



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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COMMENT PERIOD REOPENED ON RECLASSIFICATION OF LEOPARD

As a result of a major new report on the status of the leopard in Africa, the public comment period has been reopened on a proposal to reclassify the leopard from "endangered" to "threatened" status in sub-Saharan Africa, G. Ray Arnett, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, announced today.

"Endangered" means that a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. "Threatened", a less dire status, means it may become endangered in the foreseeable future.

The proposal, which was published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on March 24, 1980, would reclassify the leopard from endangered to threatened in all African countries south of the Sahara, except in Somalia. The proposal would also allow the importation of leopard trophies from this region that were legally taken by American sport hunters, but would continue the current ban on commercial trade in leopards and leopard hides.

Recently the Fish and Wildlife Service received a new report by P. H. Hamilton, a Kenyan citizen and authority on the leopard and cheetah, which indicates that the leopard had declined in Kenya since the early 1960's as a result of excessive poaching, loss of habitat, deliberate poisoning for predator control, and to a lesser extent uncontrolled sport hunting. Hamilton places the number of leopards in Kenya at between 10,000 and 12,000. Previous estimates by other investigators had placed the number of leopards as high as 25,000 to 35,000.

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As a result of a reduction in poaching, however, Hamilton believes that the leopard is recovering in Kenya. Based on his research in Kenya, he also believes that the leopard cannot be considered truly "endangered" in sub-Saharan Africa, but should be regarded as "threatened". He therefore recommends that the United States reclassify the leopard to threatened status, but continue to insist that the species be maintained on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to protect against commercial exploitation. He also supports the U.S. proposal to allow the importation of leopards legally shot by American sport hunters. Because trophy hunting provides jobs and income for African citizens, landowners, and local governments, it is believed that lifting the ban on importation of trophies would serve as an economic incentive to encourage the conservation of the leopard. Presently the leopard is often regarded as vermin and indiscriminately killed. Hamilton states that the ban on importing legitimately taken leopard trophies has not served any useful purpose and has run counter to the concept of giving the leopard monetary value that will help to justify its continued existence in Africa.

The notice announcing the reopening of the comment period was published in the September 8, 1981, Federal Register. A complete copy of the Hamilton report is available to the public for examination at the Office of Endangered Species, 1000 North Glebe Road, Arlington, Va., from 7:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Free reprints of the 137-page report are not available, but interested persons may obtain photocopies at cost.

Persons wishing to comment on the reclassification of the leopard in light of the Hamilton report should submit their comments to the Director (OES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240, by October 10, 1981. Comments should address the Service's proposed action in view of the Hamilton report only, and should not simply re-state issues involved in the original proposal that have already been raised and discussed.