

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 30, 2026

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Schatz:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies (SFOPS) Appropriations Act, we urge you to maintain funding for programs that help to conserve global biodiversity and promote sustainable natural resource management that have been historically funded via the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), State Department (State), and through the Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation Act (TFCCA) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Robust U.S. investments in international conservation are needed to address the rapid loss of nature and biodiversity on a global scale, which poses long-term threats to our security and prosperity. The fragmentation and overexploitation of nature is undermining stability and socio-economic development in many parts of the developing world while also exacerbating climate change and driving increased spillover and spread of zoonotic pathogens that can lead to pandemics. Solving these intertwined challenges requires fixing our broken relationship with nature, and global conservation investments are among the clearest and most cost-effective solutions to addressing them and the threats they pose to the United States and U.S. interests abroad. The U.S. has a central role to play in helping to galvanize global action, ambition, and investments to address these problems. Developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean are home to most of the world's remaining biological diversity, but these countries often lack the financial resources and technical capacity to conserve and protect their globally significant forests, lands, waters, and wildlife populations. Developed countries like the U.S. are key partners in this respect, and the support they provide for conservation in the developing world is essential if we are to protect these places and the people that depend on them.

As the science continues to remind us, we need to move quickly and bring greater ambition and resources to bear if we are going to ward off catastrophic nature loss and the host of challenges it will bring with it. The large-scale loss of critical ecosystems and the services they provide poses a direct threat to the health and security of people and the stability and prosperity of nations, including the United States. As detailed in World Wildlife Fund's 2024 Living Planet Report,¹

¹ World Wildlife Fund, "Living Planet Report 2024," <https://livingplanet.panda.org/en-US/> (October 10, 2024).

human activities are driving a shocking and rapid loss of wildlife and nature on a global scale, and this poses a direct threat to our health and well-being, food and water security, economic prosperity, and social stability. A 2019 intergovernmental report on the state of our planet concluded that biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history, and that “Nature and its vital contributions to people...are deteriorating worldwide.” The Council on Strategic Risks identifies such ecological disruption as one of the most underappreciated threats to U.S. national security. In its 2026 Global Risks Report,² the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranks environmental challenges, including biodiversity loss, natural resources shortages, and harmful changes to the Earth’s systems, as five of the top ten risks facing the world in this decade. The destruction and fragmentation of critical ecosystems, growing scarcities of natural resources due to over-exploitation, and illegal exploitation and trade of wildlife, timber, and fish are undermining food and water security, harming economic growth, contributing to regional tensions, and providing support and financing to transnational criminal organizations. The destruction of tropical forests and the commercial trade in wildlife that risks transmitting pathogens from animals to people are also major drivers of the spillover of zoonotic diseases, such as HIV, Ebola, and COVID-19, and threaten to spark future pandemics. The costs of responding to such spillover after it has occurred are 100 times greater than the costs of preventing it in the first place through strategic conservation investments.

Biodiversity Conservation Programs

Most U.S. foreign assistance for on-the-ground conservation has been historically delivered through a robust portfolio of biodiversity and forestry programs at USAID and the State Department. These investments have helped to protect some of the largest, most at-risk natural landscapes and seascapes, including tropical forests in the Amazon, Central Africa, and Southeast Asia; savannahs and grasslands; and transboundary water basins, as well as the livelihoods of millions of people who directly depend on such natural resources for their survival and economic growth. By preventing deforestation and the degradation of ecosystems that are rich in both wildlife and carbon, these investments also help to prevent zoonotic spillover and combat climate change. They support partnerships with foreign governments, civil society, the private sector, and local communities to address direct threats to biodiversity loss and the underlying drivers of species extinction. While most efforts are focused on conserving biologically significant areas, Biodiversity Conservation programs have also strengthened policies, raised public awareness, and tackled global challenges such as plastic pollution and the illegal trade in timber, fish, and wildlife. Funding through Biodiversity Conservation programs is also used to support partnership activities with other federal agencies with technical expertise in international conservation, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and US Forest Service (USFS). For FY27, we request at least \$292.6 million for Biodiversity Conservation Programs, which was the House-passed level in FY26. We also request that \$34.2 million of this amount be directed towards conservation efforts in the Central African region in support of the Congo Basin Forest Partnership, such as the Central African Regional Program for the

² World Economic Forum, “Global Risks Report 2026,” <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2026/> (January 14, 2026).

