

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 7, 2023

The Honorable Christopher Coons  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on State, Foreign  
Operations, and Related Agencies  
127 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on State, Foreign  
Operations, and Related Agencies  
190 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Coons and Ranking Member Graham:

As you develop the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Agencies (SFOPS) Appropriations Acts, we urge you to maintain or increase funding for programs that conserve global biodiversity and promote sustainable natural resource management at 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).

U.S. investments in international conservation are essential to responding to the global loss of biodiversity and natural habitat. These losses directly threaten the health and security of people and the stability and prosperity of nations, including the United States. The Council on Strategic Risks identifies ecological disruption as one of the most underappreciated threats to U.S. national security. The destruction and fragmentation of critical ecosystems, growing scarcities of natural resources, 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 elements. The costs of responding to these problems after they have occurred can be many times greater than the costs of preventing them in the first place through strategic conservation investments.

**Combating Wildlife Trafficking Programs at the Department of State and USAID**

Worth tens of billions of dollars annually, the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products is carried out by highly organized transnational criminal networks that connect poachers in Africa, Asia, and other regions to high-end black markets around the globe. These sophisticated criminal elements have fueled wildlife poaching and trafficking activities, creating significant ecological, economic, and national security threats. Wildlife trafficking is also closely linked to other international crimes and has provided financing for organized crime syndicates and terrorist groups.

Since FY 2014, Congress has directed funding to address wildlife trafficking through programs at USAID and the Bureau of International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) at the State Department. In 2016, Congress also passed the bipartisan END Wildlife Trafficking Act to enhance existing efforts and support implementation of a national strategy to combat wildlife trafficking. These programs support U.S. security and economic interests by combating transnational organized crime and corruption and helping to strengthen law enforcement and economic stability among our strategic partners around the globe. For FY 2024, we request at least \$125 million in dedicated funding for combating wildlife poaching and trafficking.

### **USAID Biodiversity Programs**

Most U.S. foreign assistance for on-the-ground conservation is delivered through USAID and its robust portfolio of conservation and forestry programs. These programs help to protect some of the largest, most at-risk natural landscapes and seascapes, including tropical forests in the Amazon, Central Africa, and Southeast Asia, grasslands, and transboundary water basins. They also support the livelihoods of millions of people who directly depend on their natural resources for their survival and economic growth. These programs work in partnership 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, USAID programs also strengthen policies, raise public awareness, and tackle global challenges such as the illegal trade in wildlife, fish, and timber. Funding through USAID Biodiversity programs is also used to support partnership activities between USAID and other federal agencies with technical expertise in international conservation, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and US Forest Service (USFS). For FY 2024, we request robust funding for the USAID Biodiversity Programs.

### **The Global Environment Facility**

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. Last year, the U.S. and other donor countries finalized new 4-year pledges to the GEF as part of its 8<sup>th</sup> replenishment cycle (GEF-8). We request \$150.2 million in FY24 to support the second installment of an enhanced U.S. contribution to GEF-8.

### **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. In 2019, Congress reauthorized the Act and expanded its authorities to include coral reef ecosystems. This highly successful and innovative “debt-for-nature” program has produced tremendous returns on investment over the last two decades, generating nearly \$300 million for long-term tropical forest protection in over a dozen countries. For FY24, we request \$20 million for the TFCCA.

These important U.S. government investments help prevent the illegal trafficking of wildlife while protecting globally important ecosystems and natural resources. In doing so, they serve as a stabilizing force in fragile regions, promote local community development and economic growth, protect our interests overseas, and enhance America’s economic and national security. We urge you to continue robust funding for combating wildlife trafficking and international conservation programs in the FY 2024 SFOPS Appropriations Act.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,



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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



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Thom Tillis  
United States Senator

**State and Foreign Operations Group Letter Table**  
**SFOPS\_Van Hollen\_Group\_230413-122028[LetterID 15316]**

ID	Sub	Request Agency or Account	Request Project Name	Request (\$000)
122669	SFOPS Group	[Title V - Multilateral Assistance]/[International Financial Institutions]/[Global Environment Facility] <b>[Member Staff]</b> - Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188	Global Environment Facility	\$150,200
122668	SFOPS Group	[Title VII - General Provisions]/[Environment Programs]/[Biodiversity Conservation Programs] <b>[Member Staff]</b> - Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188	Biodiversity Conservation Programs <b>[Member's Request (text)]</b> - robust funding	\$0
122686	SFOPS Group	[Title IV - International Security Assistance]/[Department of State]/[International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement] <b>[Member Staff]</b> - Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188	International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement	\$125,000
122700	SFOPS Group	[Title III - Bilateral Economic Assistance]/[Department of the Treasury]/[Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation] <b>[Member Staff]</b> - Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188	Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation	\$20,000

