

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 1, 2024

The Honorable Michael Simpson  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

We thank you for your strong support for programs at the Department of the Interior that back U.S. efforts to prevent wildlife trafficking and the illegal timber trade and protect against the spillover and spread of diseases of zoonotic origin. As you develop the FY 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (Interior/EPA), we urge you to provide \$110.8 million for the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), equal to President's request.

OLE is the key agency at the Department of the Interior responsible for enforcing U.S. laws related to wildlife. It investigates wildlife crimes, inspects wildlife and wildlife products at the border and ports-of-entry, regulates wildlife trade domestically, and works in partnership with international, state, and tribal counterparts to conserve wildlife resources. It plays an integral role in the ongoing efforts to address the global crisis of wildlife poaching and trafficking as well as in preventing illegal timber imports into the U.S. Increasing funding for OLE will support efforts to maximize the scope and effectiveness of FWS' response to the international wildlife trafficking crisis, ensuring OLE has an adequate number of law enforcement agents deployed to enforce laws against wildlife trafficking in the U.S. It is also responsible for wildlife inspections and related law enforcement on the U.S. border, an issue that has been brought to the fore over the last few years as the world has felt the human and economic toll of a pandemic sparked by COVID-19, a disease with zoonotic origin.

Recent increases in the OLE budget have enabled the agency to deploy up to 12 FWS attachés in targeted U.S. embassies overseas in countries like Tanzania, Gabon, Peru, China, and

Thailand, where wildlife trafficking is a serious problem. Law enforcement attachés are experienced criminal investigators who specialize in wildlife and natural resource investigations and have provided extensive support to local authorities engaged in wildlife trafficking investigations and vital access to Service resources. As a direct result of attaché intervention, several investigations have been initiated of transnational organized crime networks involved in the trafficking of elephant ivory, rhino horn, reptiles, and other wildlife and wildlife parts in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In addition to their law enforcement functions, attachés have been involved in building the capacity for wildlife law enforcement in the countries and regions in which they are placed.

The attachés have been incredibly effective in those countries where they are stationed, and additional funds are needed to increase their number and provide technical support including data analysis that helps to identify key actors in the illegal trade chain and map and dismantle criminal networks.

Housed within the OLE is the Wildlife Detector Dog program, which was created in 2013 as part of a national effort to combat illegal wildlife trafficking. Certified canines and wildlife inspector handlers go through a 3-month long training course at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Detector Dog Training Center in Newman, Georgia, and they are trained for real work environments such as US mail centers and courier company facilities, container ports, and air cargo warehouses. These highly skilled canines are able to detect scents from many wildlife species and their products, such as elephant ivory, dried seahorses, live birds, live reptiles and reptile skins, and many more. This program greatly strengthens and expands FWS's inspection capabilities on illegal wildlife products. Currently there are 5 units stationed at FWS designated ports-of-entry. With more than 18 major ports-of-entry across the county and FWS committed to adding additional units in the near future, increased funding is essential.

Advances in technology and connectivity across the world, combined with rising buying power and demand for illegal wildlife products, have also led to a large, unregulated online market that makes it easier for criminals to sell illegally obtained wildlife products across the globe. Purchasing elephant ivory, tiger cubs, and pangolin scales is as easy as "click, pay, ship." USFWS officials have described the "dizzying" scale of the wildlife trade on social media.

These transactions take place on online platforms such as Facebook, Alibaba, Taobao, Google, Baidu, and others. This growth has been driven by algorithmic recommendation tools that provide traffickers a cost-free mechanism for instantly reaching potential customers around the planet, in an environment that provides illegal actors a great deal of anonymity and even payment systems.

Private messaging capabilities on these platforms makes it difficult for law enforcement officials to track this activity. These illegal sales of protected wildlife violate both U.S. law as well as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). FWS Law Enforcement capabilities need to expand in order to address this rapid growth in online wildlife trafficking, including the need to employ big data analytics and increase intelligence capacity.

Implementing and enforcing laws that protect wildlife and plant species (and regulate their trade) are among our most important tools for preventing human disease. An estimated 60% of emerging human diseases are zoonotic in origin. Of these diseases, more than 70% have their origins in wildlife. Zoonotic spillover events increase when humans come into closer contact with wildlife, including through the illegal and unregulated trade in wildlife parts and products, and live wildlife for human consumption, and through habitat destruction, including activities linked to the illegal trade in plants and forestry products. Biodiversity loss, too, can contribute to zoonotic disease spillover by removing buffer species that protect against diseases jumping into human populations. By combating trafficking in illegal flora and fauna, OLE helps protect against disease spillover events that could lead to future pandemics.

As OLE interdicts the illegal trade and movement of live wildlife, they are faced with the challenge of housing and caring for wildlife that may be needed as evidence in ongoing investigations. Preventing zoonotic disease spillover requires the availability of quarantine facilities, as well as adequate space and staff resources to enable the long-term care of confiscated animals. Enforcement of the Big Cat Public Safety Act, signed into law in 2022, places the onus on USFWS to provide appropriate long-term care for animals held in violation of the law. OLE's commitment to conserving biodiversity, and the well-being of live wildlife, does not end at the point of seizure, and resources and systems must be in place to enable rapid placement of wildlife.

In addition to wildlife law enforcement, FWS OLE also plays a central role in enforcing the 2008 Lacey Act Amendments prohibiting trade in illegal timber and other plant products. Illegal logging and associated trade worldwide is worth between 52 billion and 157 billion US dollars per year. Illegal logging threatens some of the world's most biologically diverse and vulnerable forests, contributes to climate change, harms Indigenous and local communities, and undermines the legal forest products trade. In many tropical countries, over half of deforestation is illegal, and between 15 to 30 percent of all wood traded globally derives from illegal logging, which the American Forest & Paper Association estimates depresses world timber prices by between 7 to 16 percent. As a result, it is estimated that the U.S. forestry sector loses as much as \$1 billion annually due to these illegal activities. According to a 2015 analysis by the Union of Concerned Scientists, implementation and enforcement of the 2008 Lacey Act Amendments have helped to reduce the flow of illegal timber into the U.S. by 32 to 44 percent. By preventing illegal wood products from entering the U.S. market and prosecuting those who violate the law, FWS OLE is helping to protect global forests as well as U.S. companies and American workers. OLE at FWS plays a critical role in protecting wildlife through enforcement of U.S. wildlife laws, supporting U.S. efforts to stop wildlife trafficking overseas, protecting our country from diseases of zoonotic origin, and helping U.S. timber and wood product producers by countering the trade in illegal timber.

OLE, as part of the broader law enforcement community, must meet new mandates and recommendations to ensure the safety, health, and welfare of officers and the communities that they protect. Additional funding is needed to purchase body-worn cameras and other equipment to ensure compliance with appropriate standards.

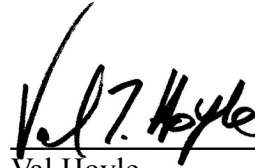
We urge you to continue to provide needed resources for the Office of Law Enforcement by

appropriating \$110.8 million for the program in the FY 2025 bill. Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,



Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress



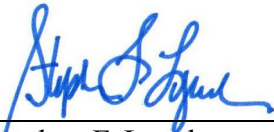
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André Carson  
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*Seth Magaziner*

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*John Garamendi*

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John Garamendi  
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