the “supply side” because we have long understood that the illegal wildlife trade cannot flourish in a vacuum. Before I do that, though, I want to emphasize that African Wildlife Foundation is actively working to stop the illegal bushmeat trade, most notably through its support of USFWS – Bushmeat MENTOR program that is developing a network for bushmeat information sharing throughout East Africa. We are also deeply involved in enterprise programs that make harvesting endangered wildlife a more costly option than conserving it.

To address the consumption factors driving the illegal bushmeat trade, or the ‘supply side,’ we need to look at the market elements as well as at the very nature of the resource. Wildlife resource at the base is usually of a low unit value, is a common resource freely accessible, is difficult to assess, and encourages free-rider behavior. In most of Africa, it is either without any owner or is state property and alienated from local communities. Therefore, the bushmeat problem could as well be resulting from an unmanaged common resource being unsustainably tapped because of inadequate governance and policy frameworks.

In Africa, we have long-recognized that the encouragement of sustainable use, rather than prohibition, is the most practical umbrella policy with regards to wildlife conservation. Trade bans are a blunt and limited intervention strategy. Though, that said, where use for commercial gain is a critical threat for specific species, notably for elephant and rhino in Africa, global trade restrictions have been a useful component of wildlife conservation strategies.

Tackling the main direct threats to wildlife conservation in Africa (habitat loss, unsustainable use) and the underlying drivers of these threats (poverty, climate change, tenure issues, weak land use planning, subsidies for agriculture, weak civil society organizations and governance issues) requires recognition of and support for the linkages between wildlife conservation and local development goals and needs. At the policy or governance level, many of the underlying causes of the unsustainable use of wildlife are the same as those underlying poverty – weak local governance, war, famine, low incomes and savings, unfair global terms of trade, etc.

African rural people, moving from a subsistence lifestyle to a cash economy, have relatively few options; unsustainable or consumptive use of wildlife resources is often a matter of survival. They often lack the education and skills to easily find alternative employment and cannot switch to different livelihoods or food sources.

### *1. Our program efforts*

The long-term challenge to wildlife conservation is how to make wildlife a ‘renewable’ resource, with a clear economic and development advantages to conserving and managing it, rather than a resource that is ‘mined’ steadily to extinction. To achieve this, all stakeholders must work together to put in place a complementary suite of policy, planning and implementation tools, to ensure that conservation and development linkages are optimized.

One of the issues where the debate about trade instruments has arisen concerns the harvesting of ‘wild meat’ or ‘bushmeat’. The bushmeat trade in West and Central Africa has been a particular focal point for concern over the past decade, not least because of its perceived threat to African great apes, namely chimpanzees, bonobos and gorillas. Research demonstrates that the bushmeat trade does threaten these species, particularly where hunting is conducted in protected areas and timber concessions. However, the bulk of bushmeat hunting is of non-endangered species and is done by very poor people – this therefore constitutes a clear argument against using any form of blanket ban on bushmeat harvesting as a conservation mechanism. A blanket ban is likely to punish the very poor without addressing the underlying issues that have allowed the bushmeat trade to thrive – that is, lack of natural resource management planning and the need to give wildlife conservation in and of itself economic value.

The effectiveness of alternative policy and management options to extinguish the illegal bushmeat trade continues to be a focal point for conservation stakeholders across West and Central Africa. African Wildlife Foundation with support from the US government through USAID, USFD, and USFWS is working on these issues in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Priority responses include (i) efforts to address local

poverty through strengthening agriculture and thereby reducing forest product dependency; (ii) efforts to address tenure and rights issues, firstly through effective local land use planning, and subsequently through regulation and licensing of local bushmeat trade and consumption; (iii) pilot projects addressing community forest management as a means of strengthening forest management overall and implementing new national forest policy and regulations.

We are engaged in dozens of conservation enterprises with communities, representing investments of several million dollars collectively. These trade and investment projects promote conservation tourism, culture-based tourism, sustainable community hunting grounds, fisheries management, livestock and other sustainable agriculture ventures, traditional handicrafts creation and distribution, and non-timber forest products. These projects also strengthen local civil societies and governance systems; benefits investment and management, and address land tenure and gender equity.

