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U.S. Support for International Conservation

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U.S. Support for International Conservation

The United States supports international conservation efforts through foreign assistance programs, diplomatic engagement, and other tools. Members of Congress have supported such efforts on a bipartisan basis and have debated the level, scope, prioritization, and potential unintended consequences of U.S. international conservation activities. International conservation efforts focus on protecting species, restoring habitats, and recovering forests, among other things. Multiple federal departments and agencies administer and implement these initiatives, and Congress appropriates funding for them via several annual appropriations laws. Congress has shaped U.S. policy on international conservation through its authorization and appropriation of foreign assistance in part, as well as through its oversight activities.

Congressional interest in international conservation issues stems from a range of factors, including concerns about human-caused threats to global biodiversity; constituent engagement; interest in global biodiversity and protected areas; potential connections between conservation and U.S. national security; and concerns about conservationists' respect for human rights. Reports of global biodiversity loss due to human interactions and recent focus on zoonotic diseases in the context of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have amplified these concerns for some Members.

Congress might consider several issues as it authorizes, appropriates funding for, and continues oversight of U.S. international conservation activities. Members may debate how much foreign assistance, if any, to provide for international conservation programs; the goals and objectives of international conservation programs; interagency coordination of international conservation programs; whether assistance is aligned with host countries' priorities; and the implications of international conservation spending for human rights and indigenous peoples.

SUMMARY

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Introduction

The United States supports international conservation of wildlife and ecosystems through diplomatic efforts, foreign assistance, and other activities. At the diplomatic level, the United States works both multilaterally and bilaterally to set international conservation policy. The United States provides foreign assistance in the form of financial, programmatic, and technical support to address international conservation activities, such as species protection, habitat restoration, and forest recovery, among other priorities. Several federal departments and agencies administer these programs, including the U.S. Department of State (State), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and U.S. Forest Service (FS).

Congress has shaped U.S. policy and global activities related to conservation through its authorization and appropriation of foreign assistance resources, as well as through oversight activities. Several Members of the 116th Congress have demonstrated interest in international conservation, especially with respect to biodiversity, environmental conservation, and illicit wildlife trade.[1] Some Members also maintain an active interest in international conservation treaties in which the United States takes part, such as the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (see the "Multilateral Treaties, Conventions, and Initiatives" section, below).

Congressional concerns over global conservation efforts escalated in the wake of a 2019 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report asserting a significant loss of biodiversity due to human interactions with natural resources.[2] Reports of human rights violations by U.S. conservation aid implementers have also prompted congressional action. In addition, connections between the wildlife trade, ecosystem alterations, and the emergence of zoonotic diseases, such as Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), have stimulated congressional interest in international conservation efforts.[3]

Congress provides international conservation funding through several annual appropriations measures, including the following:

- State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations (e.g., U.S. diplomatic activities, foreign assistance programs administered by State and USAID, and some programs implemented by Treasury and FWS);
- Department of the Interior (DOI) appropriations (the Multinational Species Conservation Fund and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund); and
- Department of Agriculture appropriations (FS international programs).

This report describes selected U.S. international conservation activities. (It does not represent a comprehensive list of all programs.) This report also identifies a number of issues for Congress,

[1] Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, "President Trump Signs Bipartisan Wildlife Conservation Legislation into Law," press release, March 12, 2019, at https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2019/3/president-trump-signs-bipartisan-wildlife-conservation.

[2] Sandra Díaz et al., *Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services*, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), 2019, at https://www.ipbes.net/system/tdf/spm_global_unedited_advance.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35245. Hereinafter Díaz et al., *Global Assessment on Biodiversity*, 2019.

[3] For example, see Letter from Senator Cory Booker et al. to Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), April 8, 2020, at https://www.booker.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04.08.20_Booker_Graham_Quigley_McCaul_sblock.pdf.

including funding levels, objectives and evaluations of international conservation programs, and potential unintended consequences of these programs. **Table A-1**, in the **Appendix**, provides funding information on the programs discussed in this report.

Key Terms in Conservation Programming

This report uses USAID definitions for common conservation terms, as follows:

Biodiversity. The variety and variability of living organisms and the ecological complexes in which they occur. The term *biodiversity* comprises the following three categories: (1) *genetic diversity* is the combination of different genes within a species; (2) *species diversity* is the variety and abundance of different types of organisms that inhabit an area; and (3) *ecosystem diversity* is the variety of ecosystems in a given region.

Indigenous Peoples. Rather than having a unified definition, the U.S. Agency for International Development uses a set of criteria to identify *indigenous peoples*, only some of which may be applicable to any particular group. These include self-identification as a distinct group; recognition of that group by others; historical continuity with precolonial or pre-settler societies; attachment to a specific territory, distinct customary institutions, language, and/or culture; and/or resolve to maintain a distinctive community.

Landscapes and Seascapes. Large areas of diverse and interacting ecosystems embedded within diverse and interacting social, cultural, legal, political, and economic systems. (USAID notes that this definition is broader than that used within the field of ecology generally.)

Protected Areas. Clearly defined geographical spaces recognized, dedicated, and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

Stakeholders. Those who have widely recognized, though not always legal, rights to a territory, ecosystem, or resource. Stakeholders may include nearby communities, particularly indigenous peoples, and marginalized groups, such as women and the very poor, as well as local, state, and national government, nongovernmental organizations, and private businesses.

Wildlife Trafficking. The illegal trade in live wildlife or wildlife products, estimated to be worth $10 billion to $20 billion annually. It ranges from small-scale local bartering to international commercial shipments facilitated by transnational criminal organizations.

Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *USAID Biodiversity and Development Handbook*, October 2015, p. 3. Hereinafter USAID, *Biodiversity Handbook*, 2015. USAID, *Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,* March 2020, p. 8.

Selected Federal Activities by Department or Agency

The following section offers information on the various U.S. diplomatic and foreign assistance efforts focused on international conservation, organized by department and agency. These include State's role in various multilateral fora, USAID's administration of foreign assistance programs, Treasury's financial assistance and loan relief programs, and FWS's and FS's international programs.

U.S. Department of State

State focuses its conservation efforts at the policy and diplomatic levels. Foreign assistance program administration is largely conducted by USAID, except for certain wildlife trafficking programs focused on law enforcement.

Multilateral Treaties, Conventions, and Initiatives

State negotiates and participates in, on behalf of the United States, multilateral conservation treaties and conventions to which the United States is a party, including the following:

- **CITES.** A multilateral treaty established in 1975, CITES seeks to protect endangered and threatened species of animals and plants through the regulation of trade in those species. Although CITES is legally binding upon its parties, it does not supersede existing national laws and statutes and does not have enforcement authority. The United States was the first signatory to CITES and ratified the treaty in 1974.[4]
- **Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar).** Established in 1975, Ramsar aims to conserve wetlands using local, national, and international cooperation for sustainable development.[5] The United States entered into this treaty in 1986.
- **International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO).** Operational in 1987, ITTO promotes the sustainability of tropical forests and the broadening of international trade in tropical timber harvested from sustainable and legal forests.[6] The United States is a party to the organization as a consuming member (i.e., a member who consumes, and does not produce, tropical timbers).
- **U.N. Forum on Forests (UNFF).** Established in 2000 as a subsidiary of the U.N. Economic and Social Council, UNFF is an intergovernmental body that promotes conservation and sustainable development. Among other objectives, it aims to reverse global forest cover loss through sustainable forest management and strengthen the ability for sustainable forest management.[7] UNFF is currently tasked with overseeing the first U.N. Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030.[8]

State also represents the United States with regard to those treaties and conventions to which the United States is not a party but which may affect U.S. activities overseas. For example, many foreign assistance programs seek to align activities with strategic plans developed pursuant to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).[9] The CBD is a multilateral treaty with three main goals: (1) the conservation of biological diversity, (2) the sustainable use of biodiversity components, and (3) the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources. State participates as a nonvoting entity in the Conference of the Parties held by the CBD Secretariat because the United States has signed but not ratified the treaty.

