

The geopolitical priorities of US biodiversity conservation: mapping the activities and funding of the US Fish and Wildlife Service's International Affairs Program

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In this paper we contribute to an understanding of conservation geopolitics, and what conservation geopolitics might do, through a multi-scalar analysis of international conservation funding. Using the case of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) International Affairs Program – the US Government's lead wildlife agency – we combine quantitative and spatial analysis with in-depth qualitative data to develop a framework for researching questions related to conservation geopolitics and what such a politics might look like. We ask the following: What types of activities is the USFWS International Affairs program funding, and where? Are there changes over time in what, who, and which geographies receive funding? How, if at all, do these changes overlap with evolving discourses around wildlife crime and other geopolitical priorities? We answer these questions through a two-fold process. First, we conducted a global meta-analysis of 3,800 projects funded by USFWS since 2002. Second, we interviewed personnel in USFWS, other conservation and security organisations, and conducted place-based research to understand how funding decisions are made, influenced, and with what implications. What emerges is a picture of the macro and micro trends and dynamics that constitutes an empirically rigorous and conceptually innovative approach to doing and understanding conservation geopolitics.