U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

What is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)?

In the early 1960s, international discussion began focusing on the rate at which the world's wild animals and plants were being threatened by unregulated international trade.

CITES entered into force in 1975, and became the only global treaty to ensure that international trade in plants and animals does not threaten their survival in the wild. It provides a framework for cooperation and collaboration among nations to prevent decline in wild populations of animals and plants. Currently 175 countries, including the United States, implement CITES with new countries joining regularly.

Who is involved?

A Secretariat, located in Geneva, Switzerland, administers the treaty. Permanent committees (Standing, Animals, and Plants Committees) provide technical and scientific support to member countries (called Parties). Each Party designates Management and Scientific Authorities to process permits, make legal and scientific findings, and monitor trade.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) meets approximately every three years to review CITES implementation and assess the status of species in trade. Through the adoption of resolutions and species proposals, the COP develops practical solutions to complex wildlife trade problems.

Non-governmental organizations, representing conservation, animal welfare, trade, zoological, botanical, and scientific interests, participate as non-voting observers at COPs and

The elephant-shaped CITES logo was first used at CoP3 in 1981. The original version, a simple black and white design, has since evolved to include species protected by CITES.

Animals, Plants, and Standing Committee meetings.

How are species protected?

Cacti, iguanas, and parrots represent some of the approximately 35,000 species protected by CITES. Species protected under CITES are listed in one of three appendices.

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and provides the greatest level of protection, including restrictions on commercial trade.

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Hyacinth Macaw, CITES Appendix I

Examples include gorillas, sea turtles, most lady slipper orchids, and giant pandas.

- Appendix II includes species that, although currently not threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. It also includes species that resemble other listed species and need to be regulated in order to effectively control the trade in those other listed species. Most CITES species are listed in this appendix, including American ginseng, paddlefish, lions, American alligators, mahogany, and many corals.

- Appendix III includes species for which a range country has asked other Parties to help in controlling international trade. Examples include map turtles, walrus and Cape stag beetles.

How does CITES monitor trade?

The backbone of CITES is the permit system that facilitates international cooperation in conservation and trade monitoring. Permits are issued only if a country's Management and Scientific Authorities determine that trade is legal and does not threaten the species' survival in the wild.

The use of standardized permit forms allows inspection officials at ports of export and import to quickly verify that CITES specimens are properly documented. They also facilitate the collection of species-specific trade data, which are used in the creation of annual reports. These data are used to determine trends in trade and ensure that trade in wildlife is sustainable.

This trade monitoring has created a substantial body of information on the management and use of CITES species worldwide.

Southern White Rhinoceros, CITES Appendices I & II

Karl Stomayer/USFWS

What has CITES achieved and where is it going?

Over the last several decades, CITES has helped ensure global conservation of species. As online markets and other technological advances make it possible to sell and ship wildlife anywhere in the world and as issues of wildlife use grow ever more complex, CITES provides tools to effectively conserve the world's diverse natural resources.

Increased commitment by Parties to effectively implement the treaty has helped control global over-exploitation of wildlife and improved legislation at the national level to enforce CITES. Increased regional communication among Parties has also improved conservation of wildlife across political borders.

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Autumn lady's tresses orchid, CITES Appendix II

The Parties have adopted a 5-year strategic vision to guide CITES through 2013. The plan sets the following goals:

- Ensure compliance with and implementation and enforcement of the Convention.
- Secure the necessary financial resources and means for the operation and implementation of the Convention.
- Contribute to significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by ensuring that CITES and other multilateral instruments and processes are coherent and mutually supportive.

What can I do to help?

CITES, like most laws and treaties, needs the cooperation and support of the public. Everyone, from individuals to businesses, has a role to play in making the treaty effective by:

- Becoming aware of what wildlife and wildlife products are protected, and obtaining required permits.
- Understanding how unsustainable wildlife trade impacts wild populations.
- Educating others on the importance of conserving the animals and plants that comprise the diverse life of this planet.
- Reporting violations of CITES and other federal wildlife laws.

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African spurred tortoise, CITES Appendix II

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