Giant Panda Policy

Questions & Answers

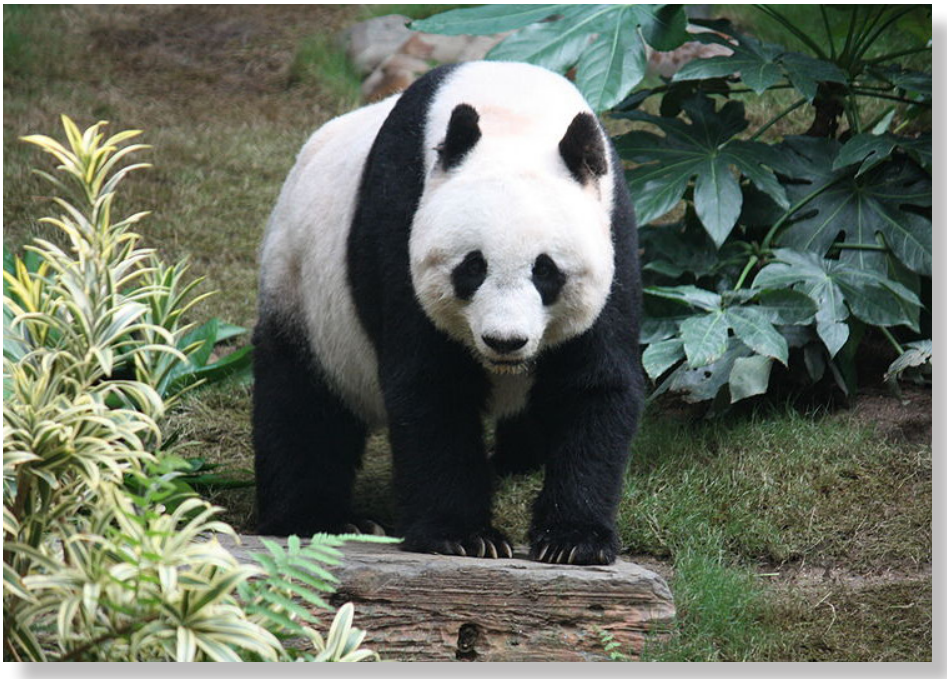
Why have a policy just for pandas?
Giant pandas (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) are protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Any import requires the Fish and Wildlife Service to issue a permit under these wildlife measures. The giant panda is unique. It is highly endangered, with an estimated population of 1,600 animals in the wild, extremely popular with the public worldwide, and capable of generating substantial revenue when displayed. Because of this, giant panda imports have had a controversial history. Conservationists fear humans will "love the panda to death."

What does the policy cover?
The policy clarifies the information considered in making permit findings under CITES and the ESA, and assists persons in filing a complete application for panda import, export, re-export, take, or interstate or foreign commerce. The policy also provides guidance to assist Service decision-makers and staff in reviewing panda permit applications to ensure that permit issuance criteria have been addressed. The policy discusses the purposes for which a permit may be issued and when exhibition of pandas is allowed. It provides guidance to ensure that the import will not contribute to the removal of pandas from the wild, and guidance on the use of funds associated with a panda transfer.

How can an institution meet the criteria set forth in the policy?
The primary goal of the policy is to ensure that permitted activities will directly contribute to the survival and recovery of the wild panda population. To accomplish this goal, the Service will review an application to determine that it is a proposal for scientific research, enhances the sustainability of the captive population, and contributes to the recovery of pandas in the wild. The Service will consider whether the application:

- Outlines how net profits will be calculated and fund disbursement will be monitored, and has a provision to provide an annual accounting report that clearly shows whether a net profit was made and how the funds were used in China.
- Includes a bona fide scientific research proposal, i.e., one that is properly designed using scientific methods focusing on a specific topic. The reseach must advance and/or supplement the scientific knowledge of panda biology and conservation needs and be specifically relevant to the expertise of the institution.
- Addresses how the proposed research, if related to captive breeding, supplements China's conservation program to achieve a self-sustaining captive population.
- Describes the origin of the pandas to be imported and clearly shows that the requested activity did not and will not cause the removal of animals from the wild.



Giant panda in captivity © J. Patrick Fischer

- Contains a plan to ensure that the public display of pandas will not interfere with the research activities.

- Shows that the applicant has the expertise, resources, and facilities to accomplish the stated objectives of the proposed research.

- Shows that the research is part of a coordinated panda conservation effort and that scientific findings will be quickly shared.

- Contains a description of how funds associated with the panda loan (loan money, net profits, or fund-raising dollars) will support high-priority panda conservation projects identified by the Panda Office of the China State Forestry Administration or contained in China's Captive Breeding Plan, with a significant portion of the funds allocated for panda projects in the wild, thus addressing the CITES criteria that the import is not for primarily commercial purposes.

- Is a long-term loan commitment and contains a copy of the loan agreement with the appropriate entity within China.

- Shows that research on captive breeding will be coordinated through the American Zoo and Aquarium Association's Species Survival Plan for giant pandas (or a similar plan) and with China's Captive Breeding Plan.

What are the purposes and circumstances under which a permit can be issued?
Under the policy, permits can be issued for the following:

- Scientific research, if the research is directly linked and will contribute to the recovery of pandas in the wild.

- Is a long-term loan commitment and contains a copy of the loan agreement with the appropriate entity within China.

- A combination of both research and conservation activities that enhance the survival of the species.

Before the Service can issue a permit, it must make the following findings under CITES and the ESA:

- The import is not for primarily commercial purposes.

- The purpose of the import is not detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

- The importer has inappropriate facilities and expertise to care for the pandas.

- The purpose of the import is consistent with the ESA (i.e., for scientific research or for enhancement of the survival or propagation of the species-purposes that benefit the panda in the wild).

- The import will not jeopardize the survival of panda populations in the wild.

Captive panda feeding on bamboo. Roddy Gabel/USFWS

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
International Affairs
Division of Management Authority
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 212
Arlington, VA 22203
703/358-2104 or 800/358-2104
Fax 703/358-2281
e-mail: managementauthority@fws.gov
www.fws.gov/international
www.fws.gov/international/DMA_DSA/Permits/Permits_home.html

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