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Testimony on “The Science of How Hunting Assists Species Conservation and Management” before the Committee on Science, Space and Technology, Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight.
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to testify here today. My name is Dr. Al Maki, and I appear before you as a member of the Executive Committee of Safari Club International, a non-profit organization with approximately 52,000 members. SCI’s missions are the conservation of wildlife, protection of the hunter, and education of the public concerning hunting and its use as a conservation tool. I am a biologist by trade and a hunter and conservationist by choice. I applaud this Committee’s decision to hold a hearing on a much misunderstood and often maligned topic – the essential role that hunting plays in the conservation of wildlife, both domestically and internationally.

Many in this country either do not understand or choose to ignore the role that hunting plays in species conservation. As a key example, my Safari Club International Foundation Conservation Committee currently stewards over sixty individual conservation projects all over the world and in the last five months alone we have contributed over \$240,000 to conservation research. Also, since 1937 the federal Pittman-Robertson Act has provided individual states with funding for research and projects that would have been unaffordable otherwise. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as of 2010, over two billion dollars of federal aid has been generated through this program. The habitat acquisition and improvement made possible by this money has allowed several game species such as white-tailed deer, American black bears, elk, cougars, and others, to expand their ranges beyond where they were found prior to the implementation of this Act which is fully funded by American sportsmen.

Unfortunately, our own U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service understands the role of hunters in conservation, but often refuses to embrace it. Again and again, the FWS ignored the role of the American hunter and instead chosen to has employed the Endangered Species Act to prevent or inhibit the use of hunting as a conservation tool, rather than to encourage it.

The saga of three antelope species is a vivid example. The scimitar-horned oryx, dama gazelle and addax have all but disappeared from their home ranges in Africa. Here in the U.S., as a result of hunting, these species are – or at least were – thriving. In Texas and in several other states, owners of private ranches chose to raise and sell hunts for these animals and to use the proceeds to pay for the costs of upkeep and healthy breeding of these exotic species. The private citizens who raised, bred and hunted these animals, invested in the conservation of these species.

The fact that these animals could be hunted in the U.S. gave them great value, encouraging more and more ranchers to raise their own herds. The population numbers of these three species in the U.S. rose in a few decades from single digits to the thousands. Despite these successes, the anti-hunting community couldn't stomach the role that hunting was playing in these species' recovery and they threatened to sue the FWS if it did not list the three species as endangered based on their plight in Africa. Despite the arguments offered by SCI and other groups against the inclusion of the U.S. captive populations, the FWS listed both the native and U.S. populations as endangered.

As a result of further litigation, in April of this year, the FWS instituted full endangered status for the U.S. captive herds of the three species. Now, owners of these animals must obtain multiple permits from the FWS before they can sell hunts for these antelope. As a consequence,

the value of these animals has dropped precipitously. Many ranchers have gotten out of the business of raising herds of these animals because they are fearful of the bureaucracies and uncertainties involved with owning, breeding and selling members of federally endangered species. The ranchers can no longer be certain that the ownership of these animals will pay for itself. Not surprisingly, the numbers of these animals in the U.S. has declined. Private ranchers have suffered financially and they have lost the ability to participate in one of the most successful demonstrations of the role that hunting plays in conservation. The simple truth is by listing these species as endangered the Fish and Wildlife Service has undermined rather than benefitted the conservation of these animals.

In addition to domestic conservation measures, hunting also plays a vital role in conserving foreign species. While the U.S. lacks authority to dictate conservation for foreign species, through hunting and importation, the U.S. has a powerful tool to encourage foreign conservation. When a U.S. hunter travels to another country to hunt, he or she brings money into the local economy. The hunting activity generates multiple jobs for the local people, as does the handling and shipping of the processed hunting trophy. Hunting gives wildlife value that is not realized in the absence of hunting, and it also creates incentives to discourage if not outlaw poaching of that animal. Frequently, the fees and permits that the hunter pays support formal and informal conservation programs. Where a foreign nation or community might otherwise lack funding for a species in need of conservation efforts, the money generated by hunting supplies that funding.

A prime example of the positive role that hunting plays overseas is the Black Rhinoceros. In 2004, the parties of the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species approved a hunting quota of five black rhinoceros per year for both Namibia and South Africa. Removing a small number

of surplus, post-reproductive black rhinoceros through hunting enhances the survival of the species and promotes population growth. Hunting of one rhinoceros generates well over \$100,000 in revenue, which is allocated to enhance conservation efforts for the species. Hunting is thus used as an efficient and cost-effective conservation tool. In addition, the high revenue potential associated with hunting black rhinoceros raises the value of each individual rhinoceros to the local people, which encourages protection of this resource. This has led to the virtual elimination of rhino poaching in Namibia.

Unfortunately, the U.S. has delayed recognizing the conservation benefits of Namibia's and South Africa's rhino hunting programs. A U.S. hunter submitted the first permit application to import a black rhino trophy from Namibia to the FWS in the fall of 2009. The vast majority of the conservation community, including but not limited to SCI, the World Wildlife Fund and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, support this permit. As of today the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still has not decided whether to approve this vital conservation program, despite the fact that they have had all of the independent scientific data necessary to make the decision for over two years.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes the role that hunting plays in foreign species conservation and acknowledges many situations where hunting and importation enhance the propagation and/or survival of foreign species classified by the FWS as threatened. But when it comes to endangered species, the FWS has drawn an arbitrary line in the sand. The ESA does not prohibit the FWS from issuing permits for the importation of endangered species hunted in circumstances that enhance the propagation or survival of the species. Nevertheless, the FWS simply chooses not to do so. Despite acknowledging the benefits that hunting and importation can bring to endangered species, such as the straight horned markhor and the recently

reclassified wood bison, the Service has relied on the ESA to resolutely refuse to allow U.S. hunters to play a role in the conservation of foreign endangered species. The black rhino is the latest species to join the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's list of missed hunting/conservation opportunities. This arbitrary misuse of ESA authority must end.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify on this important issue and ask the Committee to use its authority to recognize the role that hunting plays in species conservation and to make certain that the ESA is administered in a way that acknowledges and facilitates the use of hunting as a conservation tool for domestic and international species.