



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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### AFRICAN ELEPHANT PROPOSED FOR ENDANGERED STATUS

A proposed rule to reclassify most populations of the African elephant from threatened to endangered was announced today by Constance Harriman, the Department of the Interior's Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks.

According to the proposal, populations of the African elephant would be reclassified to endangered status under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) except those occurring in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Populations in these countries would remain classified as threatened because the sizeable elephant populations there are managed under effective conservation programs and their numbers are stable or increasing.

In February 1989, the Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned by several conservation and animal welfare organizations to reclassify the African elephant to endangered status. In response to that petition, the Service, in February 1990, found that populations of the African elephant in most countries within its range warranted being reclassified as endangered. This proposal responds to that petition finding.

"This proposal emphasizes the immediate need to halt the illegal killing of African elephants as well as the need to promote the conservation and scientific management of the species to ensure its long-term survival," Harriman said. She cautioned, however, that details of the proposal could change in light of new information currently being solicited by the Interior Department from the public, and affected African countries in particular. "Before making a final decision, we will carefully review all relevant information submitted in response to this proposal," she said. A final rule is expected within a year.

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More than half the total African elephant population is believed to have been lost during the past decade. The proposal cites the illegal killing of African elephants to supply the ivory market as the major short-term threat, and habitat fragmentation and loss due to agricultural development, urbanization, and desertification as long-term threats facing the African elephant.

While the degree of threat differs from country to country, in general, the absence of adequate regulatory mechanisms--such as active elephant conservation programs, laws, and the capability to effectively enforce those laws and control illegal killing--has hurt many elephant populations.

Harriman noted that the estimated 600,000 elephants remaining on the continent could still provide the basis for healthy and sustainable elephant populations in the future if these populations and the remaining habitat are carefully managed.

This proposal is the most recent of several steps taken by the United States government to help stem the dramatic decline in elephant populations within Africa. The African Elephant Conservation Act (AECA), passed by Congress in 1988, provided a mechanism for funding several major elephant conservation projects in Africa and provided the authority for the June 1989 Presidential ban on all imports of elephant ivory into the United States.

In October 1989, the United States joined the international community effort to transfer the African elephant from Appendix II to the more restrictive Appendix I under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered and Threatened Species (CITES). This transfer was aimed at halting the worldwide commercial trade in elephant products.

The CITES action became effective in January 1990 and is believed to have significantly reduced the international trade in elephant products, including ivory. Data on the specific effects that the AECA and CITES actions have had on elephant populations were not available at the time this proposal was written. That information will be considered, however, in developing the final rule.

The African elephant has been listed as threatened under the ESA since 1978. The additional protection provided to the African elephant by the recent passage of the African Elephant Conservation Act and the transfer of the species to Appendix I

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of CITES is, in some instances, more substantial than protection normally achieved by reclassifying a species to endangered status under the ESA. For example, the importation of all ivory, except for sport-hunted trophies and antique ivory under certain conditions, remains prohibited by the June 1989 AECA moratorium.

Under the proposal for endangered populations, permits would be available only for scientific purposes and/or to enhance the propagation or survival of the species. For threatened populations, permits would additionally be available for zoological exhibition, and for educational or certain other purposes consistent with the ESA, including the importation of sport-hunted trophies under carefully controlled conditions.

Also under the proposal, interstate trade in ivory that was legally imported into the United States prior to the June 9, 1989, AECA moratorium, would be exempt from the general prohibitions against such transactions under most conditions. Permits would not be necessary or available. The general prohibitions against such transactions would continue to apply if they involve illegally imported ivory. Also, interstate trade in sport-hunted trophies imported after the June 9, 1989, AECA moratorium would not be allowed.

Public comments on the proposed rule are encouraged and will be accepted until July 16, 1991, and should be directed to Chief, Office of Scientific Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Room 725, Arlington, VA 22203. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection by appointment from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday in room 750, at the above address. Any final rule will be based on all available information and all public comments received will be considered. For further information, contact Dr. Charles W. Dane, Chief, Office of Scientific Authority, at the above address, or call 703-358-1708.