



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

**Fish and Wildlife Service**

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### UNITED STATES PREPARES FOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WILDLIFE TRADE

International wildlife trade issues will be the focus of debate as nearly 3,000 delegates from 124 countries gather in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, November 7-18, under the terms of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Signed in Washington, DC, in 1973, CITES is the first international treaty dedicated to the preservation of global biodiversity.

The cornerstone of CITES is international cooperation to ensure protection of wild animals and plants against overexploitation through world trade. Member nations meet every 2 years to discuss ways to improve implementation and enforcement of the treaty and review the population and trade status of numerous animal and plant species. The Fort Lauderdale meeting is the ninth Conference of Parties (COP9).

"This country strongly supports the principles set forth in CITES, as mandated under the U.S. Endangered Species Act," said Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt who also serves as head of the U.S. delegation. "For more than 20 years, CITES has been the symbol of an ever-increasing acknowledgement by the international community of the plight of declining animal and plant species and their habitat around the world."

CITES has been responsible for halting the international ivory trade, establishing worldwide protective measures for rhinos and tigers, stemming the illegal commerce in exotic birds, and monitoring trade in tropical hardwoods and plants.

The treaty includes three appendices of plant and animal species. Member nations must agree to exercise control on importing and exporting listed species. Appendix I contains 700 species threatened with extinction due to international trade. CITES bans all commercial trade in Appendix I species but does allow noncommercial trade if such trade does not jeopardize the species' chances for survival. Permits are required for the importation and exportation of Appendix I species.

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Species listed on Appendix II are those not immediately threatened with extinction but which may become so if trade is not controlled. Countries may allow exportation of Appendix II species if trade is not detrimental to a listed species' survival or its role in its ecosystem. Export permits are necessary.

Under Appendix III, CITES gives member nations the option of unilaterally listing native species already protected within their own borders. This requires proper documentation to export an Appendix III listed species from its country of origin.

Delegates to this conference will make decisions concerning listing new species on the appendices and the transfer of species from one appendix to another. The status of about 200 species will be examined to determine the most appropriate level of protection vis-a-vis international trade.

Species certain to be discussed include the African elephant, minke whale, hippopotamus (whose teeth are in demand as substitutes for elephant ivory), saiga antelope (native to Mongolia and Russia, hunted for its horn), cave swiftlets (whose nests are used in birds' nest soup), and American box turtle (increasingly rare due to its growing popularity as a pet as well as habitat loss).

Delegates will review law enforcement infractions of CITES resulting from illegal trade during the period since the last COP in 1991. It is likely the conference will debate the need for more consistent worldwide enforcement legislation. The United States will recommend revising the listing criteria to ensure more scientific credibility in the process.

"CITES is a remarkable document," said Babbitt. "It allows us to work together as a world community to protect our planet's rich biodiversity."