Environment (CARPE). Maintaining Biodiversity Conservation funding would also support similar regional landscape initiatives in the Amazon and Central America, and include support to USFWS, USFS, DOI, and NOAA, leveraging the technical agency capacity and partnerships to conserve forests and marine ecosystems as well as endangered species.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF)

The Global Environment Facility (the GEF) is an independent international financial institution that provides grants to support sustainable use and improved management of natural resources. Operating in 183 countries, projects unite donor and recipient countries with U.S. corporations and NGOs. America's investment in the GEF also yields a very high rate of return. Every dollar America invests in the GEF generates an additional \$40 from other countries and partners for the GEF and its programs. GEF support has also been critical to placing 12 percent of the world's terrestrial area under protection, resulting in 3,300 protected areas that span 2.1 billion acres and contain at least 700 globally threatened species, as well as the improved cooperation and governance of one-third of the world's marine ecosystems. In addition to playing a leading role in protecting the world's forests and fisheries, the GEF funds programs to combat poaching and wildlife trafficking around the world by strengthening national laws and law enforcement, monitoring wildlife populations, and reducing demand. The GEF also provides significant support to developing-country efforts to address other pressing global environmental challenges, including the growing crisis of plastic pollution and marine debris, as well as toxic chemicals and desertification. We request level funding of \$150.2 million in FY27 to support the continued U.S. contribution to the GEF.

Combating Wildlife Trafficking Programs

Since FY 2014 Congress has directed dedicated funding to address wildlife trafficking, including through the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account at State. In 2022, Congress also reauthorized the bipartisan END Wildlife Trafficking Act to enhance existing efforts and support implementation of a national strategy to combat wildlife trafficking. Combating Wildlife Trafficking programs support U.S. security and economic interests by preventing transnational organized crime and corruption and helping to strengthen law enforcement and economic stability among our strategic partners around the globe. The illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products is worth billions of dollars annually and is carried out by highly organized transnational criminal networks connecting poachers in Africa, Asia, and other regions to high-end black markets around the globe. Wildlife trafficking is also closely linked to other transnational organized crimes, including the illegal trade in narcotics, and has provided financing for organized crime syndicates and extremist groups, including those with terrorist ties. And trade in wildlife that risks contributing to zoonotic spillover is a major driver of future pandemic threats. The funds provided by Congress have invested in projects that support anti-poaching and wildlife law enforcement, strengthen judicial systems and rule of law, disrupt transit hubs, and reduce consumer demand for illegal wildlife products. For FY27, we request \$95 million to support these activities, which is consistent with the FY26 House-passed level,

including for INL’s efforts to combat wildlife trafficking in Central and South America and its work to address the convergence of wildlife trafficking with other transnational organized crimes, including narcotics trafficking, IUU fishing, illegal logging and timber trafficking, and illegal mining.

Illegal Logging and Deforestation Programs

Strategic investments by the State Department through the Bureau of Oceans and Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) and the Bureau of International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INL) prevent deforestation globally and combat illegal logging and the trade of illegal timber products, playing a vital role in protecting the world’s remaining forests and ensuring that law-abiding business operators are not undercut by unfair competition. Activities supported by this funding, including under the Lacey Act Amendments of 2008, combat illicit timber trafficking and related crimes by building law enforcement and compliance capacities in partner nations, disrupting criminal networks and illicit financing mechanisms that threaten U.S. trade and security interests around the world, and supporting the improvement of traceability in commodity supply chains and data collection pertaining to illegal logging and deforestation. For FY27, we request no less than level funding of \$25 million for Illegal Logging and Deforestation programs.

Land Use, Management, and Protection

U.S. investments in Land Use, Management, and Protection programs support efforts to safeguard terrestrial and marine resources, including to conserve critical forests, prevent deforestation, and counter illicit logging and associated economic impacts to global supply chains. These initiatives have helped address rural poverty, encourage good governance, and secure land tenure while protecting critical upstream water supplies and creating economic opportunities. In some cases, including in Central America, these investments have created thriving economies based on local natural resources, raising incomes and significantly reducing out-migration from forest-dependent communities. For FY27, we request level funding of \$131.8 million for Land Use, Management, and Protection programs, including for efforts to strengthen forest management and reliable supply chains for timber and non-timber forest products while protecting law-abiding producers and promoting responsible, locally-led forestry enterprises.

Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation Act (TFCCA)

First enacted in 1998, the Tropical Forest Conservation Act has offered 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 ecosystems. The Act was expanded to include coral reef ecosystems in 2019, and in 2022, Congress reauthorized this highly successful and innovative “debt-for-nature” program, which has produced tremendous returns on investment for over the last 25 years. In 2023, the U.S. finalized its 22nd swap under the program – an agreement with the Government of

Peru to reduce its debt by \$20 million over 13 years, which also leveraged a combined \$3 million in support from World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Over time, current TFCCA agreements will have generated nearly \$400 million for long-term tropical forest protection in over a dozen countries. For FY27, we request \$5 million for the TFCCA.

U.S. Foundation for Natural Security and Counterterrorism

The U.S. government is a leader in global conservation. The track record and reputation of global conservation investments, as 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, in 2024 Congress passed into law the bipartisan United States Foundation for International Conservation Act, creating a new foundation to facilitate public-private partnerships that provide long-term financing for the management of protected and conserved areas around the world. This foundation is now the U.S. Foundation for Natural Security and Counterterrorism, and with every dollar matched 2-to-1 by private, philanthropic, and other non-federal partners, the Foundation will increase available resources to protect critical landscapes and seascapes in developing countries and prevent illegal exploitation of wildlife, forests, and fisheries by criminal networks, armed groups, and other malign actors. Congress has appropriated \$100 million in each of the past three years towards this purpose, and we request this same funding level for the U.S. Foundation for Natural Security and Counterterrorism in FY27.

Taken together, these important U.S. government investments protect globally important systems and natural resources, prevent the illegal trafficking of wildlife, timber, fish, and other natural resources, and provide some of the clearest and most cost-effective solutions to a number of serious global challenges, including combating climate change, curbing plastic pollution, and preventing future pandemics. In doing so, they serve as a stabilizing force in fragile regions, promote global health and local community development and economic growth, protect our interests overseas, and enhance America's economic and national security. We urge you to continue to provide funding at or above the prior year's enacted levels for these international conservation programs in the FY27 SFOPS/NSRP Appropriations Act.

Thank you for considering our request.

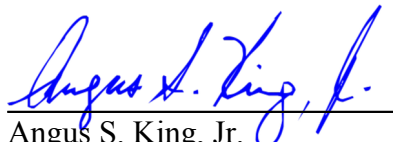
Sincerely,

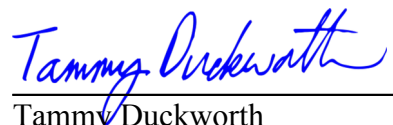


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

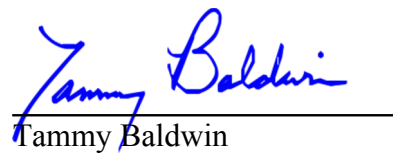


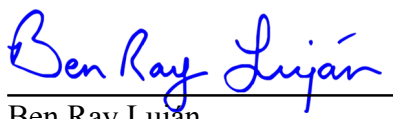
Amy Klobuchar
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United States Senator

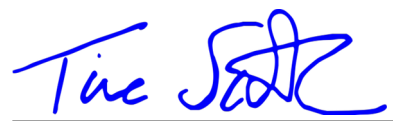

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

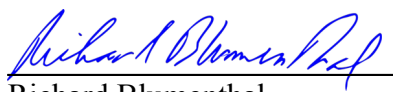

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

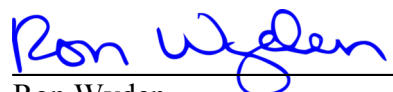

Ben Ray Lujan
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Jeffrey A. Merkley
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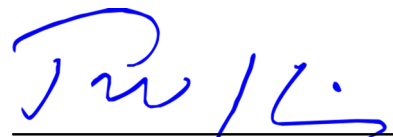

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

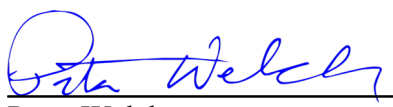

Tina Smith
United States Senator

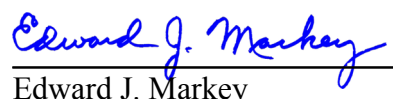

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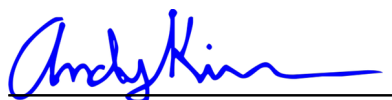
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