

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We are writing to you to express our deep concern about the continued misguided approach the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is taking regarding the trophy killing of elephants and lions in African countries and the negative implications it has for this imperiled wildlife.

In January, several members of Congress urged you to abandon the ill-conceived idea of forming a new “International Wildlife Conservation Council” (IWCC) to promote trophy killing.¹ Not only does the IWCC waste taxpayer dollars, it also promotes the senseless killing of endangered animals abroad. It is inconceivable that American taxpayers are currently footing the bill for 92 percent of all permit fees² just so millionaires and billionaires can kill these animals to decorate their walls. Instead of ending this subsidy along with the IWCC, FWS doubled-down and filled the IWCC with trophy hunters and the National Rifle Association (NRA).³

In November 2017, when FWS announced its plans to allow elephant trophy imports from Zimbabwe and Zambia, it was met with outrage by the American public. Even President Trump directed the FWS to “put big game trophy decision on hold⁴” and stated that he would be very hard pressed to change his mind that “this horror show in any way helps conservation of Elephants or any other animal.”⁵ Following Trump’s tweet, the Department of Interior issued a statement claiming that no permits for elephant imports from Zimbabwe or Zambia would be allowed pending a “review” of those decisions.

Even though it is unclear if the FWS conducted such a review, the Trump White House and FWS have since tried to quietly announce that they will now consider all permits for importing

¹ https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/press_release/files/AWI-GA-Intl-Wildlife-Cons-Council-Congressional-Letter-01172018.pdf

² <http://democrats-naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Missing%20the%20Mark%202017%20Update.pdf>

³ Federal Advisory Committee Act Database. DOI – 236 – International Wildlife Conservation Council – Agency Authority – Members. <https://www.facadatabase.gov/committee/members.aspx?cid=2636> Accessed 3/6/2018

⁴ <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/931685146415255552?lang=en>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/932397369655808001?lang=en>

elephant and lion carcasses on a “case-by-case” basis, as a response to an NRA and Safari Club International lawsuit.⁶

In doing so, the FWS withdrew the Endangered Species Act enhancement findings and CITES non-detriment findings for trophies of African elephants and lions killed in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia.⁷ This withdrawal removes all transparency, allows more trophy imports into the United States, and facilitates avoidance of public and judicial scrutiny of unjustified permitting decisions.

The American public is tired of this administration constantly pulling a bait-and-switch, with President Trump tweeting one thing to appease the public and the administration reversing-course to meet the demands of big-industry and the NRA. We will not stand for this back-door attempt to jeopardize the future of imperiled wildlife.

To provide the transparency and responsiveness to the American people that you have repeatedly called for, we urge you to:

- Dismantle the International Wildlife Conservation Council
- Rescind the FWS’s procedure for assessing applications to import trophies on a case-by-case basis
- Put a hold on all trophy imports
- Rescind any efforts to allow the importation of elephant and lion trophies from Zambia and Zimbabwe
- Initiate a thorough review and rulemaking process to establish enhancement and non-detriment findings based on best-available-science for all trophy exporting countries
- Require annual reports from trophy exporting countries to consistently review and update enhancement findings
- Make any issuance of any permit available to the public
- Require that ESA trophy import permit applications filed by hunters include additional documentation
- Significantly increase the fees for import permits to cover the costs of administering the program so that the American taxpayer does not have to subsidize this activity

We look forward to your response.


Sincerely,

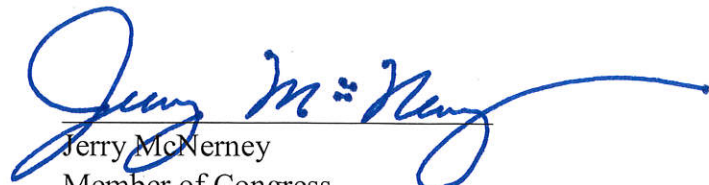


Raúl M. Grijalva
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources


⁶ <https://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/memo-withdrawal-of-certain-findings-ESA-listed-species-sport-hunted-trophies.pdf>

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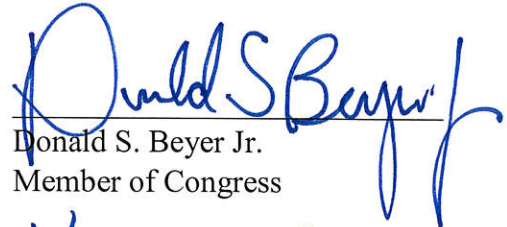

