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Multinational Species Conservation Fund Semipostal Stamp

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Summary

The Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF) supports international conservation efforts benefitting several species of animals, often in conjunction with efforts under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). MSCF receives annual appropriations under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to fund five grant programs for conserving tigers, rhinoceroses, Asian and African elephants, marine turtles, and great apes (gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans, and various species of gibbons). To provide a convenient way for the public to contribute to these activities and to boost funds for these conservation programs, Congress authorized the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-241). With the MSCF semipostal stamp (MSCF stamp) program set to expire in 2017, Congress is considering whether to reauthorize the MSCF stamp through pending legislation (e.g., S. 480 and H.R. 1247).

Semipostal stamps are postage stamps that are sold with a surcharge above the normal price for a 1-ounce first-class letter stamp. For example, the current price for a first-class stamp is 49 cents, whereas a first-class semipostal stamp costs 60 cents. The additional charge is recognized by the stamp purchaser as a voluntary contribution to a designated cause. Since 1997, Congress has authorized the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to sell four different semipostal stamps, including the MSCF stamp. The MSCF stamp, entitled “Save Vanishing Species,” was first issued by USPS on September 22, 2011. A portion of the stamp’s sale proceeds is transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the MSCF and provides grants to international organizations to help protect the species listed above. As of November 2016, proceeds from MSCF stamp sales had generated more than \$3.9 million for the MSCF.

Many view semipostal stamps as an easy and inexpensive way to raise funds and awareness for a given organization or cause. Some contend that the MSCF stamp provides a significant amount of funding for MSCF conservation programs and raises awareness about the conservation of certain international threatened and endangered species. Others argue that semipostal stamps detract from the mission of the USPS and divert consumers away from other stamps the USPS has to offer. Additionally, some contend that other causes could benefit more than the MSCF from a semipostal stamp program.

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Introduction

The Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF; 16 U.S.C. §4246) supports international conservation efforts benefitting several species of animals. The MSCF has five sub-funds, which provide grants for activities to conserve tigers, rhinoceroses, Asian and African elephants, marine turtles, and great apes (gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans, and various species of gibbons). Each of the funds receives appropriations from Congress through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). This support is often in conjunction with efforts under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and local efforts in the countries in which these animals reside.¹

MSCF provides funding in the form of technical and cost-sharing grants to groups conducting conservation activities in the species' home range countries. The grants address habitat conservation, improve law enforcement, and provide technical assistance for conserving the specified species. The conservation efforts funded by the MSCF funds also benefit from funding and in-kind support provided by partners and collaborators. Congress and constituents have shown interest in conserving iconic endangered species in foreign countries, such as elephants and tigers. Congress has appropriated funds to address wildlife trafficking and to conserve foreign endangered species and their habitats, and it is considering other forms of funding to augment this support. One form of existing support is funds generated through semipostal stamps, which are first-class stamps that are sold with a surcharge over their postage value. The additional charge is recognized by the stamp purchaser as a voluntary contribution to a designated cause (for more information, see "Overview of Semipostal Stamps," below).

Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF)

The MSCF sub-funds are authorized under five acts, described below:

- The African Elephant Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §4201) authorizes matching grants for conservation, research, management, and protection of this species.
- The Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (16 U.S.C. §5301) assists in conserving tigers and rhinoceroses. Matching grants support governments and nongovernmental organizations in projects to conserve habitat, survey populations, improve law enforcement, and educate the public.
- The Asian Elephant Fund (16 U.S.C. §4261) is similar to the above programs in purposes and scope. An additional emphasis, where the elephants are draft animals, is to promote their humane treatment and encourage captive breeding.
- The Great Ape Conservation Fund (16 U.S.C. §6303) is similar to the above programs in purposes and scope. Species of interest are lowland and mountain gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos (a species closely related to chimpanzees), orangutans, and one of the four genera of gibbons (genus *Hylobates*—about 8-10 species, according to anthropologists).
- The Marine Turtle Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §6601) provides grants for the conservation of marine turtle populations and their nesting habitats in the wild.

