

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

December 20, 2019

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Grijalva:

I write to request that you hold Committee hearings related to the ongoing bipartisan investigation into human rights violations associated with the Department of the Interior's (Department) international conservation grants. As you are aware, grave concerns exist that taxpayer dollars have inadvertently funded human rights abuses through such grants. Additionally, I introduced legislation yesterday (H.R. 5493) to strengthen much needed oversight mechanisms and help prevent further violations of human rights against local and indigenous people. It is my sincerest hope that you help provide transparency to this issue with an oversight hearing followed by a legislative hearing on my bill to deter possibilities of future taxpayer-funded instances of torture, rape, and extrajudicial killings.

For nearly eight months, this Committee has investigated reports of human rights abuses associated with Department grants intended to meet international conservation objectives. During this time, we initiated a Government Accountability Office review of the federal government's funding of international conservation grants,¹ received multiple briefings from the Department and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF),² and from various stakeholders.³ In partial response to our inquiry,⁴ WWF produced more than 300 pages of documents, including

¹ Letter from Rep. Raúl Grijalva, Chair, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. and Rep. Rob Bishop, Ranking Republican, H. Comm. on Nat. Res., to Hon. Gene Dodaro, Comptroller General, U.S. Gov't Accountability Office (May 6, 2019) (on file with Comm.).

² *Briefing from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Serv., U.S. Dep't of the Interior*, to H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Staff (July 12, 2019), *Briefing from Hon. Susan Combs, Assistant Sec'y Pol'y, Mgmt., & Budget, U.S. Dep't of the Interior*, to H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Staff and H. Comm. on Appropriations Staff (Sept. 23, 2019), *Briefing from WWF*, to H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Staff (Apr. 9, 2019), Meeting between Cassidy & Assoc. and H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Staff (July 10, 2019), Meeting between Cassidy & Assoc., WWF, WilmerHale and H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Staff (July 15, 2019).

³ *Briefing from Survival International and Rainforest Foundation UK*, to H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Staff (Sept. 13, 2019).

⁴ Letter from Thomas Strickland, Partner, WilmerHale to Rep. Raúl Grijalva, Chair, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. and Rep. Rob Bishop, Ranking Republican, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. (July 17, 2019) (on file with Comm.), Letter from Thomas Strickland, Partner, WilmerHale to Rep. Raúl Grijalva, Chair, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. and Rep. Rob Bishop, Ranking Republican, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. (July 23, 2019) (on file with Comm.), Letter from Thomas Strickland, Partner, WilmerHale to Rep. Raúl Grijalva, Chair, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. and Rep. Rob Bishop, Ranking Republican, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. (Aug. 1, 2019) (on file with Comm.).

disturbing internal reports which outline years of human rights abuse cases associated with WWF's partners and work.⁵

Additionally, the Department produced more than 1,200 pages of documents in response to our Congressional oversight about how international conservation grants are awarded.⁶ Our investigation led the Department to question "the adequacy of the controls in place to effectively and transparently monitor the use of United States taxpayer resources that support conservation and trafficking goals"⁷ Ultimately, an internal review of grants resulted in the Department withholding \$12.3 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 funds from multiple grantees.⁸

While international conservation grants play an important role in protecting wildlife, the United States cannot be party to violations of basic human rights. I am confident that we both recognize gaps in the Department's accountability of grants which necessitates a meaningful public discussion to ensure proper safeguards are in place and enforced. Convening these hearings is an appropriate and effective way to begin addressing needed accountability measures in this important area of the Committee's jurisdiction.

Sincerely,



Rob Bishop
Ranking Republican
Committee on Natural Resources

cc: The Honorable TJ Cox, Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations
The Honorable Louie Gohmert, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations
The Honorable Jared Huffman, Chairman, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife
The Honorable Tom McClintock, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife

⁵ See INVESTIGATION REPORT ON THE SALONGA NATIONAL PARK (Draft Report, March 2019) at WWF-HRNCOM-00000255 (in 2013, three men were beaten and had their genitalia tied together with fishing wire as eco-guards interrogated them), *Id.* at WWF-HRNCOM-00000252 (in 2002, a woman was raped by eco-guards).

⁶ Letter from Hon. Susan Combs, Assistant Sec'y Pol'y, Mgmt., & Budget, U.S. Dep't of the Interior to Rep. Raúl Grijalva, Chair, H. Comm. on Nat. Res. (Sept. 17, 2019) (on file with Comm.).

⁷ *Id.* at 2.

⁸ E-mail from Office of Congressional Affairs, U.S. Dep't of the Interior, to H. Comm. on Nat. Res. Staff (Sept. 30, 2019, 11:05 EST) (on file with author).