State Department-Administered Foreign Assistance Programs

State Department-administered programs aim to strengthen regional and international partnerships to address wildlife poaching and trafficking, improve foreign countries' law

[4] Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), "List of Contracting Parties," at https://www.cites.org/eng/disc/parties/chronolo.php. For further information on the relationship of treaties to national law, see CRS Report RL32528, *International Law and Agreements: Their Effect upon U.S. Law*, by Stephen P. Mulligan.

[5] Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, "The Convention on Wetlands and Its Mission," at https://www.ramsar.org/about/the-convention-on-wetlands-and-its-mission. The official title is "Convention on wetlands of international importance, especially as waterfowl habitat." Department of State (State) Office of Treaty Affairs, *Multilateral Treaties in Force as of January 1, 2019*, p. 512.

[6] International Tropical Timber Organization, "About ITTO," at https://www.itto.int/about_itto/.

[7] United Nations, U.N. Forum on the Forests, "Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Forest," fact sheet, at https://www.un.org/esa/forests/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/81_FACT_SHEET_UNFF.PDF.

[8] U.N. General Assembly, "71/285. United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030," A/RES/71/285.

[9] For example, the United States has funded the Global Environmental Facility, which implements programs of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). U.S. agencies often design their programs to align with CBD initiatives, such as recipient National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

enforcement capabilities, and tighten anti-trafficking legislation in foreign countries.[10] State administers programs to combat wildlife trafficking in foreign countries through its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). INL carries out some capacity-building activities through wildlife trafficking courses at its International Law Enforcement Academies. State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs also works to strengthen international cooperation on wildlife trafficking and conducts analyses to identify "focus countries" and "countries of concern," consistent with the Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt Wildlife Trafficking Act of 2016 (P.L. 114-231).[11] State has also partnered with multilateral organizations, such as the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime and the World Bank, as well as numerous bilateral partners.

U.S. Agency for International Development

USAID administers environmental conservation programs in an effort to curb biodiversity loss, strengthen conservation efforts abroad, and combat wildlife trafficking, among other objectives. USAID conservation programs are largely authorized under Section 118 and Section 119 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-195, as amended), which emphasize the importance of biodiversity efforts to preserve tropical forests and to protect endangered species, respectively. Congress provides funds for USAID biodiversity and conservation programs in annual SFOPS appropriations. Congress directs these funds toward three sectors, which account for the majority of international conservation programming: (1) biodiversity conservation, (2) wildlife poaching and trafficking, and (3) sustainable landscapes.[12] USAID draws on several foreign assistance accounts to meet these directives. Since FY2016, Congress has provided either level or increased funding for these three sectors each successive year (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. SFOPS Appropriations for Conservation Sectors, FY2016-FY2020

(in millions of U.S. current dollars)

	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020
Biodiversity Conservation	$265.0	$265.0	$269.0	$285.0	$315.0
Of which Wildlife Poaching & Trafficking	*$80.0*	*$90.7*	*$90.7*	*$90.7*	*$100.7*
Sustainable Landscapes	$123.5	$123.5	$123.5	$125.0	$135.0

Sources: P.L. 116-94, P.L. 116-6, P.L. 115-141, P.L. 115-31, and P.L. 114-113.

[10] H.J.Res. 31; and State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, "Combating Crime and Corruption," November 27, 2018, at https://www.state.gov/combating-crime-and-corruption/.

[11] A "focus country" refers to a foreign country determined by the Secretary of State to be a major source of wildlife trafficking products, a major transit point of wildlife trafficking, or a major consumer of wildlife trafficking products. A "country of concern" is a foreign country with similar characteristics as a focus country but in which the government has actively engaged in or knowingly profited from wildlife trafficking. According to the 2019 END Wildlife Trafficking Report, focus countries were Bangladesh, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Laos, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, People's Republic of China, Philippines, Republic of Congo, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe. Countries of concern were Democratic Republic of Congo, Laos, and Madagascar.

[12] Sector allocations are directives contained in State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) General Provisions (usually Title VII of the SFOPS appropriations measure). These allocations define ways in which funds already appropriated in the legislation shall be used. In addition to the sectors highlighted in this report, FY2020 sector allocations included those for basic education and higher education; development programs; food security and agricultural development; and programs to combat trafficking in persons; among others.

Notes: SFOPS = State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) considers wildlife poaching and trafficking a "sub-directive" under the biodiversity conservation sector; as such, funding for wildlife poaching and trafficking programs is also counted toward the biodiversity conservation congressional directive. The majority of funding in **Table 1** is administered by USAID; the rest is administered by the Department of State.

Many biodiversity conservation and sustainable landscapes activities are similar in practice, even if their stated goals differ. Formally, sustainable landscapes programs prioritize reducing carbon emissions from land degradation, and biodiversity programs must explicitly set biodiversity as a program objective. USAID often combines objectives across sectors when designing and implementing its programs (e.g., a single mission may add a sustainable landscapes objective to a biodiversity effort.) A single program may also have latitude to designate the sector based on funding considerations (e.g., USAID Natural Resource Management projects may be designated as either sustainable landscapes or biodiversity programs).[13] Details about the three sectors are provided below the text box, which gives an example of a cross-sector USAID program.

Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)

CARPE was established in 1995 as a long-term, multifaceted program to "promote sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation in the [Central Africa] region through sustainable natural resource management, and strengthened conservation policy development and implementation." The program is the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID's) largest environmental program (by annual funding) and involves numerous other federal entities as implementing partners, including the Departments of the Interior (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services [FWS], National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey), Agriculture (U.S. Forest Service, Foreign Agricultural Service), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, in addition to nongovernmental organizations.

Now in its third stage, referred to as CARPE III and slated to run through the end of FY2020, CARPE comprises two interdependent projects: (1) Central Africa Forest Ecosystems Conservation, which focuses on sustainable forest management and wildlife conservation, and (2) Environmental Monitoring and Policy Support, which targets improving the region's policy and regulatory environment. In practice, USAID aims to meet CARPE III objectives through activities such as establishing public-private partnerships to manage wildlife reserves, tracking key wildlife populations through wildlife density and abundance surveys, and developing and/or strengthening community organizations to protect and monitor local forests, among others. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, USAID and its implementing partner Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) helped to broker a partnership with a local organization to better manage the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. With USAID support, WCS worked through the partnership to increase law enforcement activity, train and equip park rangers, develop a law enforcement strategy, and increase patrol efforts. USAID asserts that these types of activities build on the first two phases of CARPE, which made gains in tropical forest management and conservation, and will help the region sustain that management capacity and strengthen governance.

In addition to these activities, and consistent with congressional priorities first articulated in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership Act of 2004 (CBFP; P.L. 108-200), CARPE is the principal mechanism through which the U.S. government supports the CBFP, a voluntary public-private partnership created to advance the Central African Forests Commission priorities of sustainable Central African forest management with donor support. CARPE spans the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Congress has provided funding for CARPE through annual State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs appropriations measures. In recent years, Congress appropriated CARPE funds to USAID but required USAID to transfer 42% of funds to FWS through an interagency agreement.

Sources: Information in this section is informed by USAID, "CARPE History," at https://www.usaid.gov/central-africa-regional/central-africa-regional-program-for-the-environment/history, last updated April 1, 2019. Nick Radford, *Central Africa Regional Operating Unit - CARPE*, Wildlife Conservation Society, Final Report, Kinshasa, DRC, March 26, 2020.

[13] USAID, *Environmental and Natural Resources Framework*, July 2019, p. 5.

