

Jeff Corwin oral testimony – April 23, 2009

Mister Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the subcommittee, thank you. It is a pleasure and honor to appear before this committee. I am Jeff Corwin, biologist, television host, producer, and lifelong naturalist appearing on behalf of Defenders of Wildlife. Founded in 1947, Defenders of Wildlife has more than one million members and activists across the nation and is dedicated to the protection and restoration of wild animals and plants in their natural communities.

As a wildlife biologist and host of my own show on Animal Planet, I have had many exhilarating and challenging experiences: I have traveled beside a thundering herd of a million wildebeest, liberated a mighty California condor back into the wild after its struggle to recover from lead poisoning and born witness to some of our planets rarest creatures and most incredible natural spectacles.

I have witnessed the discovery of new species and tragically the extinction of others. These adventures have been both exhilarating and challenging.

But I have to say that you here in Congress have an exhilarating and challenging opportunity ahead of you that easily rivals my own! You have the opportunity to make history. You have the opportunity to pass legislation that will not only curb the release of greenhouse gas into the atmosphere, but also deal with the effects that are already being seen and felt on the ground. Effects that are already having detrimental impacts on our planet, from the air we breathe to the water we drink; from the medicines we use to the food we eat; from the forests and fisheries we depend on to the special places we take our children. You have the opportunity to be heroes! It gets my adrenaline pumping just thinking about it.

I am on the road about 10 months out of every year, and I see first-hand the impacts that we have had on this amazing planet and the diverse creatures that share it with us.

I have been to Southeast Asia where I walked through a silent rain forest. Every bird, lizard and mammal was gone. I have been to the North Pole to study the iconic polar bear, who's habitat is melting away before our eyes. And I have traveled around the world studying the effects of a deadly fungus that is on course to destroy half of our frogs and other amphibian populations... one of the most significant mass extinctions since the dinosaurs.

But you don't have to go to the ends of the earth to find the effects of global warming on wildlife, our natural resources and ultimately, ourselves. The pika and the wolverine in the Rockies, our nation's waterfowl; even fish, shrimp, oysters - and with them, an entire seafood industry are already in trouble.

Mr. Chairman, I worry deeply about what kind of world awaits my two young daughters if we fail to address this threat. The sad fact is that despite my best efforts and those of many others, my girls will inherit a world that may be less biologically rich and healthy than my own. In fact, in the lifetime of my young daughter Marina, born just last year, 20-30% of the world's plant and animal species will be on the brink of extinction if we do not act now to curb global warming.

We must act now to minimize the losses we are destined to experience.

As a biologist, I firmly believe that we should start by expanding our scientific understanding of global warming's impacts on the living world. We cannot develop and implement an effective strategy without this knowledge. The creation and funding of the National Climate Change and Wildlife Science Center at the U.S. Geological Survey is an important commitment to this serious issue.

But that is only the start. I am here today to ask you to commit five percent of the revenue from new global warming cap and trade legislation to safeguard wildlife and ecosystems from a warming world.

These are exhilarating and challenging times. We are depending on you to provide the resources and guidance to ensure we meet this challenge head on and be the heroes we know you can be.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to encourage your further good work.