

July 22, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

The undersigned sporting-conservation organizations are very concerned about the recent movement of two pieces of misguided, partisan legislation that would undermine highly successful international conservation programs. These proposals will only further harm African countries who have been severely impacted economically by the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated travel restrictions. Well-regulated, sustainable hunting is critical to the economies of African nations, and these proposals simply ignore the needs of both people and wildlife directly affected by the pandemic. We urge leadership to reject these legislative proposals.

The first of these proposals, H.R. 2245, the Conserving Ecosystems by Ceasing the Importation of Large Animal Trophies Act, is driven by emotions and the inaccurate portrayal of international hunting rather than sound, science-based wildlife management principles. This bill represents another attempt to substitute uninformed prejudices for the management strategies of the wildlife authorities successfully conserving the world's largest populations of lions, elephants and other African species in their range countries.

H.R. 2245's title claims that its provisions are intended to "conserve ecosystems." Not only will the bill do nothing to benefit ecosystems, it more likely will undermine the very programs that conserve the most habitat in Africa. Countries such as Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have some of the world's largest populations of elephant, leopard, lion, and white and black rhino. Experts including the scientific and management authorities of these countries, the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), credit sustainable hunting programs as a cornerstone of the successful conservation and wildlife management strategies that are responsible for these wildlife populations. Any law that discourages, rather than facilitates, these hunting programs will have an adverse impact on sound ecosystem conservation.

The second of our concerns is language contained in Section 436 of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill (H.R. 7612). This is another short-sighted, emotionally driven proposal that represents a sweeping effort to curtail the importation of legally and sustainably harvested African game species. This language would prevent any federal funds from being used by FWS to issue permits for the importation of elephant or lion trophies from Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Tanzania, despite the fact these countries have some of the highest populations of these species in the World. In some cases, the populations of these species exceed appropriate carrying capacity for their habitats and if left unmanaged, threaten otherwise viable habitat as well as human safety in rural areas abroad.

Well-regulated hunting programs, particularly those that involve rural communities in the management and protection of wildlife, have repeatedly played a key role in conservation. These sustainable hunting programs generate the incentives and funding to protect habitat and encourage tolerance of dangerous game. Species such as black and white rhino, bontebok, markhor, and wood bison owe their conservation success to sustainable use programs. If enacted, H.R. 2245 and Section 436 would put an end to these successes. Congress must not let this happen.

On their face, H.R. 2245 and Section 436 of the Interior Appropriations bill do not advance the concept of collaborative wildlife management because they fail to recognize the monumental efforts wildlife management experts, particularly those of the range countries, undertake to conserve these species. These legislative efforts will harm the very wildlife that supporters of these proposals claim to protect. For example, the IUCN has explained that “[p]oorly targeted or blanket bans or restrictions affect both good and bad hunting practices. They are blunt instruments that risk undermining important benefits for both conservation and local livelihoods, *thus exacerbating rather than addressing the prevailing major threats* of habitat loss and poaching.” Briefing Paper, Informing Decisions on Trophy Hunting, April 2016, at 2 (emphasis added).

The blanket prohibition against the importation of any elephant or lion from Tanzania, Zimbabwe, or Zambia contained in Section 436 of H.R. 7612 ignores credible science that demonstrates the conservation benefits of existing hunting programs – programs that enable these countries to support some of the largest elephant and lion populations in the world. Sadly, if implemented, this import ban would directly conflict with Section 8 of the ESA, which specifically requires the FWS to encourage foreign conservation programs in range countries. Instead of incentivizing and supporting programs with a strong track record of conservation success, Section 436 would deprive these countries of significant sources of conservation funding generated by the fees and other expenditures paid by U.S. hunters that are essential to range country efforts to maintain large wildlife populations.

Enacting H.R. 2245 and Section 436 will severely hinder the importation of some legally-harvested animals and ban the importation of others. Congress should not pass a bill that would undermine successful conservation programs, substitute prejudice for the rational decisions of wildlife management experts around the world and turn a blind eye to science. The undersigned organizations ask you to make sure that H.R. 2245 and Section 436 never becomes law.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
California Waterfowl Association
Camp Fire Club of America
Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation
Conservation Force

Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Dallas Safari Club
Delta Waterfowl
Houston Safari Club
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
Orion – The Hunter’s Institute
Pope and Young Club
Professional Outfitters and Guides of America
Quality Deer Management Association
Safari Club International
Sportsmen’s Alliance
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Management Institute