Biodiversity Conservation

According to USAID, the agency's biodiversity programs work "to conserve biodiversity, leverage private sector funds, fight conservation crime, and support sustainable fisheries."[14] USAID cites five factors that drive its investment in biodiversity programs:

- approximately 1.6 billion people globally rely on forests for their livelihoods;
- biodiversity loss negatively affects global health and nutrition outcomes;
- industry related to environmental sectors may contribute to women's economic empowerment;
- biodiversity is critical to agricultural productivity; and
- environmental crime is linked to corruption, which reduces community safety and the opportunity for legal livelihoods.[15]

The *USAID Biodiversity Policy*, issued in 2015 alongside an implementation handbook, set out a tiered list of ecologically significant regions or countries at risk of degradation.[16] USAID missions in 14 "Tier One Operating Units" (i.e., priority geographic areas) are required to integrate biodiversity as a major priority of their development strategies to be considered for funding (**Figure 1**); Tier Two missions are strongly encouraged, but not required, to undertake such programming.[17] USAID has also developed a *Biodiversity and Development Research Agenda* and a Biodiversity Conservation Gateway. The gateway serves as a repository for the agency's policy and procedural guidance related to international conservation programs.[18]

[14] USAID, "Conserving Biodiversity and Forests," last updated February 28, 2020, at https://www.usaid.gov/biodiversity. Hereinafter USAID, "Conserving Biodiversity and Forests."

[15] USAID, "Conserving Biodiversity and Forests."

[16] USAID, *USAID Biodiversity Policy*, March 2014. Tier One countries are ranked in terms of biological criteria and have a preponderance of globally significant ecoregions. Tier Two countries have a combination of characteristics that include a globally significant ecoregion, critical habitat for threatened or endangered species, and an area where USAID has experience.

[17] USAID, *USAID Biodiversity Policy*, March 2014, p. 21. USAID based its selections on the Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) Global Benefits Index for Biodiversity and the World Wildlife Fund's Global 200 list. Papua New Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were both identified as Tier One countries, but mission presence currently is limited in Papua New Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo is already supported through Central Africa funding.

[18] USAID, Biodiversity Conservation Gateway, "About the Gateway," at https://rmportal.net/biodiversityconservation-gateway/about-the-gateway.

Foreign Assistance Act Sections 118/119 Country Analyses

In addition to dedicated biodiversity programming, Section 118 and Section 119 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (P.L. 87-195, as amended) require by law that all USAID overseas missions (regardless of biodiversity tier) integrate tropical forests (Section 118) and biodiversity (Section 119) in their country or regional strategies. Missions carry out these *118/119 Analyses* prior to development of a new country strategy, identifying threats to biodiversity, the actions needed to mitigate such threats, and the extent to which missions' existing strategies have addressed those threats. For example, the 118/119 analysis for the 2014-2018 Colombia country strategy made several programming recommendations that appear in the resulting strategy, such as establishing an official survey of rural land, formalizing artisanal mining activities, and fostering private financing mechanisms for carbon sequestration. Similarly, the country strategy adopts the 118/119 analysis view that sustainable resource management is a critical factor in rural conflict reconciliation.

Sources: Ignacio Gómez, Gloria Sanclemente, Fabián Navarrete, Ramón Laborde, and Simón Vieira, *USAID/Colombia's 2014-2018 118/119 Tropical Forest and Biodiversity Assessment* (Colombia Assessment), USAID, March 2014, p. 6; USAID/Colombia, *Country Development Cooperation Strategy 2014-2020: A Path to Peace* (Colombia Country Strategy), June 13, 2014, pp. 3, 24, 26.

Between FY2016 and FY2020, funding designated for biodiversity programs in annual SFOPS appropriations grew by nearly 19% ($50 million). More than 50 countries implement biodiversity programs with USAID support,[19] with nearly 61% of funding in FY2018 going to Tier One countries.[20] USAID in 2015 estimated that its activities consistently constituted approximately two-thirds of all U.S. foreign assistance for biodiversity.[21] USAID also transfers funding to partner agencies, such as FWS, when those partners can address a programmatic need or at the direction of Congress. The agency maintains a "Biodiversity Code," which establishes guidelines for counting projects toward the congressional biodiversity funding directive, including that only projects with explicit biodiversity objectives may be counted.[22]

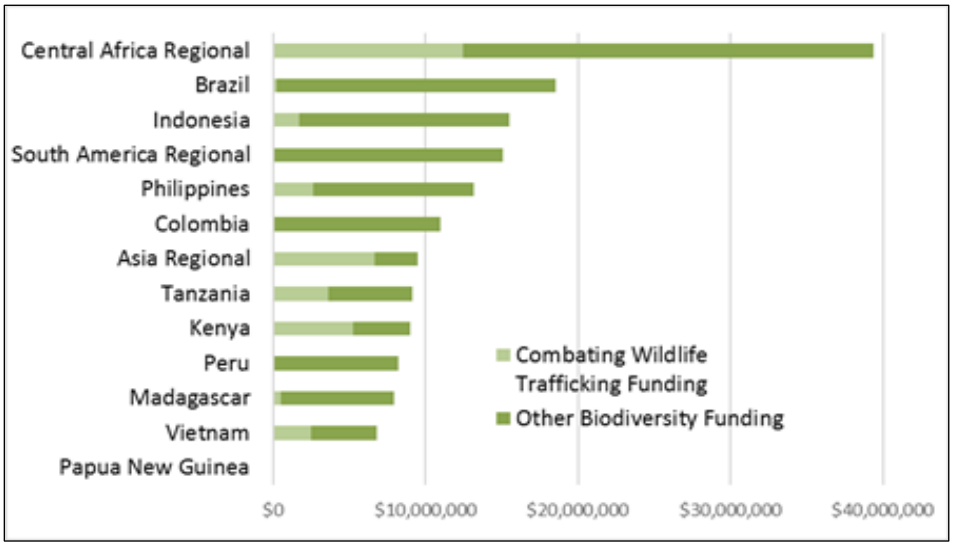
[19] USAID, "Conserving Biodiversity and Forests."

[20] FY2018 is the most recent fiscal year reported in the annual report. USAID, *Report to Congress on Programs in Forestry and the Conservation of Biodiversity during Fiscal Year 2018: Results and Funding*, March 10, 2020, at https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID-Report-to-Congress-on-Forestry-and-Biodiversity_FY_2018.pdf.

[21] USAID, *USAID Biodiversity and Development Handbook*, October 2015, p. 6. Hereinafter USAID, *Biodiversity Handbook*, 2015.

[22] USAID, Biodiversity and Conservation Gateway, "Biodiversity Code," updated November 8, 2018, at https://rmportal.net/biodiversityconservation-gateway/biodiversity-code.

Figure 1. Biodiversity Tier One Areas, by FY2018 Funding



Source: U.S. Agency for International Development, *Report to Congress on Programs in Forestry and the Conservation of Biodiversity during Fiscal Year 2018: Results and Funding*, March 10, 2020. "Areas" are a combination of regions and individual countries. For Papua New Guinea, USAID states that limited mission presence makes investments in the country inadvisable.

USAID's biodiversity program portfolio is organized under two core goals: (1) to conserve biodiversity in target areas and (2) to integrate biodiversity as an essential component of human development.[23] USAID has stated that its programs reflect this connection between protecting fragile habitats and promoting economic prosperity by addressing threats to biodiversity and underlying drivers of those threats, such as economic activities of nearby communities and national land management policies. USAID has linked livelihoods to conservation as a response to findings that past conservation efforts failed because they did not take into account nearby communities' livelihoods and priorities in program design.[24] USAID targets many of its activities at an expansive, "landscape" or "seascape" scale—such as an entire watershed, a transboundary fishery, or a protected area with its surrounding communities.[25] Often this expansive scale is meant to connect community stakeholders with vulnerable ecosystems. For example, USAID's Hariyo Ban Program in Nepal not only created new community-based anti-poaching units to protect biodiversity but also supported the creation of new ecotourism activities to create alternative livelihoods within those communities.[26] USAID maintains that it seeks input on program design and implementation from an array of stakeholders, particularly indigenous

[23] USAID, *USAID Biodiversity Policy*, March 2014, p. 10. In addition to these two goals, the policy sets six objectives for programs.

[24] Secretariat of the CBD, Biodiversity Indicators & the 2010 Biodiversity Target: Outputs, experiences and lessons learnt from the 2010 Biodiversity Indicators Partnership, CBD Technical Series no. 53, 2010, p. 6, at https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-53-en.pdf. For further information on the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and countries' action plans, visit https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/.

