

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2026

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murkowski and Ranking Member Merkley:

We thank you for your continued support of programs at the Department of the Interior (DOI) that support U.S. efforts to conserve wildlife, combat wildlife trafficking and illegal timber trade, and protect against the spillover and spread of diseases of zoonotic origin. As you draft the FY27 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, we request that you maintain existing funding levels for programs that support international conservation and efforts to prevent wildlife trafficking, including:

- \$21 million for the Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF),
- \$28.6 million for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) International Affairs (IA) program, and
- \$92 million for the FWS Office of Law Enforcement (OLE).

Further, we ask that the Subcommittee include language in the legislative text allocating these funding amounts to the agency to better ensure that the agency is carrying out the intent of Congress.

The MSCF is made up of a group of five congressionally established funds that support public-private partnerships to conserve several of the world's most iconic and imperiled species—tigers, African and Asian elephants, rhinos, great apes, turtles, and tortoises—in their native habitats. These programs were first enacted nearly four decades ago and have been repeatedly reauthorized by Congress, most recently as part of the FY25 National Defense Authorization Act. In addition, the FWS IA program supports broader efforts to conserve our planet's wildlife and resources and to stop illegal wildlife trade. The program represents US interests in international treaties and implements domestic laws and related permitting processes to ensure that imports of wildlife and wildlife products comply with applicable laws, and to facilitate legal exports from US businesses.

These programs play an integral role in implementing U.S. government strategies to prevent the illegal trafficking of endangered and threatened wildlife and their parts—such as elephant ivory,

rhino horn, tiger bones, pangolin scales, shark fins, and live turtles, parrots, cheetahs, and even monkeys. Wildlife trafficking is a transnational organized crime worth up to \$23 billion annually. It drives poaching while financing criminal syndicates and extremist groups that threaten U.S. security interests and corrupt the rule of law. In 2017, President Trump signed an Executive Order to strengthen efforts to combat transnational organized crime, including wildlife trafficking; and in 2022, Congress reauthorized the END Wildlife Trafficking Act and the Presidential Task Force on Combating Wildlife Trafficking. Since 2014, Congress has also provided dedicated funding to disrupt trafficking networks, improve law enforcement and anti-poaching efforts, stop corruption, and reduce demand for illegal wildlife products.

Wildlife trafficking is closely linked to other transnational organized crimes, including trafficking of narcotics, weapons, and minerals. The illegal extraction of resources is ravaging many remote protected areas. Grants from USFWS have supported efforts by park rangers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to confront extensive illegal mining activities and terrorist organizational networks. In Latin America, Chinese syndicates are increasingly linked to cartels known to be trading illegal wildlife products for fentanyl and its precursors, alongside other narcotics, and the smuggling of migrants into the United States. By supporting the capacity of countries to prevent and disrupt these illegal activities and the criminals perpetrating them, these USFWS programs are a critical component of the overall effort to prevent and counter transnational organized crime and its many threats to our nation.

Despite Congress providing appropriations for these programs in both FY25 and FY26, USFWS has not issued funding opportunities for either the MSCF or the grant programs from International Affairs since FY2024. All existing grants that were competitively awarded were halted in February of last year, and those that were not terminated remain frozen. Given the strong bipartisan support that these programs have long had, we ask that the Committee include language to direct the agency to provide spend plans for appropriated funds that remain unspent and that funding in FY27 is included in the bill text, to be made available until spent.

While FWS IA provides the regulatory framework to facilitate legal wildlife trade and build capacity in other countries to keep criminal networks from operating within our borders, FWS OLE operates both domestically and internationally to ensure that our wildlife laws are upheld. OLE is composed of special agents, wildlife inspectors, intelligence analysts, forensic scientists, and support staff who protect the border and U.S. ports-of-entry. Wildlife inspectors serve as front-line defenders against illegal trade in wildlife and timber products, which harms not only animals and ecosystems, but also undermines American businesses that are abiding by legal and sustainable business practices. OLE works across law enforcement agencies to disrupt and dismantle criminal organizations that deal in narcotics, weapons, humans, wildlife, and basically any contraband that will generate revenue. They have created a dedicated position in support of E.O. 14165 (Securing Our Borders) for coordination with the Department of Defense and

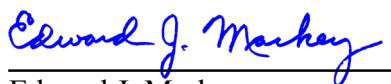
Department of Homeland Security and have already exposed a criminal network trafficking in wildlife from Mexico through the US and onto China.

Advances in technology and connectivity across the world, combined with rising buying power and demand for 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, pangolin scales, and live tiger or cheetah cubs often is as easy as “click, pay, ship.” USFWS officials have described the “dizzying” scale of the wildlife trade on social media. Private messaging capabilities on common platforms makes it difficult for law enforcement officials to track this activity. FWS OLE capabilities must expand in order to respond to this rapid growth in online wildlife trafficking, including the need to employ big data analytics and increase intelligence capacity.

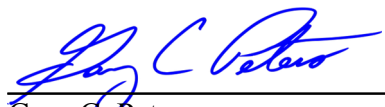
FWS OLE also plays a central role in stopping the trade in illegal timber and other plant products by enforcing the Lacey Act Amendments of 2008. Illegal logging and associated trade worldwide is worth between \$52 billion and \$157 billion per year, which threatens the world’s remaining forests, harms Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and undermines the legal forest products trade. In many tropical countries, over half of deforestation is illegal. According to estimates by the American Forest & Paper Association, between 15 to 30 percent of all wood traded globally derives from illegal logging, which depresses world timber prices by as much as 16 percent. It is estimated that the U.S. forestry sector suffers as much as \$1 billion in lost revenues annually as a result of these illegal activities.

With nature and biodiversity declining globally and with multiple negative spillover effects for human health, development, and the climate, support for these programs is needed now more than ever. For these reasons, we ask that you support funding the MSCF at \$21 million, USFWS IA at \$28.6 million, and USFWS OLE at \$92 million in the FY27 Interior, the Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Thank you for taking the time to consider our views and for recognizing the ongoing importance of these programs in protecting our world’s rich biological diversity and the people and communities who rely on it.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



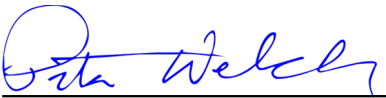
Gary C. Peters
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Angela D. Alsobrooks
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Peter Welch
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Maria Cantwell
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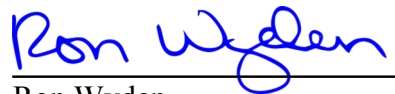
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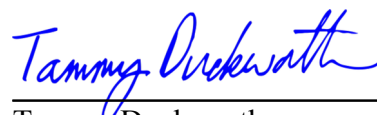
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