During the 20th century, populations of many of the world’s most treasured wild animals have fallen dramatically, with poaching, habitat loss, and other pressures continuing to push these species towards extinction. To help respond to this challenge, Congress created the **Multinational Species Conservation Funds (MSCF)**. Managed for more than 30 years by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the five programs that make up the MSCF are helping conserve some of the world’s most iconic species: elephants, rhinos, tigers, great apes, and turtles. Working with partners in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, these U.S. government programs are helping to turn the tide, proving that species can recover when there is dedicated support for conservation, including protecting habitats, improving wildlife management and public education, and supporting efforts to prevent poaching and wildlife trafficking.

Thanks to strong bipartisan support for the program in the House and Senate, funding for the MSCF has remained strong. But without continued support from Members of Congress, recent progress made to stop poaching and trafficking of these iconic species and recover their populations in the wild may be reversed.

**The need for these programs has never been greater:**

- The Great Elephant Census, released in 2016 and partly funded by FWS, documented about 350,000 African savanna elephants in 18 range countries—a decline of 150,000 in just 7 years.
- Fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants remain worldwide, a decline of at least 50% over the last 3 generations, as the species suffers from human-elephant conflict, habitat loss, and poaching.
- Gorilla populations declined by about 20 percent over an 8-year period according to a 2018 study, primarily due to habitat destruction, the bushmeat trade, illegal trade in live animals, and diseases such as ebola.
- Nearly half of the species of turtles and tortoises are imminently threatened, and 10 have populations of less than 100 individuals, making them among the groups of vertebrates facing the highest risks of species extinctions.
- About 28,000 rhinos remain in the world, with about 10,000 having been poached in the last decade.
- Roughly 4,500 tigers remain in the wild - down from 100,000 a century ago - occupying only 7% of their historical range.

**A track record of success**

Although the problems are daunting, the MSCF has a strong record of success. Since 1989, the FWS has provided more than 4,500 grants totaling more than $330 million in support of cost-effective partnerships to advance international conservation. MSCF grants have leveraged more than $475 million in matching contributions from the agency’s nearly 900 partners, substantially increasing the impact of U.S. government funding directed to conservation of these species.

Over the thirty years since its inception, the MSCF has played a key role in many conservation successes, including:

- Stabilizing the population of tigers in the wild, which had dropped to below 4,000 worldwide;
- Funding projects that led the international effort over the past decade to halt and reverse the rapid growth in the poaching of wild elephants and rhinos; and,
- Helping to secure the remaining habitats for many great ape species, such as Grauer’s gorillas and orangutans.
The MSCF has delivered impressive conservation results:

African Elephant Conservation Fund (AfECF)
With grants from AfECF and other partners, World Wildlife Fund recently supported the first ever synchronized aerial elephant survey for the entire Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA), undertaken by the governments of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. With at least 225,000 elephants, KAZA holds the largest contiguous elephant population in the world.

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (AsECF)
Support from the AsECF has helped the International Elephant Foundation secure vital habitat for the critically endangered Sumatran elephant, prevent encroachments, preserve connectivity, and stop poachers and wildlife crime. In addition to patrols, Conservation Response Units cooperate with communities and local farmers to encourage a culture of conservation to protect all of the endangered species who call Sumatra home.

Rhinoceros/Tiger Conservation Fund (RTCF)
In partnership with the International Rhino Foundation, FWS is supporting Javan Rhino Protection Units in Ujung Kulon National Park in Indonesia, the habitat for the few dozen Javan rhinos remaining in the wild. Units play a critical role in the species’ survival, patrolling, monitoring, and surveying the full extent of the park to curtail the illegal hunting and trapping of protected wildlife and minimize the effects of human encroachment.

The last of Indonesia’s tigers—less than 400 today—are holding on for survival in the remaining patches of forests on the island of Sumatra. A RTCF grant received by Fauna & Flora International is being used to increase protection and conservation of Sumatran tigers in Kerinci Seblat National Park by reducing poaching threats through the use of durable technology supporting forest patrols and investigations and enabling rapid veterinary responses to injured or sick tigers.

Great Ape Conservation Fund (GACF)
Pan African Sanctuary Alliance members Chimpanzee Conservation Center and Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary received funding from the GACF to protect the critically endangered Western chimpanzee in national parks in Guinea and Sierra Leone through activities such as conservation patrols, support of alternative livelihoods, and community engagement.

Marine Turtle Conservation Fund (MTCF)
With a small grant from the MTCF, the Wildlife Conservation Society’s Bronx Zoo recently sent 36 zoo-bred Rote Island snake-necked turtles to the Singapore Zoo as part of a collaboration that will eventually reintroduce the animals to their native range in Indonesia where the species is functionally extinct.