[25] USAID Ridge to Reef programs, for example, operate along an entire watershed, seeking to facilitate cooperation between downstream reef areas often affected by environmental degradation and upstream ridge communities. See, for example, WorldFish, World Agroforestry Centre, and Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture, *From Ridge to Reef: An Ecosystem Based Approach to Biodiversity Conservation in the Philippines Final Program Performance Report*, May 31, 2013.

[26] World Wildlife Fund, *Biodiversity, People and Climate Change: Final Technical Report of the Hariyo Ban Program, First Phase*, Hariyo Ban Program, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2017, pp. vii-viii.

communities. USAID support to the Partnership for Conservation of Amazon Biodiversity, for instance, includes what it characterizes as significant engagement in indigenous-controlled lands; research has found these lands may be more likely to sustain forest cover as formally protected areas.[27] According to some stakeholders, Congress's addition of coral reefs to USAID's legislative mandate for conserving biodiversity under the Tropical Forest Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-440) may signal a new priority for biodiversity programs, as seascapes historically have received less USAID funding than tropical forests.[28]

Wildlife Poaching and Trafficking

USAID considers wildlife poaching and trafficking a "sub-directive" under the biodiversity conservation sector. Further, USAID states that it is an issue for international development, as it counteracts efforts to end extreme poverty, impedes the rule of law, and hinders sustainable development programs that benefit from ecotourism.[29] Wildlife trafficking also threatens wildlife populations and the sustainability of community lands and may contribute to public health risks.[30] U.S. government efforts to combat wildlife poaching and trafficking are broad and multisectoral.[31] SFOPS funds to combat wildlife poaching and trafficking grew by nearly 26% ($20.7 million) between FY2016 and FY2020.

USAID has noted that it seeks not only to preserve wildlife populations but also to combat transnational crime and preserve safe, sustainable ecotourism, among other priorities. USAID wildlife poaching and trafficking activities target areas where wildlife are poached, transit hubs, and high-demand markets for trafficked wildlife.

- In areas where wildlife are poached, USAID focuses on capacity building to enhance policies and processes to end wildlife trafficking and to train local rangers and scouts to counter wildlife trafficking with effective enforcement.
- Along prominent trafficking routes, USAID funds partnerships that seek to disrupt trafficking supply chains. For instance, the Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species partnership trains workers in the transport and logistics sector to identify and respond to wildlife trafficking, as well as to work to strengthen law enforcement and data analytics capacities.[32]

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[27] USAID, *Biodiversity Handbook*, 2015, p. 82; and USAID, "Bilateral Biodiversity Conservation," last updated September 6, 2019, at https://www.usaid.gov/brazil/our-work/environmental-partnerships.

[28] USAID, *Biodiversity Handbook*, 2015, p. 92.

[29] USAID, "Combating Wildlife Trafficking," last updated March 12, 2020, at https://www.usaid.gov/biodiversity/wildlife-trafficking.

[30] Wildlife trade—both legal and illegal—often involves placing live wildlife in close proximity to each other and people, potentially increasing risks of transmitting zoonotic diseases. Some Members of Congress have proposed restrictions and increased enforcement on wildlife trade and associated markets. See Letter from Senator Cory Booker et al. to Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of WHO, Monique Eloit, director-general of the World Organisation for Animal Health, and Qu Dongyu, director-general of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, April 8, 2020, at https://www.booker.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/04.08.20_Booker_Graham_Quigley_McCaul_sblock.pdf.

[31] For more information on wildlife trafficking, particularly as it relates to transnational crime, see CRS In Focus IF10601, *Transnational Crime Issues: Global Trends Overview*, by Liana W. Rosen.

[32] Recent Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species (ROUTES) publications have focused on air transport of illegal wildlife products. See, for example, ROUTES Partnership, *Runway to Extinction*, 2019, at https://routespartnership.org/.

- In high-demand markets for trafficked goods, USAID works to reduce demand through behavior change and community outreach campaigns. For example, USAID developed and published the *Wildlife Consumer Behavior Change Toolkit* with the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC.[33] USAID has also launched specific campaigns, such as the "Beautiful Without Ivory" campaign in Thailand, which sought to reduce the acceptability of ivory accessories among female consumers.[34]

Some USAID projects also seek to monitor and track the global wildlife trafficking trade. The Wildlife Trafficking Response, Assessment, and Priority Setting Project produces analyses of the wildlife trafficking trade by identifying trends to educate policymakers and strengthen their enforcement and investigation capabilities, including through increased forensic analysis of wildlife products.[35]

Sustainable Landscapes

USAID sustainable landscapes programming addresses the "sound management of land and forests [that] sustains livelihoods and strengthens resilience to natural hazards, protects water resources, and biodiversity, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and land management."[36] According to USAID, it supports 13 bilateral programs, 5 regional programs, and numerous global programs that address sustainable landscapes.[37] The programs are diverse in their objectives, but many address deforestation, seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote public-private partnerships.

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+)

The body of policy and approaches to address deforestation and forest degradation as they pertain to emissions, forest conservation, sustainable development, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks has been termed REDD+. REDD+ policies attempt to create financial value for carbon stored in forests by using market approaches to compensate landowners for not deforesting their lands. This new approach to financing forest conservation projects is intended to reward landholders for preserving biodiverse landscapes that absorb large quantities of carbon, such as tropical forests and peat bogs. USAID REDD+ projects support countries' efforts to calculate total carbon stocks stored in their national forests and may support countries' marketing of carbon credits for continued preservation of their carbon stocks. The SilvaCarbon project, for example, is an interagency initiative funded primarily by USAID and the State Department to provide technical assistance to countries in measuring and monitoring their forest and terrestrial carbon stocks.

Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *USAID Biodiversity and Development Handbook*, October 2015, p. 6. USAID, *SilvaCarbon Performance Evaluation Final Report*, March 13, 2015, p. ix.

[33] Users can search information by species (e.g., elephants, tigers, and rhinoceroses), target audience (e.g., government or consumers), or consumer actions (e.g., consumption trends). See Change Wildlife Consumers, at https://www.changewildlifeconsumers.org/.

[34] USAID, "Top Fashion Influencers Join USAID's 'Beautiful Without Ivory' Campaign," press release, September 20, 2019, at https://www.usaid.gov/asia-regional/press-releases/sep-20-2019-top-fashion-influencers-join-usaid-beautiful-without-ivory-campaign.

[35] USAID, "Wildlife Trafficking Response Assessment and Priority Setting (Wildlife TRAPS)," 2018, at https://rmportal.net/biodiversityconservation-gateway/resources/projects/w-traps-wildlife-trafficking-response-assessment-and-priority-setting.

[36] USAID, "Sustainable Landscapes," last updated April 29, 2020, at https://www.usaid.gov/climate/sustainable-landscapes.

[37] USAID has supported these programs as of November 2019.

U.S. Department of the Treasury

Treasury addresses international biodiversity conservation through lending programs and technical assistance. Treasury works with intergovernmental organizations and foreign governments to provide financial assistance for a wide range of activities, including international conservation activities.[38] Treasury also works with other agencies, such as State, to implement some international conservation programs.

Global Environment Facility

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a multilateral environmental trust fund supporting projects with global environmental benefits. Treasury administers U.S. participation in the GEF, but, as a multilateral assistance program, it is funded by Congress through annual SFOPS appropriations.[39] In FY2020, Congress provided $139.6 million for the trust fund under the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-94). The GEF provides grants and other financing programs that support a variety of projects, such as Safeguarding Biodiversity from Invasive Alien Species in the Federated States of Micronesia,[40] the restoration of degraded forests in Vanuatu,[41] and efforts to conserve coastal wetlands in Chile.[42] The GEF states that its programs are approved by consensus of a council comprised of developed and developing member countries.[43]

Tropical Forest Conservation Act

The Tropical Forest Conservation Act authorizes *debt-for-nature transactions*,[44] where a developing country's debt is exchanged for local funds to conserve tropical forests. Brazil, for example, committed to develop and fund programs intended to protect the country's tropical forests; in exchange, the United States canceled an equivalent level of debt and deposited interest from a portion of the debt into a Tropical Forest Fund for conservation grants to address forest conservation in Brazil.[45] Fourteen countries were beneficiaries of such agreements from 2000 to 2013.[46] Congress did not appropriate funding for debt-for-nature transactions from FY2014 to FY2019. In 2019, President Trump signed into law a new version of the act, entitled the Tropical

[38] U.S. Department of the Treasury, "International Programs," 2019, at https://www.treasury.gov/about/budget-performance/budget-in-brief/BIB19/24.%20International%20Programs.pdf. For more information on sanctions use, see State, "2019 END Wildlife Trafficking Strategic Review," November 7, 2019, at https://www.state.gov/2019-end-wildlife-trafficking-strategic-review/.

