



NOTICE TO THE WILDLIFE IMPORT/EXPORT COMMUNITY



August 29, 2011

Subject: Denied Issuance of CITES Permits for Export of Paddlefish from Impounded Waters in Tennessee Harvested in the 2010-2011 Fishing Season

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is unable to find that the export of paddlefish (*Polyodon spathula*) and its products harvested from impounded waters¹ (such as reservoirs and lakes), in Tennessee during the 2010-2011 fishing season is not detrimental to the survival of the species. Since we are unable to make a positive finding, export permits under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) will be denied for paddlefish and its products from impounded waters in Tennessee.

The Service's finding is based on the science-based recommendations published in a peer-reviewed journal article by Scholten and Bettoli (2005), "*Population characteristics and assessment of overfishing for an exploited paddlefish population in the lower Tennessee River.*" Bettoli and Scholten studied paddlefish populations in Kentucky Lake, Tennessee, and found that a minimum harvest length limit of 36 inches would protect only 7% of the mature female paddlefish from harvest. In 2009, the Service found that protecting only 7% of the mature females from harvest was inadequate to sustain the paddlefish population in Kentucky Lake, as it allows the removal of a large portion of the reproductive population which would negatively affect recruitment and growth of strong year-classes of paddlefish.

The current commercial paddlefish fishing regulations in Tennessee for all open waters, except the Mississippi River, require a length limit of 36 inches. Bettoli et al. (2009) found that paddlefish populations in Tennessee have been in decline for several decades. There are other mainstem impoundments (reservoirs and lakes) in Tennessee, similar to Kentucky Lake, including but not limited to Barkley Lake, Chickamauga Lake, and Cheatham Lake, and the Service is concerned that the harvest length limit of 36 inches may also be protecting only 7% of the mature female paddlefish in those impounded water bodies. In the absence of peer-reviewed, site-specific research that allays our concerns, we are unable to find that the export of paddlefish and its products from those impounded waters, such as reservoirs and lakes, in Tennessee will not be detrimental to the survival of the species.

This finding affects the State of Tennessee only. The denial of CITES exports permits for paddlefish and its products from impounded waters in Tennessee during the

¹ Impounded water, such as a reservoir or lake, is formed by a dam, weir or other structure that raises the water level above its natural level.

completed 2010-2011 fishing season will not impact the sale of caviar domestically in the United States. Roe buyers in Tennessee and the caviar sellers/exporters nationwide will likely be impacted because they will not be able to export caviar harvested from impoundments in Tennessee even though they can sell it domestically.

Action: The caviar trade should be aware that the Service will not be able to issue export permits under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) for paddlefish and its products from impounded waters in Tennessee harvested in the 2010-2011 fishing season, which ended April 15, 2011.

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