



The Institute of Greatly Endangered and Rare Species



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**Testimony of
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before
the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
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Thank you Madam Chair, Ranking Member Brown and Members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of T.I.G.E.R.S., I am honored to be before you today to provide public comment on H.R. 1454, the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp Act of 2009. Maintaining the United States’ leadership in the conservation of species around the world is vital to the ultimate success of our wildlife’s survival.

I would like to begin by acknowledging Congressman Brown, who represents my town and the home of T.I.G.E.R.S. in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. His leadership and support for the conservation of wildlife and the welfare of animals is welcome and appreciated by his constituents. I thank you.

T.I.G.E.R.S., is based in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and we operate four public education exhibits; Two “Preservation Stations” in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, “Wild Encounters” located at Jungle Island in Miami, Florida as well as yearly productions in the Boston, Massachusetts area of the highly acclaimed show “The Tale of the Tiger”. At our Preservation Stations, the wildlife ambassadors; great apes, big cats, elephant and a stunning group of other highly interactive species, offer our guests a collection of experiences that can be life changing. While at the preserves, the participants senses are awakened to a whole new world; feeling the leathery hide of our elephant, the soft touch of a lynx, the sweet smell of a binturong and the heart pounding sound of tigers running at 55 miles per hour. Our visitors see animals they know and love displaying their spectacular natural talents and have encounters with new ones they never even knew existed. During these encounters our guests connect with wildlife in a very intimate way that personally involves them in the lives of these amazing animals. They then walk away into the world with a desire to save these creatures and help preserve their environments.

T.I.G.E.R.S. is a commercial and private operation. We are proud of the education we provide the public and equally proud of being able to give back to the natural resources we have benefited from living with. Social responsibility is very important to me and my team at T.I.G.E.R.S. Since 1983, T.I.G.E.R.S. has carried out such work through our

percentage of revenues taken in by T.I.G.E.R.S., the generosity of donations from exhibit guests, and the general public. The Rare Species Fund was established to provide critical on the ground funding to international wildlife conservation programs, thereby complimenting the educational messages and field research of T.I.G.E.R.S. Preferably, the Rare Species Fund looks for donating to programs that have the support of governments. Allowing a conservation program to use our donation as a “matching fund” in order to be leveraged for additional dollars is something we strongly favor and can be a factor in our final decisions. One such matching system that we have taken note of and observed is this that of the United States Government, the Multinational Species Conservation Fund.

As the Committee is aware, in the late 1980’s, the population of African elephants was in drastic decline and all trends were signaling a road to extinction. Out of this crisis the United States Government established the African Elephant Conservation Act. The fundamental goal of this landmark legislation was to establish a fund to assist African nations in their battle to conserve this flagship species. A simple and straight forward response to a complex problem: provide a small amount of US taxpayer money to be leveraged two or three times more in private matching funds and put the entire amount toward assisting certain highly endangered flagship species. It was a first of its kind and is what is due credit for paving a path to what we now call The Multinational Species Conservation Fund.

Today, that fund has grown into multiple accounts and has provided aid to hundreds of species and subspecies, as well as thousands of varying habitats. But we can’t stop here. We can do more.

The most challenging variable to the success of a wildlife conservation program is money. Although it benefits from being a federal program, The Multinational Species Conservation Fund is not immune to this. The American taxpayer has graciously demonstrated its commitment to wildlife by supporting the Congress in designating funds to the Multinational Species Conservation Fund. I hope this will continue. However, it is our job, those of us in the conservation community, to find solutions to the challenges. Long-term financing is such a case. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service receives far more applications for conservation grant projects than they are able to fund. The result is that many projects never get off the ground or existing projects are not completed in the time frames critical to the wildlife they benefit. As the Committee is aware, the Multinational Species Conservation Fund has never seen maximum funding from federal appropriations. It is not likely to realize this in the foreseeable future. This is not a criticism of the Administration or the Congress, this is just a reality of the challenges faced when balancing varying needs and priorities of a nation.

There is an answer to this challenge, it is H.R. 1454. Along side with the continuing support and efforts of private matching funds, we can close the gap and allow the means for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund to fund nearly all of the applications for projects that the Fish and Wildlife Service approves. By selling the stamps created under

H.R. 1454, through the premium price established, all proceeds generated would be shared by the existing subaccounts within the Multinational Species Conservation Fund. This is money that would be used to finance additional conservation projects to conserve some of the most endangered and charismatic wildlife on this planet.

Since its creation in 1998, The Multinational Species Conservation Fund has proven itself an important tool in its mission. That is why I am most pleased that H.R. 1454 is being considered before the United States Congress. In my view, H.R. 1454 will improve the effectiveness of international conservation programs by tapping into new and available financial opportunities. However, unlike most federal legislation, H.R. 1454 demonstrates fiscal responsibility and does not place its funding source burden on the shoulders of the American taxpayer.

T.I.G.E.R.S. looks forward to a day when the semipostal stamps are available and when we can do our part in support of conservation funding and begin offering them to our visitors and friends.

Madam Chair, I encourage the Subcommittee and the House of Representatives to pass H.R. 1454, the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp Act of 2009. Thank you for listening to my comments and I welcome any questions you and the Members may have.