[39] State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Fiscal Year 2020*, 2019, at https://www.state.gov/fy-2020-international-affairs-budget/.

[40] Global Environment Facility (GEF), "Safeguarding Biodiversity from Invasive Alien Species in the Federated States of Micronesia," at https://www.thegef.org/project/safeguarding-biodiversity-invasive-alien-species-federated-states-micronesia.

[41] GEF, "Ecosystem Restoration and Sustainable Land Management in Tongoa Island," at https://www.thegef.org/project/ecosystem-restoration-and-sustainable-land-management-tongoa-island.

[42] GEF, "Mainstreaming Conservation of Coastal Wetlands of Chile's South Center Biodiversity Hotspot through Adaptive Management of Coastal Area Ecosystems," at https://www.thegef.org/project/mainstreaming-conservation-coastal-wetlands-chile%E2%80%99s-south-center-biodiversity-hotspot.

[43] GEF, "Organization," at https://www.thegef.org/about/organization.

[44] 22 U.S.C. §2431.

[45] USAID, "Countries with TFCA Programs," at https://www.usaid.gov/biodiversity/TFCA/programs-by-country.

[46] For more information on the Tropical Forest Conservation Act, see CRS Report RL31286, *Debt-for-Nature Initiatives and the Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA): Status and Implementation*, by Pervaze A. Sheikh.

Forest Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-440), which adds coral reef ecosystems to the protection of the act and authorizes activities for FY2019 and FY2020. Congress appropriated $15 million to debt-for-nature exchanges in FY2020 (P.L. 116-94).[47]

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Department of the Interior)

FWS administers international conservation funding through programs that focus on species and habitat conservation, both domestically and internationally, and has been authorized to administer a variety of funds for foreign conservation efforts.[48] Examples include the Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF) and the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund. The FWS International Affairs program addresses international wildlife conservation and international wildlife trade. Various other programs address specific species or groups of species that are found internationally, as discussed below. Congress provides funding for FWS international conservation activities largely through annual Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Acts. FWS also receives a funding transfer from USAID for biodiversity programming overseas (see text box entitled "Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE)," above).

International Affairs

FWS's International Affairs program is split into two subprograms: International Conservation and International Wildlife Trade. These subprograms provide technical and financial assistance to partner countries and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to address habitat conservation, species conservation, and wildlife trafficking. These programs are implemented in partnership with nonfederal stakeholders. FWS reports that from 1989 through 2018, it provided more than 4,200 grants for international conservation, totaling more than $322 million. This work was done with more than 700 partners (e.g., other donors, NGOs, and foundations) in developing countries, which, according to FWS, contributed more than $470 million in matching funds for grant projects.[49]

The International Conservation subprogram focuses on regional and species conservation activities in foreign countries that are of importance to the United States.[50] For example, the Wildlife Conservation Capacity Development in Central Africa program aims to develop and implement training and workforce capacity in Central Africa.[51] Further, in a partnership with Gabon's National Parks Agency, FWS aims to create safeguards for multiple species, some endangered, by supporting efforts to guard and protect parks in Gabon.[52]

FWS's International Wildlife Trade program is responsible for implementing CITES for the United States, issuing permits for listed species, and implementing other U.S. laws that address wildlife trade and wildlife trafficking, including the END Wildlife Trafficking Act (P.L. 114-231)

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[47] USAID, "Financing Forest Conservation: An Overview of the Tropical Forest and Coral Reef Conservation Act," at https://www.usaid.gov/tropical-forest-conservation-act.

[48] 16 U.S.C. §742j.

[49] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), *Budget Justification and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2021*, p. IA-3, at https://www.fws.gov/budget/2021/FY2021-FWS-Budget-Justification.pdf. Hereinafter FWS, *FY2021 Budget Justification*.

[50] FWS, *FY2021 Budget Justification*, p. IA-2.

[51] FWS, "Wildlife Conservation Capacity Development in Central Africa," fact sheet, at https://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/factsheet-capacity-development.pdf.

[52] FWS, *Budget Justification and Performance Information Fiscal Year 2020*, at https://www.fws.gov/budget/2020/FY2020-FWS-Budget-Justification.pdf.

and Executive Order 13773 on preventing international trafficking.[53] The United States is one of the world's largest importers of *legally* traded wildlife products.[54]

FWS also works with governmental and nongovernmental entities in foreign countries through technical and financial assistance to prevent poaching, lower wildlife trafficking, and reduce demand for wildlife contraband. In 2016, FWS implemented the Combating Wildlife Trafficking grants program to address trafficking in species that might not otherwise receive the same level of attention as others. For example, FWS initiated a project in Sumatra to address wildlife trafficking and to conserve species such as the Sumatran tiger, helmeted hornbill, and Malay pangolin—according to some scientists, pangolins are the world's most trafficked species.[55] This project is significant, according to FWS, because these species are often poached and trafficked by the same criminal syndicates in the region.[56] FWS enforces laws that guard against wildlife trafficking through its Office of Law Enforcement, which is funded separately from these programs.[57]

Multinational Species Conservation Fund

The MSCF provides technical and financial assistance to local communities, wildlife authorities, and NGOs in developing countries for conserving specific species, including African and Asian elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, great apes, and marine turtles. The MSCF is separated into several sub-funds that support conservation efforts benefitting certain species, often in conjunction with efforts under CITES. The sub-funds provide grants to address habitat conservation, law enforcement, and technical assistance for conserving species under the MSCF. A summary of the funds is below.

- The African and Asian Elephant Conservation Fund provides funding for projects for research, conservation, and the management and protection of African and Asian elephants and their habitats. Appropriations are authorized for $5.0 million annually from FY2019 to FY2023.
- The Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund approves grants for other nations and to CITES for programs assisting in direct and indirect conservation of rhinoceroses and tigers in Asia and Africa. Further, it prohibits the sale, import, and export of products derived from any rhinoceros and tiger species. Appropriations are authorized for $10.0 million annually from FY2019 to FY2023.
- The Great Ape Conservation Fund provides grants to foreign governments, the CITES Secretariat, and NGOs for the conservation of great apes and their habitats. Appropriations are authorized for $5.0 million annually from FY2019 to FY2023.

[53] Executive Order 13773, "Executive Order on Enforcing Federal Law with Respect to Transnational Criminal Organizations and Preventing International Trafficking," 82 *Federal Register* 10691, February 14, 2017.

[54] FWS, *FY2021 Budget Justification*.

[55] Smriti Mallapaty, "Scientists call for pandemic investigations to focus on wildlife trade," *Nature*, vol. 583, no. 344 (July 10, 2020). Hereinafter Mallapaty, "Scientists call for pandemic investigations," 2020.

[56] Mallapaty, "Scientists call for pandemic investigations," 2020.

[57] For more on FWS and other agency law enforcement efforts to counter wildlife crimes, see CRS In Focus IF11605, *Wildlife Trafficking: International Law Enforcement Responses*, by Katarina C. O'Regan.

- The Marine Turtle Conservation Fund provides grants for the conservation of marine turtles and their nesting habitats. It is authorized to receive $5.0 million in annual appropriations from FY2019 to FY2023 for conservation efforts.

Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund

The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (NMBCF) provides grants for the conservation of hundreds of bird species that migrate among North America, South America, and the Caribbean.[58] The goal of the NMBCF is to foster and support initiatives that bolster cooperation internationally for the conservation of bird populations. The program provides matching grants for neotropical migratory bird conservation projects throughout the Western Hemisphere,[59] with at least 75% of funding going to projects in foreign countries. Since 2002, the NMBCA has provided nearly $75.0 million in grants to support 628 projects in 36 countries. These projects have addressed 5 million acres of bird habitat and leveraged an additional $286.0 million for conservation, according to FWS.[60]

U.S. Forest Service (Department of Agriculture)

The FS International Programs office promotes sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation internationally. The office has three main units: (1) Technical Cooperation, (2) Policy, and (3) Disaster Assistance Response. The office supports specific activities, including managing protected areas; protecting migratory species; engaging in landscape-level forest planning; providing fire management training; curbing invasive species; preventing illegal logging; promoting forest certification; reducing the impacts of forest use; and developing nontimber forest products. The office has activities and projects in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In addition, USAID occasionally partners with FS under an interagency agreement to support sustainable landscape activities.

Issues for Congress

Congress may consider the following issues as it authorizes, appropriates funding for, and continues oversight of U.S. international conservation activities.

Level of Funding for International Conservation

A perennial debate about U.S. international conservation assistance is how much, if any, funding to provide—and implicitly, how to prioritize international conservation vis-à-vis other U.S. foreign aid and policy priorities. Recently, congressional concerns over global conservation efforts escalated in the wake of an IPBES report asserting a significant loss in biodiversity due to

[58] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Leveraging Funds for Effective Conservation in the Americas: The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act*, September 2018, at https://www.fws.gov/birds/grants/neotropical-migratory-bird-conservation-act.php.

[59] The program benefits approximately 386 bird species that breed in the United States or Canada and spend winter in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, or South America.

[60] U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act*, July 21, 2020, at https://www.fws.gov/birds/grants/neotropical-migratory-bird-conservation-act.php.

human interactions with natural resources.[61] The decline in biodiversity alleged in the IPBES report may raise questions about the efficacy and proper funding levels for biodiversity efforts.

In FY2019 and FY2020, Congress appropriated funds above the Trump Administration's request for biodiversity funding at USAID in FY2020, more than four times the Administration's request.[62] In addition, the Trump Administration proposed to eliminate the FS International Programs office to focus on several domestic forest activities, including improving conditions of forests and grasslands, enhancing rural economies, and reducing wildland fire risk.[63] Congress did not approve the Administration's request and provided $12.0 million for the FS International Programs for FY2020.

Some critics of foreign assistance as a whole have asserted that the United States provides overseas development assistance to the detriment of domestic programs, and aid recipients or private entities should do more to advance international assistance goals.[64] This sentiment has also been applied to international conservation activities. For example, some observers assert that the United States should reduce conservation assistance funding and encourage recipient countries to increase their contributions to conservation within their countries.[65] Some policymakers propose a different perspective, arguing that recipient countries justifiably focus their domestic spending on other priorities, such as poverty alleviation, health care, and infrastructure, leaving few resources for conservation. They argue that wealthier countries, such as the United States, could fill in this shortage of funding for conservation—a key justification for debt-for-nature exchanges, which Congress recently renewed.[66] Results from a 2013 study support this position.[67] The study found that 40 of the most severely underfunded countries[68] for biodiversity conservation contain 32% of all threatened mammalian biodiversity. The authors argued that modest increases in international conservation assistance for these countries could lead to proportionally larger improvements in biodiversity.[69]

Advocates of U.S. international conservation funding often assert that preserving wildlife and ecosystems in developing countries benefits the American people by sustaining global public goods—for example, by preserving tropical forests that serve as natural carbon sinks; sustaining biodiversity resources that sequester zoonotic diseases or provide natural substances for pharmaceuticals; or protecting the intrinsic value of diverse species and ecosystems.[70] However,

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[61] Díaz et al., *Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services*, 2019.

[62] The Administration's FY2020 request for biodiversity funding under USAID was $78.9 million; Congress appropriated "not less than $315.0 million."

[63] USAID, U.S. Forest Service (FS), *FY2020 Budget Justification*, March 2019, at https://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/media_wysiwyg/usfs-fy-2020-budget-justification.pdf.

[64] Angus Deaton, "The U.S. Can No Longer Hide From Its Deep Poverty Problem," *New York Times*, January 24, 2018.

[65] James Roberts and Brett Schaefer, *An Overhaul of America's Foreign Assistance Programs Is Long Overdue*, The Heritage Foundation, September 19, 2017, at https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/overhaul-americas-foreign-assistance-programs-long-overdue.

[66] Annie Haakenstad et al., "The Financing Gaps Framework: Using Need, Potential Spending and Expected Spending to Allocate Development Assistance for Health," *Health Policy Plan*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2018).

[67] Anthony Waldron et al., "Targeting Global Conservation Funding to Limit Immediate Biodiversity Declines," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 110, no. 29 (July 16, 2013), pp. 12144-12148. Hereinafter Waldron et al., "Targeting Global Conservation Funding," 2013.

[68] Underfunded countries are determined by comparing known current levels of spending with a model's expectation of spending.

[69] Waldron et al., "Targeting Global Conservation Funding," 2013, pp. 12144-12148.

[70] For example, see Andrew Balmford et al., "Economic Reasons for Conserving Wild Nature," *Science*, vol. 297, no. 5583 (August 9, 2002), pp. 950-953.

some policymakers who advocate for reducing U.S. international conservation funding contend that some recipient countries may reduce their own conservation spending in light of funding gaps filled by international aid, resulting in a zero net benefit for conservation. To counter this possibility, some suggest establishing conditions or assurances that countries would not reduce domestic conservation budgets upon receiving conservation aid. These types of assurances are embedded in some U.S. domestic conservation programs, such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.[71]

Questions about how international conservation might benefit the United States sometimes arise in congressional consideration of appropriations. Some policymakers contend there are few—if any—benefits from U.S. international conservation efforts, an assertion that has been supported by some academic and oversight studies.[72] For example, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2017 conducted an audit of U.S. overseas activities to combat wildlife trafficking and found that the results of such activities were unclear, in part because agencies administering the programs had not set performance targets for their respective efforts.[73] Other policymakers counter that U.S. investments may leverage funding from private sector firms and other entities within beneficiary countries to expand international conservation programs' scales, thereby increasing the potential benefits.[74] For example, in FY2018, according to USAID, a partnership between USAID and Coca-Cola, Natura, and the NGO Sitawi Finance for Good led to the conservation of freshwater fish in the Amazon and yielded economic benefits for 6,150 families in protected areas in the Brazilian state of Amazonas.[75]

Some stakeholders might also contend that foreign assistance for some international conservation issues could address U.S. national security or global health concerns. For example, assistance for addressing international wildlife trafficking might deprive foreign armed groups of financing or lower imports of illegally traded wildlife into the United States and thus prevent the entry of zoonotic diseases that could be carried by illegally traded wildlife and wildlife products. Some critics may counter that the United States could bolster national security and health in other, more direct ways.

Goals and Objectives of Foreign Conservation Assistance

Congress appropriates U.S. international conservation assistance funding to multiple federal departments and agencies, and funds are spread out over many different programs. There is no centralized plan or framework for distributing the funds or evaluating the success of all conservation assistance to foreign countries. Certain agencies focus their funding according to program goals and priorities, which range from protecting certain species (e.g., rhinoceroses and elephants) to restoring landscapes (e.g., tropical forests). In some cases, interagency international conservation efforts and criteria might not be aligned. For example, while USAID's Biodiversity

[71] See 33 U.S.C. §1268(c)(7)(F).

[72] See, for example, one such study conducted using Madagascar as a test case. Patrick O. Waeber et al., "How Effective Have Thirty Years of Internationally Driven Conservation and Development Efforts Been in Madagascar?" PLoS ONE vol. 11, no. 8 (August 2016).

[73] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Combating Wildlife Trafficking: Agencies Are Taking a Range of Actions, But Task Force Lacks Performance Targets for Assessing Progress*, GAO 16-717, September 2016.

[74] Efforts to create investment models for private investment to deliver returns and conservation outcomes are the objective of some conservation organizations. For example, see "Meeting Global Conservation Challenges," *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 6, no. 891 (September 28, 2016).

