

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 1, 2024

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
HT-2 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign
Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Lee:

We write in support of robust funding in the FY 2025 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and State programs that support biodiversity conservation, combating wildlife trafficking, sustainable landscapes, and global health initiatives. These investments, which have historically received bipartisan and bicameral support, contribute to U.S. security and economic interests, combat transnational organized crime, build economic stability among our strategic partners around the world, and help to prevent future pandemics.

The U.S. government recognizes the illegal trade in endangered wildlife products constitutes transnational organized crime that garners an estimated \$8-10 billion annually. Accounts combatting transnational crime keep criminals from profiting from, stealing, and poaching wildlife and other natural resources. The high profits and low risks of wildlife trafficking have attracted the involvement of the same organized syndicates that traffic drugs, guns, and people and violent extremist groups, including those with ties to terrorism.

Illegal trade in timber and seafood is also robbing Americans of billions of dollars annually by artificially depressing prices of these goods, which makes it harder for law-abiding U.S. businesses and workers to compete in global markets. These illegal activities are driving deforestation and the collapse of global fish stocks, which are not only vital resources for developing communities that heavily rely on them, but also for the global markets and supply chains that depend on their sustainability. As such, federal investments in international conservation combat threats to domestic security and economic prosperity, while empowering local communities and building economic stability and good natural resource management among our strategic partners.

In recognition of the alarming rate of deforestation and land degradation, the U.S. recently joined other governments in a commitment to halt and reverse global forest loss by 2030 with a pledge of \$9 billion toward these imperative efforts. We understand that both bilateral and multilateral funding, including certain monetary portions from the programs listed below, will contribute toward the U.S. being able to achieve its Global Forest Pledge, which is an estimated \$1 billion annually.

As we continue to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged our families, our nation, and our global economy, there has never been a more important time to prevent and prepare for the next pandemic. Deforestation, legal and illegal live wildlife trade for human consumption can lead to the spillover of zoonotic pathogens, and uncoordinated global health security systems all create a world that is ill-prepared for the impacts of novel pathogens. The accounts addressed in this letter will also invest in our global health security to ensure that we are better prepared to stop disruptive zoonotic diseases at the original point of spillover and prevent their spread from animals to people before they become pandemics.

FY25 SFOPS Priority Accounts:

USAID Biodiversity Programs

Most U.S. foreign assistance for on-the ground conservation is delivered through USAID and its portfolio of biodiversity, forestry, and marine programs. These programs help protect some of the largest, most at-risk natural landscapes, species, water and soil quality, and the livelihoods of millions of people who directly depend on them for their survival and economic growth. For FY25, we request \$500 million for the USAID Biodiversity Conservation and natural resource management programs, including \$50 million to the Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE). Increases from the Fiscal Year 2024 enacted levels address would support regional landscape programs in Central Africa, the Amazon, Central America, and include support to USFWS, USFS, DOI, and NOAA, leveraging the technical agency capacity and partnerships to conserve forests, great apes, and other vulnerable species.

The Global Environment Facility

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is an independent international financial institution that provides grants to support sustainable use of natural capital and improved management of natural resources. The GEF also funds programs to combat poaching and wildlife trafficking around the world, including to strengthen national laws, improve law enforcement, monitor wildlife populations, and reduce demand. In 2022, The U.S. made new 4-year pledges as part of the GEF's eighth replenishment to enable the GEF to meet new mandates and to support both sustainable COVID-19 recovery and the forthcoming 2030 Global Biodiversity Framework. In light of this, we request \$150.2 million in FY25 for the third installment of the U.S. contribution to the eighth replenishment of the Global Environment Facility.

Global Health Security Program

USAID's Global Health Programs have a track record of monitoring, predicting, preventing, and responding to emerging infectious diseases, including zoonotic diseases that spillover from wildlife and animals to people. Collection and analysis of zoonotic spillover data of both known and unknown pathogens at the source of spillover is an essential but often overlooked component of preventing pandemics. For FY25, we request \$1 billion for the Global Health Security bilateral funds at USAID, including the \$250 million for the U.S. government's contribution to the Pandemic Fund, a multilateral financial intermediary fund for health security, pandemic prevention and preparedness as authorized by the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 117-263).

It is critical that any funding for Global Health Security addresses the risks of zoonotic spillover. We also request the following report language be included in the State and Foreign Operations (SFOPS) report:

Global Health Security.—The Secretary of State is encouraged to prioritize zoonotic spillover prevention at the source, such as wildlife trade chains, degraded edges of the forest, within the new Pandemic Fund and Pandemic Agreement.

