



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

February 5, 1998

Patricia Fisher 202-208-5634

**AGENCY ISSUES EARLY CALL FOR PUBLIC INPUT ON SPECIES TO BE
CONSIDERED AS U.S. PROPOSALS TO THE 1999 MEETING OF THE
CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public information and comment on animal and plant species that might be considered as candidates for United States proposals to be presented at the 1999 Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The agency's earlier-than-usual request was made to ensure greater involvement of the states, conservation organizations, other Federal agencies, and various interested parties in the review process.

"The Service wants to maximize its ability to present the most comprehensive proposals to the next CITES meeting," said Marshall Jones, the Service's Assistant Director for International Affairs. "By starting the process early, we have ample time to work with our cooperators to develop successful negotiating positions."

Currently, 143 nations including the U.S. belong to CITES, an international treaty designed to control and regulate international trade in certain animal and plant species that are now or may become threatened with extinction.

Each species for which trade is controlled is included in one of three appendices. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction that are or may be affected by trade. No commercial trade is allowed in Appendix I species. Appendix II includes species which, although not necessarily now threatened with extinction, may become so unless their trade is strictly controlled. Any member nation may place a native species on Appendix III in order to monitor its trade and prevent exploitation.

This request for public input concerns only the identification of those animal or plant species as possible candidates for addition, removal, or reclassification in Appendices I and II. Information may be submitted on the status of domestic and foreign species if these species are subject to international trade that may be detrimental to wild populations.

One of the species under consideration for reclassification is the North American population of the gyrfalcon, a raptor found in the arctic and subarctic regions of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Iceland. Because the Service has no evidence that this particular population has ever been threatened due to habitat loss, nest robbing, or trade, the agency is considering a

proposal to transfer the species from Appendix I to Appendix II. In the past, European range states have been concerned about enforcement problems for their own populations if the North American birds were downlisted. However, trade in North American gyrfalcons does not appear to pose a significant threat to the survival of the species.

Another proposal under consideration is to include the timber rattlesnake, a U.S. native species, in Appendix II. Although found in 27 states from New Hampshire and Minnesota south to Texas and Florida, populations have declined greatly over much of their range. In fact, timber rattlesnakes have completely disappeared from Maine and Rhode Island and they are listed as endangered in many northern states. However, these snakes are still being collected for the pet trade, for meat, and for leather goods.

The CITES parties also periodically review species currently listed on the appendices to ensure they are listed appropriately. Because there is no evidence that the Sonoran green toad and the orange-throated whiptail lizard are in international trade, the United States and Mexico have been asked to consider proposing to remove them from the Appendices. Therefore, the Service is asking for biological and trade information on these two species.

In addition, the CITES nations will be reviewing most of the plant species included in the Appendices prior to 1985 to assess whether they are appropriately listed.

The Service is not asking for complete proposals at this time but rather is seeking information describing the status of the species, conservation and management programs, including the effectiveness of enforcement efforts, and both domestic and international trade data. Comments must be submitted by March 31, 1998, which is 60 days from publication in the January 30, 1998, Federal Register.

The next Conference of the Parties is expected to be held in November 1999 in Indonesia.

Comments should be sent to Chief, Office of Scientific Authority, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 750, Arlington, VA 22203. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection by appointment from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday at the Office of Scientific Authority. For further information, please contact Dr. Susan Lieberman, Acting Chief, Office of Scientific Authority. Telephone: 703-358-1708, fax: 703-358-2276, or e-mail: susan_lieberman@fws.gov.