[75] USAID, *U.S. Agency for International Development Report to Congress on Programs in Forestry and the Conservation of Biodiversity During Fiscal Year 2018: Results and Funding*, at https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/USAID-Report-to-Congress-on-Forestry-and-Biodiversity_FY_2018.pdf.

Code establishes a set of criteria for implementing biodiversity programs, the sustainable landscapes sector under USAID programming does not appear to operate under similar criteria. In the absence of a holistic program or initiative, agencies might group existing programs or projects together to report progress toward an objective.

Some policymakers might contend that if all U.S. international conservation assistance were organized and spent according to a set of whole-of-government priorities or an overarching framework, this could lead to the development of conservation goals and focus U.S. funding toward achieving those goals. This could enable greater congressional oversight of conservation assistance and help measure progress on international conservation initiatives.

Some other policymakers might oppose this approach and argue that existing agency-led conservation programs should be guided by their specific legislative authorities. For example, several laws authorize international conservation activities with specific objectives that address certain species or landscapes. Policymakers might argue that these laws and programs reflect the will of constituents and that conservation is too broad to be addressed under one plan. They might argue that the effectiveness of addressing specific issues, such as wildlife trafficking, might be diluted under an overarching plan or agenda.

This issue is exemplified by debates over the scope of the Tropical Forest Conservation Act and debt-for-nature swaps. Some policymakers wanted to expand the use of debt-for-nature swaps under the law to all forest and ocean resources.[76] Others argued for keeping the law focused on tropical forests, arguing that with limited funds, the most effective use of the law would be conserving tropical forests. Ultimately, the law was amended in 2019 to address tropical forests and coral reef ecosystems (see the "Tropical Forest Conservation Act" section, above).

Interagency Coordination

With international conservation assistance largely implemented by individual agencies, some have questioned whether interagency coordination is possible and effective. For example, in 2017, GAO found that although U.S. government efforts to reduce wildlife trafficking in Southeast Asia were making some progress, "disagreement on roles and responsibilities" had proved challenging. To address these challenges, GAO recommended that State, DOI, and USAID each clarify their respective roles and responsibilities related to wildlife trafficking programs in Southeast Asia. Each agency agreed with, and reportedly implemented, the GAO recommendation.[77]

Congress may seek to understand how U.S. government entities are coordinating their international conservation efforts and where there might be areas for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Some policymakers might propose an interagency task force to coordinate conservation activities in similar landscapes or countries. Further, some might contend that sharing expertise among agencies or pooling resources and efforts could increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementing conservation programs. Other policymakers might argue that disrupting the status quo may be detrimental. They might point to existing coordination, such as FWS and State collaboration on addressing wildlife trafficking in foreign countries and the

[76] Senator Rob Portman, "Portman, Bipartisan Senate Colleagues Introduce Legislation to Promote Conservation and Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions," press release, May 3, 2017, at https://www.portman.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=8E80A0C4-F03C-4420-BB19-44D7A7919875.

[77] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Combating Wildlife Trafficking: Agencies Are Taking Action to Reduce Demand but Could Improve Collaboration in Southeast Asia*, GAO-18-7, October 12, 2017, at https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-18-7#summary.

presence of FWS officers in certain U.S. embassies abroad to participate in international criminal investigations of wildlife trafficking and wildlife enforcement networks.

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the potential emergence of zoonotic diseases globally have stimulated these discussions. Some Members of Congress have introduced bills that direct interagency collaboration to identify zoonotic diseases and study factors that contribute to their emergence. For example, under Section 6 of S. 3759, several federal agencies would coordinate with the intention to address global zoonotic diseases and biodiversity, improve food security, and minimize the human-wildlife interface by preventing the degradation and fragmentation of ecosystems, among other actions.

Alignment with Host Country Priorities and Length of Commitment

Congressional oversight of international conservation activities may include questions about whether federal programs and activities align with recipient countries' conservation priorities. Some stakeholders argue that foreign assistance programs meet their objectives only when they align with recipient countries' priorities.[78] For example, one study found that if the needs of the developing country were aligned with those of the conservation projects, then the probability of success would increase, as the developing country can implement policies that would support the project. The same study argues that biodiversity conservation can have policy and project goals that may contradict a nation's poverty reduction goals. If the nation's poor were overhunting or converting larger tracts of biodiverse land to farmland, then biodiversity policies may not succeed, according to the study.[79]

Some policymakers contend that successful international conservation initiatives are implemented through long-term rather than short-term efforts, implying that long-term commitments to conservation aid might be a better approach. For example, some point to long-term aid to Brazil for strengthening the structures for monitoring and managing reserves and forests as an effective use of aid. Some stakeholders might counter this approach by suggesting that short-term conservation actions are more effective when addressing dire environmental issues that emerge quickly. For example, conservation actions to prevent a species from going extinct or save an ecosystem from burning (e.g., forest fires in Australia) might be more effective if implemented by short-term rather than long-term efforts.

Congress might consider these findings when deliberating international conservation assistance. Members might view a holistic approach to conservation that would take into account development goals and aspirations by recipient countries and focus on long-term conservation initiatives. In contrast, Congress might focus on international conservation priorities that would focus on specific species or ecosystems that have broad constituent support, such as African elephant conservation or coral reefs.

[78] For example, see Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, 2005, at https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264098084-en.pdf?expires=1597420266&id=id&accname=ocid195520&checksum=6416CCB99F17932468962E5EB606C305.

[79] Zdenek Oprsal and Jaromir Harmacek, "Is Foreign Aid Responsive to Environmental Needs and Performance of Developing Countries? Case Study of the Czech Republic," *Sustainability*, vol. 11, no. 401 (2019), p. 10.

Foreign Assistance for Conservation and Consequences for Human Rights

Human rights advocates and organizations representing indigenous communities have periodically asserted that international conservation programs can result in forced displacement, in security force abuses against local communities, or both. For example, a 2019 news article alleged that people living near national parks in Nepal and near national parks in several central African countries were abused as a result of counter-poaching operations by local park rangers.[80] Allegations that Nepal park rangers had tortured and killed a suspected poacher near Chitwan Forest in 2006 were central to the article. Other reports of human rights abuses associated with conservation have surfaced throughout the world. For example, some observers allege human rights abuses by park rangers in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in the Republic of the Congo, and some indigenous rights groups allege that this park's creation dispossessed local communities of their lands without consent. Local government officials have denied these allegations.[81]

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern that U.S. international conservation aid has been used to fund organizations implicated in human rights violations. In response to the article mentioned above, Senator Patrick Leahy and Representative Eliot Engel called for an investigation into U.S. funding administered by FWS for the international conservation organizations that support anti-poaching efforts in Nepal.[82] In May 2019, Representative Raúl Grijalva and Representative Rob Bishop requested a GAO review of U.S. efforts to combat wildlife trafficking, with a focus on human rights abuses.[83] In response to these issues, DOI is withholding certain funds for international conservation pending an internal review.[84] Other donors (including the British and German parliaments) are also investigating alleged human rights abuses as a result of conservation projects.[85]

Some U.S. agencies, including FWS, have human rights guidelines for grants that fund international conservation. Congress might consider evaluating these guidelines to potentially decide whether further oversight or legislation might be needed to, for example, impose additional conditions on grant recipients (e.g., certification that recipients have internal procedures for soliciting, tracking, and reporting information on abuses by their personnel or sub-grantees). Congress might also examine the allegations in question to determine whether they are credible and whether partner and agency responses were adequate or appropriate.

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[80] Tom Warren and Katie Baker, "WWF Funds Guards Who Have Tortured and Killed People," *BuzzFeed News*, March 4, 2019.

[81] See, for example, Inés Ayari and Simon Counsell, *The Human Cost of Conservation in the Republic of Congo*, Rainforest Foundation UK, December 2017; Survival International, *How Will We Survive? The destruction of Congo Basin tribes in the name of conservation*, 2017. The Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park (NNNP) is managed by the Nouabalé-Ndoki Foundation, a public-private partnership between the Congolese government's Ministry for Forest Economy and the Wildlife Conservation Society, a nonprofit conservation organization. NNNP has received funding from USAID, FWS, State, FS, and various private, international, and nongovernmental donors.

