

230 Missy Lane
Whitefish, MT 59937
18 May, 1997

Bon. Jim M. Jeffords
United States Senate
728 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Sir,

Elephants are one of those animals by which we define the grandeur of creation. There are no larger life forms walking our earth and precious few more intelligent --or more emotional. Elephants live 60 to 70 years and maintain close, complex bonds with other family members throughout that span. They are also intimately tied to the cultures of many nations. And now they are in danger of disappearing. On my own behalf, and for the sake of people everywhere, including those in generations yet to come, I urge that you give the strongest support possible to an Asian Elephant Conservation Act.

I am a wildlife biologist and author who has spent several years traveling the world to collect information on elephants. This research resulted in a May, 1991 article for National Geographic entitled "Elephants, Out of Time, Out of Space," and a book, The Fate of the Elephant, among other publications. My work has allowed me to follow the creatures in some of the most remote wildlands left in Asia, stay in logging camps among working elephants, and even win special permission to visit with the sacred white elephants of the royal palace in Thailand. I have also seen three-legged elephants whose last homeland was laced with explosive mines, elephants whose trunk had been taken off by snares, and elephants patterned by the scars of bullets and acid hurled at them by farmers whose crops had been raided.

As you know, the American public and Congress have worked hard to reverse the decline of African elephants, Loxodonta africana. And the effort has succeeded in many respects, helping boost the population to more than half a million. In the meantime, Asian elephants, Elephas maximus, have declined to one-tenth that number. Where they once inhabited a range that swept from southern China to the Middle East, they find themselves confined to fragments of countryside too small and too scattered to guarantee the species's survival. The solutions are to better protect remaining herds, secure linkages between forest reserves, and integrate the elephants' habitat requirements with the economies of local communities. If we cannot meet these challenges, soon, Asia will lose its giants in the wild.

If that happens, we all stand to lose a great deal more. Others have probably pointed out to you the value of elephants as an umbrella species. That is, by safeguarding forest tracts large enough to sustain Elephas maximus, we ensure sufficient habitat for countless smaller fauna from tigers and sloth bears to peacocks and emerald doves. The association between saving elephants and conserving biological diversity has an extra dimension. You see, the extraordinary variety of plant and animal species found in Asia's

tropical forests --the genetic bounty that could one day provide humanity with new sources of food, fiber, and pharmaceutical products -- is in good part a direct result of having elephants in the ecosystem.

It has been estimated that elephants distribute the seeds of perhaps one-third of all tropical trees. In some cases, the elephants are the only known agents of dispersal. Plants germinate in elephant dung at twice the rate found in ordinary forest soil. Through their grazing and trampling, elephants create openings dominated by monocots -- grasses and certain starchy herbs -- throughout dense woodlands. Those patches in turn host a special array of animals from insects to Asian rhinos.

The same forests essential to elephant survival will, when used wisely, provide a perpetual source of raw materials, food, and traditional medicines for local people. Even more important, those woodlands absorb and slowly release a reliable supply of good water. Deforested, the landscape offers only rapid runoff --floods during the rainy season followed just as surely by drought and withered crops.

To save Asian elephants is to save one of the principal shapers of biological diversity. To maintain Asian elephant habitat is to maintain the resources that enrich human communities over the long run. To pass an Asian Elephant Conservation Act would be one of the most foresighted and yet practical, cost-effective things we could do for the benefit of Americans, people throughout Asia, and the world we all share. Thank you for taking the time to listen.

Respectfully,

Douglas H. Chadwick