MSCF Semipostal Stamp

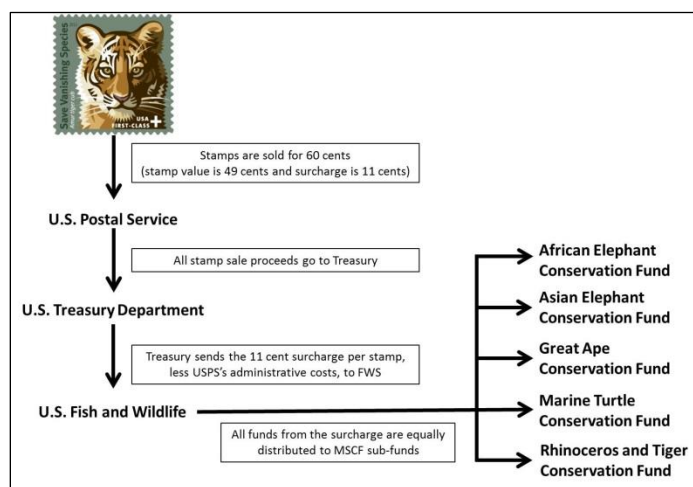
To boost funds for conservation programs under MSCF, Congress authorized the creation and distribution of the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp (MSCF stamp) under the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-

¹ The United States is a party to CITES.

241).² This law requires the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to issue and sell the MSCF stamp.³ A portion of the proceeds (11 cents, less USPS’s administrative costs) from the stamp are transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS),⁴ which equally distributes the stamp-generated funds among the five MSCF sub-funds (see **Figure 1**).⁵ The other portion of the revenue goes to the Postal Service Fund, which is a revolving fund in the U.S. Treasury that consists largely of revenues generated from the sale of postal products and services.⁶

USPS introduced the MSCF stamp, entitled “Save Vanishing Species,” in September 2011. The stamp depicts an Amur tiger, a design approved by the Postmaster General, who has the final authority to decide the design for semipostal stamps.⁷ Congress initially provided for the MSCF stamp to be available to the public for at least two years.⁸ Congress extended the mandated sale of the MSCF stamp by an additional four years through the Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp Reauthorization Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-165). Authorization for the MSCF stamp is set to expire in September 2017. This expiration does not preclude USPS from continuing to issue and sell the stamp, should it choose to do so.

Figure 1. Pathway of MSCF Stamp Funds



Source: Congressional Research Service, modified from diagrams provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, March 2017.

Notes: FWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; MSCF = Multinational Species Conservation Fund.

As of November 2016, more than 36.6 million MSCF stamps had sold, generating more than \$3.9 million for conservation. According to FWS, funds from the stamps have supported 84 conservation projects in 33 countries.⁹ Projects and programs funded by stamp sales address

² The Multinational Species Conservation Fund (MSCF) stamp is authorized under P.L. 111-241.

³ Congress did not specify a stamp design for the MSCF stamp.

⁴ 39 USC §416 (d)(5); 39 C.F.R. §§551.7-551.8.

⁵ Section(2)(a) of P.L. 111-241. The law specifically notes that proceeds from the sale of the stamp cannot be used to fund or support the Wildlife Without Borders Program or to supplement funds for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.

⁶ 39 U.S.C. §2003. The revenue in the Postal Service Fund is used for the payment of expenses of the USPS, Postal Inspection Service, Postal Regulatory Commission, and USPS Office of Inspector General.

⁷ See 39 C.F.R. Part 551.

⁸ §2(c)(2) of P.L. 111-241.

⁹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at <https://www.fws.gov/international/save-vanishing-species-stamp.html>.

antipoaching activities, capacity building for conserving species, community engagement and outreach, habitat restoration, and activities to raise public awareness of the illegal wildlife trade, among other things. In addition, federal grants from MSCF receive matching funds from nonfederal conservation supporters. FWS has noted that the funds from stamp sales have leveraged more than double their value in funds for conservation. For example, from FY2012 to FY2016, \$3.1 million of funds generated from stamps leveraged \$12.5 million in additional funds from nonfederal stakeholders for conservation projects.¹⁰ The MSCF stamp's efficacy in generating funds for international conservation made reauthorizing the stamp a priority for addressing wildlife trafficking, as the Presidential Taskforce on Wildlife Trafficking created by the Obama Administration in 2014 noted.¹¹ Funds generated by MSCF stamp sales have supported efforts to decrease wildlife trafficking. For example, FWS used MSCF stamp funds to support a program that rehabilitates trafficked tigers for return to the wild in Indonesia.

Overview of Semipostal Stamps

Semipostal stamps are first-class letter stamps that are sold with a surcharge over their postage value. The additional charge is recognized by the stamp purchaser as a voluntary contribution to a designated cause. For example, a first-class stamp may be purchased for 49 cents, but a first-class semipostal stamp costs 60 cents. USPS sells a semipostal stamp and then transfers a portion of the proceeds (less USPS's administrative costs) to the U.S. Treasury, which allocates funding to the federal agency designated to administer the funds. The agency then expends or distributes the funds for the statutorily designated purpose. Congress first authorized the issuance of semipostal stamps in 1997.

