

U.S. Efforts to Regulate Tiger Trade

What is the status of tigers in the wild and what are the major conservation threats to them?

The tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is the largest and perhaps the best known of the wild cats. It is also one of the most imperiled. Nine subspecies of tiger are generally recognized, of which three are now considered extinct. Although the tiger once ranged across Asia from eastern Turkey to the Russian Far East, it currently survives only in scattered populations from India to Viet Nam, south to Indonesia, and China and the Russian Far East. The principal threats to wild tiger populations are illegal hunting and trade, loss of habitat, and a declining tiger prey base. Additionally, the growing popularity and use of tiger parts and products in traditional medicine poses a significant threat to wild tiger populations. By current estimates, there are only 3,200 to 3,500 tigers remaining in the wild worldwide.

What U.S. laws and international agreements protect tigers?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the principal Federal agency responsible for implementing and enforcing the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Both the ESA and CITES afford protection to endangered species and wildlife of global concern. The United States has worked tirelessly along with other CITES member countries to encourage the adoption of measures aimed at protecting wild tiger populations from poaching and illegal trade, and ensuring that breeding of tigers in captivity supports conservation goals. The ESA specifically prohibits the interstate and foreign commerce in listed species, such as the tiger, and their parts and products without a permit or authorization from the Service. The Service's approximately 200 Special Agents and 120 Wildlife Inspectors within its Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) help control illegal trade and interstate sale of tigers and their parts and products.



Amur tiger - also called Siberian tiger (*Panthera tigris altaica*)
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In 1994, the U.S. Congress passed the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act (RTCA) to assist in the conservation of rhinoceroses and tigers by establishing the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund. Through this Fund, the Service supports anti-poaching programs, habitat and ecosystem management, development of nature reserves, wildlife surveys and monitoring, management of human-wildlife conflict, public awareness campaigns, and other conservation-related efforts for rhinoceroses and tigers.

The RTCA was amended in 1998 to prohibit the sale, importation, and exportation of products intended for human use containing, or labeled or advertised as containing, any substance derived from any species of rhinoceros or tiger.

The RTCA labeling provision authorizes OLE to seize tiger and rhinoceros products directly from vendors, distributors, shippers, or importers, and provides substantial criminal and civil penalties for violators. In conjunction with CITES and the ESA, the RTCA is a powerful tool in combating the global trade in products containing tiger and rhinoceros parts.

FAST FACT:

Tigers are classified by IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, as Endangered. In addition, tigers are listed as Endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act of 1973.

How are captive tigers in the United States regulated?

The 2003 Captive Wildlife Safety Act (CWSA) and associated regulations gave the Service a new enforcement tool to help keep large cats, including tigers, in responsible hands. Except for certain specified groups and persons or institutions licensed or registered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) under the Animal Welfare Act, the CWSA makes it illegal to import, export, transport, sell, receive, acquire, or purchase, in interstate or foreign commerce, live large cats (lion, tiger, leopard, snow leopard, cheetah, jaguar, and cougar, including all subspecies and hybrids of these species). While there is no Federal authority to regulate or monitor ownership of live tigers, a number of States and local jurisdictions have regulations controlling the possession and intrastate sale of big cats.

FAST FACT:

Under the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act, it is illegal to import or sell any products intended for human consumption that contain, or are labeled as containing, any substance derived from rhinoceroses or tigers.

What U.S. enforcement efforts are being taken to control the trade in tigers?

The Service investigates violations of U.S. wildlife laws and treaties that protect tigers and works to intercept illegal imports of tiger parts and products at the nation's ports of entry. In recent years, these efforts have included identifying, investigating, and intercepting Internet-based trafficking in tiger commodities such as live animals, skins, rugs, meat, claws, and medicinals. Service casework has documented violations of the ESA, the Federal smuggling statute, and the RTCA.

Policing the medicinal trade remains a priority. Such products are among those commonly seized on import by Service wildlife inspectors. In the 5-year period during 2005-2009, Service enforcement officers worked on more than 300 cases involving violations of the RTCA. Service intelligence analysts recently launched a focused initiative to target potential commercial imports of Asian medicinals and assist inspectors at key ports of entry in screening high-risk shipments for this type of trafficking.

Service officers conduct inspection sweeps of grocery stores and medicinal markets potentially selling tiger and

FAST FACT:

Tigers once ranged widely across Asia, from Turkey to the Russian Far East, but have now lost more than 90% of their historic range. Habitat loss and poaching are considered to be the greatest threats to tigers.

other medicinals made from endangered species in cities that range from Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Dallas/Fort Worth to Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Chicago. Recent port-based inspection efforts have targeted medicinal shipments imported into Los Angeles via ocean cargo and medicinals arriving at international mail facilities in New York and Jersey City.

The Service Office of Law Enforcement also works closely with enforcement counterparts around the world to address tiger trafficking. Examples include sharing intelligence with foreign investigative agencies, maintaining liaison with the CITES Secretariat and Interpol, and providing training and investigative assistance on the ground to the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN). In recent years, this partnership effort has included stationing a Service special agent in Bangkok as part of an ASEAN-WEN Support Program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.



Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*)
Jessie Cohen/Smithsonian National Zoo

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