

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release April 18, 1978

Levitt 202/343-5634

ENDANGERED ANIMALS IN CAPTIVITY MAY BE RECLASSIFIED

Some wildlife now in U.S. zoos, animal parks, or otherwise captive in this country, and presently listed as "endangered," could be reclassified to a less restrictive status under the Endangered Species Act, according to Associate Director Keith M. Schreiner of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Zoos and other breeders of endangered species have argued that they need such relief from present Federal restrictions which they say hinder effective propagation and husbandry.

The possible change in status was announced in a notice in the April 14, Federal Register. Such a "notice" is not a proposal, but is a step which could precede a proposed rulemaking.

The notice said certain populations of wildlife could be affected. Schreiner explained that in a hypothetical situation, a population of captive zebras in zoos might be so numerous as to warrant a less restrictive status than "endangered," whereas zebras in the wild would remain on the endangered list.

The Federal Register notice invites alternative suggestions, as well as public comment, on the several regulatory approaches open to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Two of the alternative approaches have the common denominator of reclassifying captive wildlife from endangered to the less restrictive "threatened" category and removing the requirement for Federal permits for interstate commerce and for certain forms of "taking." (Taking includes euthanasia as well as capture and other forms of harassment.) All but one alternative would retain controls on import and export by requiring Federal permits.

Alternatives being considered include:

--Reclassifying captive endangered wildlife to threatened, with special rules geared to the biological needs of these species. Permits would be required only to import, export and, in some cases, to take.

--Reclassifying exotic wildlife to threatened, with special rules as outlined above. This would retain controls on domestic endangered species that are not afforded the protection available under import or export controls.

--Reclassifying certain populations based on their "similarity in appearance" to populations in the wild that remain classified as endangered or threatened.

--Deleting selected captive endangered wildlife entirely from listing in any status or category. This would have the effect of removing all controls.

Persons interested in suggesting other alternatives or in commenting on those discussed above have until June 13, 1978, to do so. Requests for copies of the notice and comments should be addressed to the Director (WPO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.