



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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AFRICAN ELEPHANT TO REMAIN LISTED AS THREATENED:
CONSERVATION EFFORTS PROVE EFFECTIVE

Citing significantly reduced threats to elephants as a result of international conservation efforts, the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced the African elephant will remain listed as threatened rather than be reclassified to endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

John Turner, Service director, said new information obtained during the public comment period on a 1991 proposed reclassification indicates that enhanced protection and the current ivory trade ban have drastically reduced the illegal kill of elephants.

Widespread poaching for ivory during the 1970's and 1980's was severely impacting elephant populations in much of their range. In 1989, the Bush Administration imposed a moratorium on ivory imports and the Service submitted a proposal to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to list the species as Appendix I which was adopted later that year.

In 1991, the Service proposed to reclassify most populations of African elephants as endangered, a status indicating a species is likely to become extinct.

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"We knew it would take time to see how elephant populations would respond to international conservation efforts," said Turner, "and our 1991 proposal acknowledged this. The final rule retaining the threatened status reflects both the success of the U.S.-led ivory trade ban in reducing poaching pressure as well as the improved management, law enforcement, and general protection programs underway in most African countries. Today, I am encouraged by these conservation efforts and pleased reclassification to endangered is not necessary."

The Service's decision, to be published in the August 10, 1992 Federal Register, still prohibits the import of African ivory into the United States, underlining the 1989 ban imposed by President Bush under the African Elephant Conservation Act (AECA).

Interstate trade in ivory legally imported before the 1989 ban is permitted, as is the importation of sport-hunted elephant trophies as long as strict CITES permit conditions and AECA requirements are met.

In making its final determination, the Service considered more complete information on elephant conservation programs in African countries, updates on poaching activity, and reports from a CITES panel of elephant experts that became available at the CITES conference of parties held last March. This information indicates that over-exploitation of elephants, which so severely affected their populations in the 1970's and 1980's, has been controlled through anti-poaching campaigns, assisted by the ivory ban. Many elephant populations have stabilized and some are increasing.

Turner noted that the dramatic reduction in illegal elephant kills and the stabilization in elephant populations occurred while the species was listed as threatened, and the level of protection afforded by that designation will continue.

The current African elephant population numbers approximately 600,000 animals occupying about 2 million square miles of habitat. As in 1978, when the African elephant was first listed as threatened, habitat loss continues to affect the species. Habitat in west African countries is fragmented, and habitat loss still occurs throughout much of the elephant's range due to the pressures of increasing human populations and agricultural encroachment.