Our enterprise programs are a key intervention strategy in support of sustainable wildlife use. Enabling communities to participate, and often own, commercially successful businesses with clear conservation logic is a strategy that warrants further support. For example with support from the US Government and private individuals, African Wildlife Foundation has recently facilitated new community-owned luxury gorilla tourism facilities in Uganda and Rwanda, enabled the resumption of river trade in agricultural commodities in Democratic Republic of Congo, and created an innovative revolving debt facility for livestock value enhancement in pastoralist areas of northern Kenya. These programs address many rural communities' simple but highly consequential dilemma: finding a creative way to benefit from the presence of wildlife. Our conservation enterprise strategy strives to help communities and governments undertake business ventures that support both livelihoods and wildlife conservation.

## *2. Our efforts in USA*

While we do not have field programs in USA, we place a high priority on partnerships as a means of delivering wildlife conservation and thereby bridging policy stances in the US and Africa.

African Wildlife Foundation is currently supporting the USFWS – Bushmeat MENTOR program that is developing a network for bushmeat information sharing throughout East Africa, which will be enormously helpful in gathering together scattered information on wildlife populations, threats and solutions to the bushmeat crisis. There has been a high level of commitment and investment in the training and support of the eight African fellows. Our technical staff has been involved in training the fellows, from leading sessions on programming conservation and development, to conceptual modeling, management and monitoring programs.

In collaboration with US Department of the Interior, we have supported national parks and other protected-area authorities in Tanzania, to improve conservation management (including planning, law enforcement, and monitoring trans-boundary cooperation). Partnering with the US Forestry Department, we support Democratic

Republic of Congo government and individual landowners and communities to make land use plans in order to secure wildlife movement corridors, habitat linkages, dry season refuges, wildlife dispersal areas, plus enterprises development - critical alternatives to the bushmeat trade.

Through our membership with the US based Bushmeat Crisis Task Force we have learned from their research that US government agencies have a difficult time in addressing bushmeat that enters the U.S. every month. While there are laws that address wildlife importation and laws that address meat import, there is only one law that specifically mentions bushmeat, and that law targets live African rodents and primates, not dead ones smoked for their meat. Another challenge is the overlapping jurisdictions by numerous US government agencies having shared authority over bushmeat shipped in commercial containers. In addition, the U.S. government does not have a bushmeat information management and analysis system that could provide central location for storing and retrieving information for coordinating its efforts to address the bushmeat problem within US borders.

USA should focus not only on the illegal bushmeat trade but also on the risk of the introduction of emerging infectious diseases through bushmeat – Monkeypox, SARS, Ebola, etc. We do not know much about the disease incidence for different species or bushmeat preparations (smoked, fresh, etc.) because in the US confiscated bushmeat is routinely destroyed rather than tested for disease or contaminants. There is a great need for additional resources not only to detect illegal bushmeat but also to test it so that the government can more strategically address the risks involved and share their findings with African governments and institutions.

### *3. Conclusion*

Africa's wildlife and wild lands are unmatched in the world and are one of the continent's most significant sources of future 'competitive advantages' in the global marketplace. Where wildlife exists, African Wildlife Foundation encourages African nations to conserve, expand and add value to those resources and to position them as a critical part of development and growth strategies for the future of the continent, reflected in national strategies for poverty alleviation and for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

African Wildlife Foundation believes in the protection of resources within formally designated national parks, but encourages carefully monitored and sustainable use of natural resources outside these more restricted areas to ensure that human needs and aspirations are satisfied while maintaining ecosystem viability. Understanding that ecosystem function and biodiversity resources cannot be conserved through protected area systems alone, but requires sustainable management at scale, we see the principle of sustainable use as central to conservation efforts.

African Wildlife Foundation respects the principle that the owners and users of land and wildlife resources must be given the primary stake in their management and in the benefits generated. African Wildlife Foundation supports strong, secure, tenure arrangements for local communities living with wildlife on their land, and effective

national policy and legal frameworks that protect tenure and rights. African Wildlife Foundation has a particular interest in developing and applying models that give local communities a large and defining financial stake in the resources they conserve and in promoting public and private investments in enabling and replicating these models.

The challenge has been to encourage appropriate and sustainable development opportunities throughout the communities living in scientifically identified wildlife landscapes, to ensure that they have the opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty without jeopardizing conservation goals. In African Wildlife Foundation's view, it is both practical and important that wildlife conservation work maintains a focus on improving livelihoods, and we aim to do this while maintaining close monitoring of resulting benefits and costs to the environment.

African Wildlife foundation firmly believes that Africans are ideal stewards of Africa's natural resources. To that end, we invest heavily in the training and education of Africans to help them take the lead in managing and benefiting from their own natural heritage.