**Request ID: 122669**

Agency or Account:	[Title V - Multilateral Assistance]/[International Financial Institutions]/[Global Environment Facility]	Project Name:	Global Environment Facility
Member/s:	Van Hollen, Chris(D-MD); Tillis, Thom(R-NC)	Subcommittee:	SFOPS
Request Type:	Group	Staff Contact:	Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188
Justification:	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. Last year, the U.S. and other donor countries finalized new 4-year pledges to the GEF as part of its 8th replenishment cycle (GEF-8). We request \$150.2 million in FY24 to support the second installment of an enhanced U.S. contribution to GEF-8.		
Proposed Bill Language:		Proposed Report Language:	
Member's Request:	\$150,200	Member's Request (text):	
Enacted Level:	\$0	President's Request:	\$0
CDS Request:	No		

Request ID: 122668

Agency or Account:	[Title VII - General Provisions]/[Environment Programs]/[Biodiversity Conservation Programs]	Project Name:	Biodiversity Conservation Programs
Member/s:	Van Hollen, Chris(D-MD); Tillis, Thom(R-NC)	Subcommittee:	SFOPS
Request Type:	Group	Staff Contact:	Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188
Justification:	Most U.S. foreign assistance for on-the-ground conservation is delivered through USAID and its robust portfolio of conservation and forestry programs. These programs help to protect some of the largest, most at-risk natural landscapes and seascapes, including tropical forests in the Amazon, Central Africa, and Southeast Asia, grasslands, and transboundary water basins. They also support the livelihoods of millions of people who directly depend on their natural resources for their survival and economic growth. These programs work in partnership 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, USAID programs also strengthen policies, raise public awareness, and tackle global challenges such as the illegal trade in wildlife, fish, and timber. Funding through USAID Biodiversity programs is also used to support partnership activities between USAID and other federal agencies with technical expertise in international conservation, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and US Forest Service (USFS). For FY 2024, we request robust funding for the USAID Biodiversity Programs.		
Proposed Bill Language:		Proposed Report Language:	
Member's Request:	\$0	Member's Request (text):	robust funding
Enacted Level:	\$0	President's Request:	\$0
CDS Request:	No		

**Request ID: 122686**

Agency or Account:	[Title IV - International Security Assistance]/[Department of State]/[International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement]	Project Name:	International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement
Member/s:	Van Hollen, Chris(D-MD); Tillis, Thom(R-NC)	Subcommittee:	SFOPS
Request Type:	Group	Staff Contact:	Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188
Justification:	<p>Combating Wildlife Trafficking Programs at the Department of State and USAID</p> <p>Worth tens of billions of dollars annually, the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products is carried out by highly organized transnational criminal networks that connect poachers in Africa, Asia, and other regions to high-end black markets around the globe. These sophisticated criminal elements have fueled wildlife poaching and trafficking activities, creating significant ecological, economic, and national security threats. Wildlife trafficking is also closely linked to other international crimes and has provided financing for organized crime syndicates and terrorist groups.</p> <p>Since FY 2014, Congress has directed funding to address wildlife trafficking through programs at USAID and the Bureau of International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) at the State Department. In 2016, Congress also passed the bipartisan END Wildlife Trafficking Act to enhance existing efforts and support implementation of a national strategy to combat wildlife trafficking. These programs support U.S. security and economic interests by combating transnational organized crime and corruption and helping to strengthen law enforcement and economic stability among our strategic partners around the globe. For FY 2024, we request at least \$125 million in dedicated funding for combating wildlife poaching and trafficking.</p>		
Proposed Bill Language:		Proposed Report Language:	
Member's Request:	\$125,000	Member's Request (text):	
Enacted Level:	\$0	President's Request:	\$0
CDS Request:	No		

<b>Request ID: 122700</b>			
Agency or Account:	[Title III - Bilateral Economic Assistance]/[Department of the Treasury]/[Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation]	Project Name:	Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation
Member/s:	Van Hollen, Chris(D-MD); Tillis, Thom(R-NC)	Subcommittee:	SFOPS
Request Type:	Group	Staff Contact:	Deborah Haynie deborah_haynie@vanhollen.senate.gov 202-228-2188
Justification:	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. In 2019, Congress reauthorized the Act and expanded its authorities to include coral reef ecosystems. This highly successful and innovative "debt-for-nature" program has produced tremendous returns on investment over the last two decades, generating nearly \$300 million for long-term tropical forest protection in over a dozen countries. For FY24, we request \$20 million for the TFCCA.		
Proposed Bill Language:		Proposed Report Language:	
Member's Request:	\$20,000	Member's Request (text):	
Enacted Level:	\$0	President's Request:	\$0
CDS Request:	No		