The first semipostal stamp sold in the United States was the Breast Cancer Research stamp in 1997, which was created by the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act (P.L. 105-41). This act authorized the USPS to issue a first-class stamp at a price up to 25% higher than the standard first-class stamp price. The law required USPS to deliver 70% of the additional proceeds to the National Institutes of Health and 30% to the Department of Defense to fund breast cancer research, less USPS's administrative costs.

After the success of the Breast Cancer Research stamp, Congress enacted the Semipostal Authorization Act (P.L. 106-253) in 2000. The act gave USPS broad authority to issue and sell semipostal stamps for causes that USPS considers to be in the "national public interest and appropriate." The law specified that funds raised must go only to federal agencies supporting the cause, and it gave discretion to USPS for the selection and depiction of future semipostal stamps. The authority for USPS to issue semipostal stamps expires 10 years after the issuance of the first stamp. This 10-year sunset provision has not started, because USPS has not issued any semipostal stamps through its own authority. All current semipostal stamps have been mandated separately in enacted legislation. However, USPS recently revised its semipostal regulations (39 C.F.R. 551) and has begun the process of developing and issuing its first discretionary semipostal stamp.

¹⁰ MSCF receives from \$1.0 million to \$3.0 million in annual appropriations. Under §2(c)(1)(B) of P.L. 111-241, funds received by the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for the MSCF stamp are not to offset decisions regarding annual appropriations.

For more information on projects funded by stamp sales, see FWS, Division of International Conservation, "Save Vanishing Species Semipostal Stamp Funding FY2012-2016," at <https://www.fws.gov/international/pdf/2012-2016-Stamp-Grants-Project-Summaries.pdf>.

¹¹ The Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking was created by a President Obama Executive Order 13648, "Combatting Wildlife Trafficking," July 1, 2013. Some of its duties are authorized in law under P.L. 114-231, §301.

Recent Changes to the USPS Semipostal Program

Recent changes to the USPS semipostal program could affect the MSCF stamp. In 2016, the USPS amended its regulations and began the process of developing and issuing its own semipostal stamps.¹²

The Semipostal Authorization Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-253) provided USPS with authority to issue semipostals for a 10-year period beginning on the date on which semipostals are first made available to the public. Under the original regulations implementing the Semipostal Stamp Program, USPS stated that it would not exercise its authority to issue semipostal stamps under 39 U.S.C. §416 until after the sales period of the Breast Cancer Research Stamp is concluded.¹³ A rule issued by USPS in April 2016 retracts the restriction on the start of the discretionary Semipostal Stamp Program.¹⁴

The amended regulations state that USPS will issue one discretionary semipostal stamp at a time, five in total, to be sold for a period of no more than two years each. Public proposals for the first discretionary semipostal were due in July 2016. The final decision regarding the subject of the discretionary semipostal stamps belongs to the Postmaster General; as of February 28, 2017, a decision on what semipostals to issue had not been made.¹⁵ If the MSCF stamp is not reauthorized in 2017, USPS could discontinue the MSCF stamp and focus on other semipostal stamps per its plan in the amended regulations.

Several bills introduced in the 115th Congress address the MSCF stamp and other semipostal stamps. Some bills would reauthorize the issuance of the MSCF stamp for an additional four years (e.g., S. 480 and H.R. 1247). Further, H.R. 1247 would require an MSCF semipostal stamp depicting an African elephant in addition to an Amur tiger.

Other bills would require USPS to issue semipostal stamps supporting other causes, such as the Peace Corps (H.R. 332), efforts to combat invasive species (H.R. 1837), agricultural conservation programs (H.R. 581), and the families of fallen service members (H.R. 1147). H.R. 128 would take away the general authority of USPS to issue semipostal stamps. Under the bill, USPS could issue semipostals as long as the stamps were mandated by Congress.

Potential Issues for Congress

Overall, many people view semipostal stamps as an easy and inexpensive way to raise both funds from the public and awareness for a given organization or cause. (See **Table 1**.) Supporters of the MSCF stamp also contend the following points:

- Some contend that the MSCF stamp has a great deal of support and leverages additional funds for conservation. They note that funds generated and leveraged by the sale of the stamp have provided a boost to conservation and antipoaching efforts for species targeted by the MSCF.¹⁶ Further, they assert that semipostal

¹² U.S. Postal Service (USPS), “Semipostal Stamp Program,” 81 *Federal Register* 23162, April 20, 2016.

¹³ USPS, “Semipostal Stamp Program,” 66 *Federal Register* 31821, June 12, 2001.

¹⁴ 39 C.F.R. §551 was finalized on April 20, 2016, and went into effect on May 20, 2016.

¹⁵ Email communication to CRS from USPS, February 28, 2017.