[82] Michael Burke, "Lawmakers Call for Investigation into World Wildlife Fund," *The Hill*, March 5, 2019.

[83] Letter from Representative Raúl M. Grijalva, chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, and Representative Rob Bishop, ranking member of the House Committee on Natural Resources, to the Honorable Gene Dodaro, comptroller general of the GAO, May 6, 2019.

[84] Letter from Susan Combs, assistant secretary of Policy, Management, and Budget for the Department of the Interior, to Representative Raúl Grijalva, chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, September 19, 2019.

[85] For example, see Karen McVeigh, "British Watchdog Launches Inquiry into WWF Abuse Allegations," *The Guardian*, April 4, 2019.

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples

Areas of the world that are home to large concentrations of indigenous peoples and low-income communities are often prone to the negative effects of climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, and other conservation-related challenges.[86] Congress might consider whether foreign assistance for conservation aids or hinders indigenous and low-income communities in recipient countries. Some human rights advocates argue that efforts to conserve habitats or sustainably manage lands could force indigenous peoples out of their ancestral homelands and deprive them of their livelihoods.[87] They argue that conservation assistance may not address or mitigate externalities that affect the livelihoods of these populations.[88] For example, international efforts to shut down wildlife markets to prevent the spread of zoonotic diseases and lower wildlife trafficking may have the unintended consequence of diminishing protein options for indigenous or low-income people with little access to markets with meat from domesticated animals. Some conservation advocates counter that conservation assistance and activities can enhance the well-being of indigenous people by involving them in securing the sustainability and longevity of natural habitats and lands and by protecting the ecosystems they depend on from destruction at the hands of local government, private sector initiatives, and themselves.[89]

U.S. government entities involved in international conservation activities differ in their approaches to involving indigenous peoples and other local communities as potential stakeholders in conservation efforts. The Overseas Private Investment Corporation (recently reconstituted as the U.S. Development Finance Corporation), for instance, maintained a policy to attain "consent" of indigenous peoples for programs; State and Treasury suggest the need for "consultation."[90] USAID, in its new policy on indigenous peoples, encourages attaining free, prior, and informed consent as a "best practice" but also refers to the U.S. Announcement of Support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a "call for a process of meaningful consultation with [traditional] leaders, but not necessarily the agreement of those leaders, before the actions addressed in those consultations are taken."[91]

Congress could seek to clarify the U.S. position on requirements for attaining the consent of indigenous peoples in U.S. conservation programs, including by considering the establishment of a U.S. government position on the matter. Congress could also consider policy mechanisms to integrate conservation programs with the livelihoods of indigenous peoples.

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[86] Sandra Díaz et al., *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, IPBES, 2019, pp. 15-16.

[87] Jeremy Hance, "Conservation's People Problem," *Mongabay*, 2016. Hereinafter Hance, "Conservation's People Problem," 2016.

[88] Hance, "Conservation's People Problem," 2016.

[89] Claudia Sobrevila, *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation: The Natural but Often Forgotten Partners*, Working Paper no. 44300, The World Bank, 2008.

[90] USAID, *Biodiversity and Development Handbook*, 2015, p. 83.

[91] USAID, *Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, March 2020, p. 21.

Appendix. Selected Appropriations for International Conservation Activities

Table A-1. Enacted Appropriations for Selected Federal Programs That Address International Conservation, FY2018 to FY2020

(in millions of U.S. dollars)

Program	Description	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020
U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Biodiversity Programs	Biodiversity conservation activities conducted by USAID aim to help developing countries maintain biodiversity and habitats and the environmental services they provide. USAID funds projects and activities in approximately 60 countries throughout the world and emphasizes sustainable development and community-based conservation. Efforts began in the 1970s to address the conservation of forests and expanded to address biological diversity and tropical deforestation in the 1980s. Biodiversity conservation activities are broadly authorized by §119 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. §2151q).	269.0	285.0	Not less than 315.0
USAID funds to address wildlife poaching and trafficking	This category covers funding under several programs that address wildlife trafficking. A portion of funds are appropriated to in-country programs in Africa and Asia. Another portion of funding is appropriated to the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement Program to develop criminal justice systems and capabilities in foreign countries. Wildlife trafficking is one of the illicit international crimes in the purview of this program.	Not less than 90.7	Not less than 90.7	Not less than 100.7
International Conservation Programs	This funding covers international treaties that address conservation, including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); U.N. Convention to Combat Desertification; RAMSAR Convention on Wetlands; Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; U.N. Forum on Forests; International Tropical Timber Organization; and the Food and Agriculture Organization's National Forest Program Facility.	7.0	7.0	7.0
U.N. Environment Program	This funding goes towards the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP), which promotes environmental sustainability globally. UNEP works in themes related to climate change, disasters, ecosystems, environmental governance, chemicals and waste, resource efficiency, and sustainability.	10.0	10.0	10.6
U.S. Department of the Treasury Global Environmental Facility (GEF)	The GEF is a multilateral environmental trust fund that supports projects with global environmental benefits related to six areas: biodiversity, climate change, international waters, the ozone layer, land degradation, and persistent organic pollutants. Allocation of funding across these six areas has varied by year. Established in 1991, the GEF has received funds from the United States annually since 1993.	139.6	139.6	139.6

Program	Description	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020
U.S. Department of the Treasury Tropical Forest Conservation Act (TFCA)	The TFCA (22 U.S.C. §2431 et seq.) authorizes debt-for-nature transactions, where developing country debt is exchanged for local funds to conserve tropical forests.	0.0	0.0	15.0
U.S. Department of State (State) and USAID Sustainable Landscapes Programming	The Sustainable Landscapes program aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. USAID and State draw funds for bilateral and regional Sustainable Landscape programming from larger accounts in their budgets, including Development Assistance, Economic Support Fund, and International Organizations and Programs.	No less than 123.5	Not less than 125.0	Not less than 135.0
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF)	The MSCF supports conservation efforts benefitting certain species, often in conjunction with efforts under CITES (to which the United States is a party). The MSCF provides funding to a range of countries for the conservation of African and Asian elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, great apes, tortoises, freshwater turtles, and marine turtles. This funding provides grants that target species and address habitat conservation, law enforcement, and technical assistance for conserving species under the MSCF.	11.1	11.6	15.0
FWS Neotropical Migratory Bird Fund	This funding provides grants for the conservation of hundreds of bird species that migrate among North America, South America, and the Caribbean.	3.9	3.9	4.9
FWS International Affairs Program	The FWS International Affairs program addresses wildlife conservation, wildlife trade, and the implementation of several U.S. wildlife laws. This office also coordinates programs that address forest conservation indirectly by supporting the conservation of species and ecosystems. Program components include International Conservation and International Wildlife Trade discussed below.	15.8	15.8	18.8
• International Conservation	This program consists of species and regional programs that provide technical and financial assistance to conserve high-priority species and habitats.	8.3	8.3	10.8
• International Wildlife Trade	This program is responsible for implementing CITES and various domestic laws of the United States to ensure that the international wildlife trade is not harmful to endangered and threatened wildlife around the world.	7.5	7.5	8.0
U.S. Forest Service (FS) International Programs	The FS International Programs office promotes sustainable forest management and biodiversity conservation internationally. The office has three main units: Technical Cooperation, Policy, and Disaster Assistance Response. Specific activities include managing protected areas, protecting migratory species, engaging in landscape-level forest planning, providing fire management training, curbing invasive species, preventing illegal logging, promoting forest certification, reducing the impacts of forest use, and the development of nontimber forest products.	9.0	9.0	12.0

Sources: P.L. 116-94, P.L. 116-6, P.L. 115-141; accompanying committee reports for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies and for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs; and FY2020 congressional budget

justifications for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies and for State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

Notes: FY2020 appropriations for biodiversity programs under USAID identify funding for some conservation programs in the explanatory statement, including the Andean Amazon Program ($24.5 million); Brazilian Amazon Program ($11.0 million); Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment ($43.0 million); and Great Apes Conservation ($40.0 million); among others.

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