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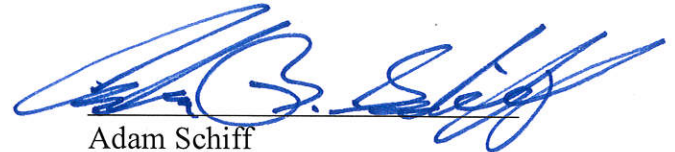

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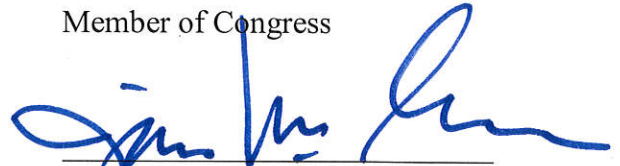

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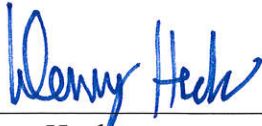

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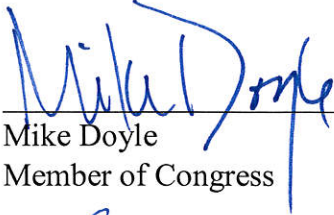

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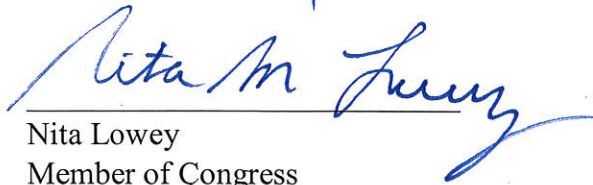
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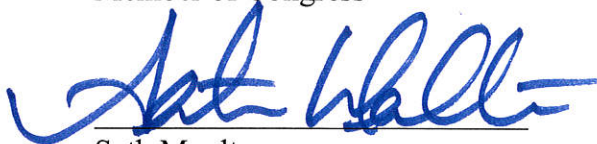
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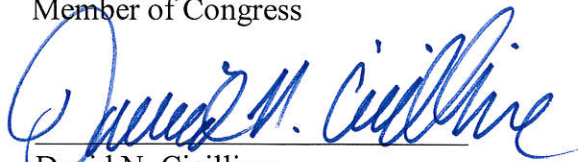
Nita Lowey
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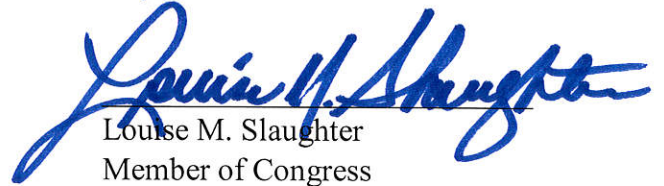
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Peter Welch
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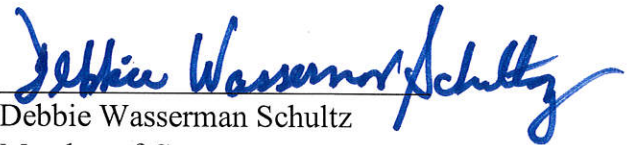
Jose E. Serrano
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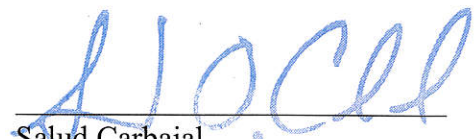
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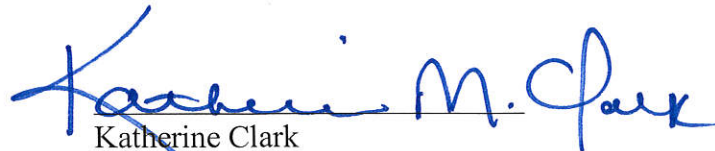
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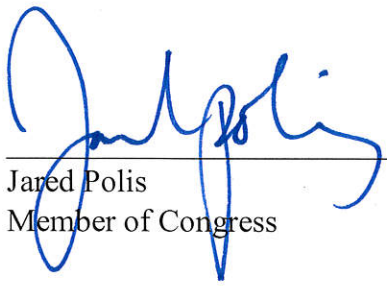
Charlie Crist
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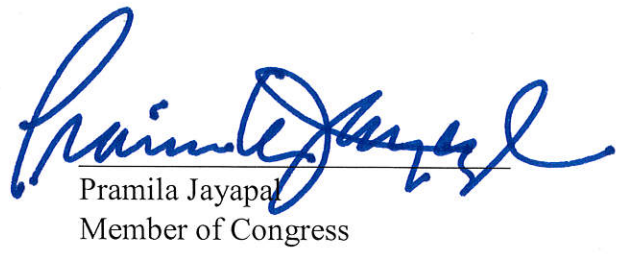
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