

**Opening Statement
Rep. Paul D. Tonko
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight
Committee on Science, Space and Technology**

**Hearing on:
*The Science of How Hunting Assists Species Conservation and Management***

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We are here this afternoon to discuss an important and challenging goal – wildlife management. Our history is entwined with the image of the frontier. Early settlers were amazed at the wealth of resources they encountered here. First on the east coast and then as they moved west. Resources appeared to be endless – fish-filled rivers, lakes and bays; acres of forests filled with timber; abundant wildlife of all sorts. Hunting, trapping, and fishing for subsistence, trade, and sport defined the lifestyle of many early Americans.

The wildlife management policies we have in place today were adopted as a result of some tragic losses of a number of species due to excesses in these practices. It turned out that our rate of hunting, fishing and trapping coupled with habitat destruction exceeded animals' ability to reproduce. Populations collapsed and a number of species were driven to extinction. This was not only tragic for the lost species. The loss of these populations deprived people of food sources and livelihoods. Today, we know better.

Science and experience have taught us that we need to balance our desire to hunt and fish and our need for land, water, timber, and mineral resources with the needs of the animals and plants that share this planet with us. The Endangered Species Act, the Lacey Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty, our system of wildlife refuges and national parks -- all of these -- play an essential role in maintaining that balance.

There is no question that hunting, when matched with effective management and informed by solid biological advice, can play a role in sustaining some species. In the United States, we have competent agencies at the Federal and state levels, and some of the best scientists in the world. As a result, the United States has been a leader in demonstrating to the world how the hunting community can work with, and be supported by, public servants to successfully protect species in the wild.

Sadly, these conditions do not exist in large areas of the world. Many of the world's most desirable trophy species reside in lands that lack effective governance and a wealthy domestic hunting population. These countries do not have a sufficiently robust domestic biological science infrastructure to guide sound management. In addition, cultural traditions that

established the use of body parts for their perceived medicinal effects or placed high value on artifacts crafted from animals fuel strong incentives to over exploit populations. In these places, the role of hunting—which may take the form of poaching—may be destructive rather than constructive.

It takes solid science and a partnership between effective government and the hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation communities to maintain the wild areas of this country and the wild animals that inhabit them. The Endangered Species Act is an important statutory structure to guide management decisions for those species that are attractive to hunters. There is no evidence that the ESA is failing in its purposes. Even when faced with something as unusual as hunting ranches that exist to offer an African hunting experience in the wilds of New Mexico or Texas, the law is flexible enough to work.

I know there have been some complaints that the FWS, in the face of a court decision, should not require licenses of facilities that offer hunts of the Scimitar-horned Oryx, the Adax or the Dama Gazelle. However, the costs of getting the Captive-bred Wildlife permit and the annual taking license work out to just \$140 a year over a five year period. If a ranch is charging thousands of dollars to hunt just one of these animals—and they are—a fee of less than \$150 a year to be in that business does not seem overly burdensome.

It seems to me that the Fish and Wildlife Service has been doing a good job. State agencies, so far as I am aware, have also been doing a good job in species management. The scientific community has rallied to support management efforts and guide species recovery plans. And the members of the hunting community, on balance, have been responsible stewards of America's wildlife.

Let me close by offering my personal view that the Duck Stamp fee should be increased. I know that Director Ashe will speak to this, but the fee has not gone up in over 20 years. The stamp is widely supported in the hunting and recreation community and provides dedicated funds to support these activities. And, to raise it to \$25 after being at \$15 for a generation seems like a reasonable step to provide FWS with resources dedicated to protect the wetlands that our wildfowl need for forage and breeding.

We were granted an amazing biological inheritance through the foresight and dedication of leaders like Teddy Roosevelt, John F. Lacey, and Aldo Leopold. They realized that to maintain some of our pioneer spirit, our sense of wild, open spaces and connection to this land we needed to protect and revere the living resources we share it with. The wildlife and land management laws that guide federal and state government policy ensure that we act as good stewards of this inheritance so that it will be passed along to the next generation.

I thank our witnesses for appearing before the Subcommittee this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.