¹⁶ For example, see Jane Goodall Institute, “Jane Goodall Institute Praises U.S. Congress for Approval of Wildlife Postage Stamp,” press release, September 27, 2010, at <http://www.janegoodall.org/media/news/jgi-praises-us-congress-approval-wildlife-postage-stamp>.

stamps have the potential to generate greater amounts of funding, as evidenced by the success of the Breast Cancer Research Stamp.

- According to some, the MSCF stamp provides the public with an opportunity to participate in financing conservation and anti-wildlife trafficking efforts for MSCF species.¹⁷
- Some contend that, apart from raising funds for conservation, MSCF stamps can be used to raise public awareness of wildlife trafficking.¹⁸ In addition, some contend that MSCF stamps created in collaboration with efforts in other countries could increase public awareness about wildlife trafficking and conservation on an international scale.¹⁹

Some potential detracting points associated with the issuance of the MSCF stamp and other semipostal stamps include the following:

- In the past, USPS expressed limited interest in selling semipostal stamps. During a Senate hearing in 2000, a USPS representative noted that USPS did not favor the issuance of further semipostal stamps after the Breast Cancer Research Stamp. USPS stated that fundraising was a diversion from the service's core mission and that the philatelic community opposed semipostals on the grounds that they dilute the quality of the stamp program. USPS further noted that choosing among the many worthy causes eager for semipostal revenue would be difficult and requested that Congress help make decisions on what semipostal stamps should be created in the future.²⁰ Given USPS's stated intention in 2016 to issue semipostal stamps under its general authority, the service's position may have changed. Further, if USPS issues more types of semipostal stamps, it is unclear whether the increased competition will decrease sales of the MSCF stamp.
- Some might suggest that causes other than the MSCF could receive wider attention and therefore should be prioritized over the MSCF for semipostal stamp programs. The success of semipostal stamps varies widely. The Breast Cancer Research Stamp has generated several million dollars a year for its cause, but two other semipostal stamps—the “Heroes of 2001” and “Stop Family Violence” semipostal stamps—generated significantly less funding (see **Table 1**).²¹ It is difficult to predict which causes would benefit most from the sale of semipostals.
- Some might contend that future MSCF stamps may not generate sufficient funds to support their existence. No analysis has clarified the precise factors that affect

¹⁷ White House, *National Strategy for Combatting Wildlife Trafficking*, White House, February 2014, p. 9, at <https://www.fws.gov/home/feature/2014/trafficking/national-strategy-wildlife-trafficking.pdf>.

¹⁸ FWS, International Affairs, “Stamp Out Extinction,” at <https://www.fws.gov/international/save-vanishing-species-stamp.html>.

¹⁹ Europe has a long tradition of using semipostal stamps to raise funds for causes. Some of the causes supported by European semipostals include child health, literacy programs, national sports development, and philately (stamp collecting). The Netherlands, for example, has a tradition in which children go door-to-door to sell semipostals with a 50% surcharge to benefit children's health and welfare causes.

²⁰ Testimony of Deborah Willhite, Senior Vice President, Government Relations and Public Policy, USPS, U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, *The Issuance of Semipostal Stamps by the U.S. Postal Service*, 106th Cong., 2nd sess., May 25, 2000, p. 14.

²¹ CRS Report RS22611, *Common Questions About Postage and Stamps*, by (name redacted)

the sales of any particular semipostal. Factors that could affect the success of semipostal sales, such as the MSCF stamp, may include advertising, competition with other semipostal stamps, and popularity of the cause represented by the semipostal stamp.

- Some might be concerned that the range of eligible uses for funds generated by MSCF stamp is limited to a small set of species. They might suggest creating specific or alternative guidelines so that the funds raised address broader international conservation efforts.

Table I. Semipostal Stamp Authorizations

Semipostal Stamp	Statute	Years Issued	Stamps Sold	Funds Raised	Funds Administrator
Breast Cancer Research	P.L. 105-41	1998-present	1.017 billion	\$84.2 million	Department of Defense and National Institutes of Health
Heroes of 2001	P.L. 107-67	2002-2004	132.8 million	\$10.6 million	Federal Emergency Management Agency
Stop Family Violence	P.L. 107-67	2003-2006	45.4 million	\$3.2 million	Department of Health and Human Services
Save Vanishing Species (MSCF Stamp)	P.L. 111-241	2011-present	36.6 million	\$3.9 million	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Sources: CRS Report RS22611, *Common Questions About Postage and Stamps*, by (name redacted) . Data on semipostal sales and revenue received via email from USPS on February 28, 2017.

Notes: The Breast Cancer Research stamp was reauthorized by P.L. 108-199; P.L. 109-100; P.L. 110-150; P.L. 112-80; and P.L. 114-99. The Save the Vanishing Species stamp was reauthorized by P.L. 113-165.

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