U.S. State Department & U.S. Agency for International Development Combatting Wildlife Trafficking Programs

Congress and the Administration have directed U.S. agencies to take strong steps to address the transnational organized crime of wildlife poaching and trafficking through the END Wildlife Trafficking Act and Executive Orders 13648 on Combatting Wildlife Trafficking and 13773 on Transnational Organized Crime. U.S. State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) supports programs to increase the capacity of wildlife law enforcement to detect, interdict, and seize illegal wildlife products, and enhance investigative and law enforcement functions of our foreign enforcement partners, among other goals. USAID supports projects to strengthen anti-poaching and wildlife law enforcement, strengthen judicial systems and rule of law, disrupt trafficking networks, and reduce consumer demand for illegal wildlife products. These programs also complement and support efforts to address other nature crimes, including, illegal logging and timber trafficking, and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. For FY25, we request \$140 million split evenly between INL from Title IV and USAID, in order to combat wildlife trafficking and other nature crimes. The END Wildlife Trafficking Act renewed the Counter Wildlife Trafficking Task Force and expanded its scope to include countering online wildlife trafficking (P.L. 117 – 263). Additional funding is needed to meet the expanded scope of the program to counter wildlife, timber, fish and mineral trafficking as well as combating online trafficking and tracking payment platforms for online transactions.

USAID Sustainable Landscapes

The USAID Sustainable Landscapes Program supports efforts to halt deforestation and forest Degradation, promote sustainable and responsible forestry and land use practices, and prevent illegal logging in the world’s largest, most biologically diverse forests. These initiatives have helped address rural poverty, good governance, and land tenure issues while also slowing climate change through the conservation of the world’s largest storehouses of terrestrial carbon. For FY25, we request \$451 million for USAID Sustainable Landscapes Program, to strengthen local community led sustainable tourism and sustainable timber management efforts in the face of foreign government pressures to exploit natural resources.

Tropical Forest & Coral Reef Conservation Act

The Tropical Forest & Coral Reef Conservation Act (TFCCA) offers eligible countries the opportunity to reduce their official concessional debt owed to the U.S. government while generating funds locally to conserve biological diversity and protect ecologically and economically vital forest and coral ecosystems. Innovative financial mechanisms such as TFCCA have demonstrated strong conservation and strategic economic cooperation between the U.S. and several countries. For FY25, we request at least \$15 million for TFCCA, the same as the FY23 enacted level.

Public-Private Partnerships in Conservation

The U.S. government is a leader in global conservation. The track record and reputation of global conservation investments, such as the ones outlined above, attracts other public and private sector donors. To leverage greater and sustained long-term financing for protected and conserved areas around the world, public-private partnerships can be facilitated by a U.S. foundation for international conservation. We also request the following report language be included in the SFOPS report:

Public-Private Partnerships.— The Committee directs that, of the funds appropriated by this Act and prior Acts under the heading “Economic Support Funds” made available to support a new public-private partnership foundation for conservation are in addition to funds otherwise allocated to the Biodiversity Conservation program at USAID in the act and are not to cause a reduction of total funds available to Biodiversity Conservation at USAID.

We urge the Subcommittee to continue to robustly fund international conservation and combating wildlife trafficking programs in the FY25 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress



Nicole Malliotakis
Member of Congress



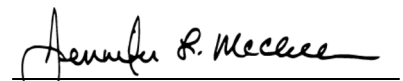
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



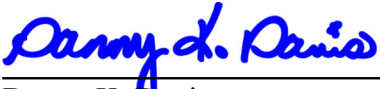
Lucy McBath
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Salud Carbajal
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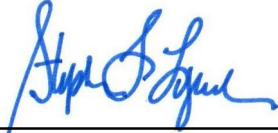
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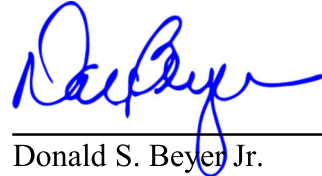
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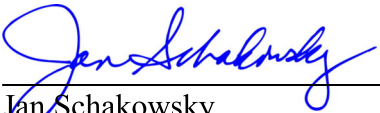
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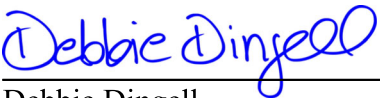
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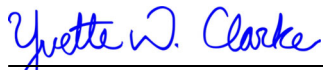
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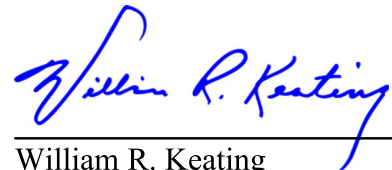
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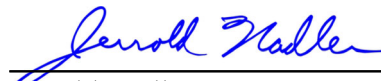
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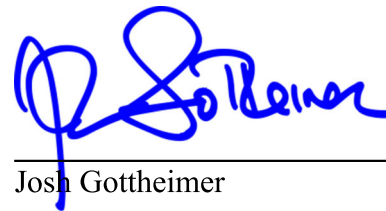
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