The Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt (END) Wildlife Trafficking Act elevated the visibility of wildlife poaching and trafficking by bringing attention to crime that undermines security, economic prosperity, the rule of law, and long-standing conservation efforts, as well as endangers human health through the increased potential for zoonotic pathogen spillover and disease spread. The bipartisan END Wildlife Trafficking Reauthorization and Improvements Act of 2021 continues the whole-of-government approach to ending global wildlife poaching and trafficking by permanently reauthorizing the activities of the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking established by 2013 Executive Order 13648. The five-year authorization for the Task Force set in the END Wildlife Trafficking Act of 2016 expired in 2021.

Focus Countries

Under existing law, the Secretary of State annually publishes a list of Focus Countries that are a major source of wildlife trafficking products or their derivatives, a major transit point of wildlife trafficking products or their derivatives, or a major consumer of wildlife trafficking products. In the 2021 Report, there were 28 Focus Countries. The U.S. Government provides them with technical and other assistance to halt poaching.

H.R. 5996/S. 3211 would shift the report requirement from annual to biennial.

Countries of Concern have the same criteria as focus countries, but the governments of these nations are identified as actively engaging in or knowingly profiting from the trafficking. H.R. 5996/S. 3211 would add to that definition a government that facilitates trafficking through a persistent failure to make serious and sustained efforts to prevent and prosecute. This bill would also establish criteria for removing countries that no longer meet this definition.
Digital Technology

The expansion of e-commerce and social platforms has led to unprecedented unregulated wildlife trade and cybercrime. During the COVID-19 pandemic, lack of enforcement due to lockdowns, along with other negative effects of the pandemic, led to accelerated deforestation and wildlife crime such as poaching. These trends were observed in Africa's national parks, Asia, and elsewhere.²

Under H.R. 5996/S. 3211, the Task Force is directed to support the expansion of technology for anti-poaching and anti-trafficking efforts, to support local governments in developing and using such technologies (such as AI for airport scanners), and to address the expansion of illegal wildlife trade on digital platforms. This is to be done in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders from the private sector, foreign governments, academia, and nongovernmental organizations, including technology, transportation and logistics, social media, e-commerce, and search engine companies.

Task Force Indicators

To improve accountability and reporting on strategy implementation, the Task Force developed several indicators for monitoring U.S. Government-supported actions to address wildlife trafficking in Focus Countries. These indicators are designed to measure inputs, outputs, or outcomes of law enforcement capacity building and cooperation efforts, policy reform, and demand reduction actions tailored to each country. They also measure dimensions of how seriously wildlife crime is perceived or addressed in each country. The bill directs the Task Force to include analysis of these indicators in the biennial strategic assessment.

From the 2021 (END) Wildlife Trafficking Report:
25/28 countries reported seizures of assets, proceeds, and illegal wildlife or wildlife products by law enforcement authorities

22/28 countries reported data on arrests, prosecutions, and convictions of wildlife traffickers

U.S. Government demand reduction efforts for illegal wildlife products reached an estimated 226 million people in 17 Focus Countries


Interventions

H.R. 5996/S. 3211 directs the Task Force to introduce “interventions,” which will be implemented to address the drivers of poaching, trafficking, and demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products in Focus Countries and Countries of Concern. More opportunities for collaboration and coordination between law enforcement and financial institutions to identify trafficking activity will also be considered.

Subpoenas

H.R. 5996/S. 3211 amends the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Lacey Act, and the Bald & Golden Eagle Protection Act to include issuance of subpoenas for witness testimony and attendance related to investigations of the import, export, sale, or purchase, to or from the United States, of wildlife or plants covered under these Acts.

Funding Safeguards information will be obtained from USAID, USFWS, and other federal agencies that partner with international conservation NGOs.

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WCS works with Governments, local communities and civil society groups in over 30 countries worldwide to reduce the trafficking of wildlife. We support our partners to implement highly focused, evidence-based strategies informed by an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of trafficking and the people involved to reduce the profits of crime, whilst simultaneously increasing the risks of being caught.