FOREWORD

Conservation and the Global Economic Recession

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The world is reeling from the global economic recession that took firm hold in 2009. Its widespread and interconnected nature has practically crippled our modern banking institutions and baffled economists. As countries struggle with debt, particularly in the developing world, many will experience a prolonged period of economic malaise, with high unemployment rates and reduced standards of living.

For the countries that contain our last wild places, a decrease in global consumption of natural resources could offer a reprieve for biodiversity. In fact, the recession has reduced demand for and exploitation of some natural resources. For example, Malaysia and Indonesia have lowered the targeted acreage of rainforest to be converted to palm oil plantations, a relief to orangutans and other forest wildlife. By the same token, a reduction in economic security may prove detrimental to wild places—local communities and national governments may sell rights to extract natural resources in order to receive much-needed immediate income, shelving good conservation regulations in the process.

Regardless of unpredictable economic factors, conservation organizations such as the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) will continue the vital work of protecting our planet's precious species and ecosystems. In its 100-plus year history, WCS's science-based approach to conservation has survived other recessions, and its investment in conservation has proven to be quite a bargain. WCS's $200 million annual operating budget directly helps to conserve

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at least one quarter of all the world's biodiversity contained within the 200 million acres where WCS works—that equals one dollar per acre, an incredible value per dollar.

Funding to support conservation efforts must come from private donations, governments, and bilateral donor agencies, and all three of these sources have been affected by the global recession. Government and bilateral donor agencies tend to use their financial resources to prioritize economic development and social safety networks over wildlife conservation. Remaining funds may go toward mitigating and adapting to climate change. At the same time, foundations that historically have supported conservation may reduce their grants. As of early 2009, foundations reported an average 30 percent decline in their endowments from their previous highs.

To effectively achieve durable conservation results regardless of the global economy, conservation organizations must identify and seize innovative new opportunities. In wild places, such as the rich forests of Cameroon and Congo, logging concessions have recently been marked, roads have been cut, and species such as chimpanzees and forest elephants have been disturbed. But the market for expensive tropical timber has recently shrunk, causing a decrease in the value of logging concessions and presenting an opportunity to acquire these concessions for conservation. Similarly, opportunities may open up to buy out hunting leases, mining rights, or even fishing concessions.

Other opportunities may lie in new partnerships. As this edition of *State of the Wild* makes clear, biodiversity conservation is intricately linked to factors as varied as rural livelihoods and political stability, which could encourage new partnerships to address several facets of conservation both comprehensively and simultaneously. Recognizing this, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has increased funds for programs that seek to promote environmental conservation, economic development, and democratization. Such programs include building sustainable natural resource management in Afghanistan, a place notable as a crossroads for species from three faunal realms.

Another opportunity for new partnerships lies in climate change offset programs that may pay for preserving intact forests. For example, WCS plans to "sell" the carbon currently secured in Makira Forest, Madagascar, in a developing international market for "avoided deforestation" credits. The funds from these carbon offsets will support the conservation of lemurs and reptiles in this forest, and will be disbursed to the local people, helping to alleviate poverty and build security.

Finally, by strengthening their strategies, conservation organizations can invest in the future and position themselves for the eventual economic upturn. The first rule during economic hard times is to match inflows and outflows. WCS and other conservation organizations are systematically assessing vulnerabilities and increasing efficiency of operations while cutting operating costs.

Every dollar should be used for conservation. This means that some activities not directly tied to the mission of saving wildlife and wild places may cease. In the process of streamlining, conservation organizations should also decide which species and places are most essential for conservation, and where effort will yield the greatest conservation impact. Finally, to fund this continued work, conservation organizations need to reach new audiences and highlight the fact that conservation is in humankind's best interest. Ultimately, the value of conservation is that sustaining wild places and biodiversity today will ensure a better future for the planet and humanity. Thank you for reading *State of the Wild* as part of this journey.

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