

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## AFRICAN ELEPHANT PROPOSED AS A THREATENED SPECIES

The African elephant, the world's largest land animal, has been proposed for listing as a threatened species by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Associate Director Keith M. Schreiner announced today.

The proposal was published in the January 16, 1978, Federal Register.

The African elephant has declined in many parts of its range in recent years because of loss of habitat caused by an expanding human population and illegal killing for ivory. About 1,300,000 elephants are estimated to remain, but according to Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton, Chairman of the Elephant Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, as many as 100,000 to 400,000 are being lost each year from ivory poaching alone. Because there are still some large populations, however, some of which are stable and carefully protected, the Fish and Wildlife Service does not believe that the elephant is in immediate danger of extinction. For this reason, the Service proposes to classify the species as threatened rather than endangered.

The elephant once occupied all of Africa, except for extremely dry areas. Today it is found in 33 countries south of the Sahara Desert, but it is progressively losing habitat in most of these areas as human settlements and farms expand. In western and southern Africa, the species has

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held out only in remote border areas or in small, isolated patches of suitable habitat. Many elephants are killed because they are considered a threat to man and his crops and settlements, and others die because the remaining habitat cannot support them. Certain elephant "population explosions" that have recently received publicity are often associated with forced crowding imposed by man, and actually result from humans encroaching on former elephant habitat, rather than the opposite. In any case, these occur only on a small percentage of the overall range of the species.

Because of its ivory, the elephant is one of the world's most commercially valuable species. Within the last few years, illegal killing has increased along with a tenfold rise in the price of ivory. Poaching appears to have been largely responsible for a drastic reduction of elephants in Uganda, and for eliminating nearly half of the elephants in Kenya, since the early 1970's. If large-scale poaching continues, the still large populations of elephants in eastern and central Africa could be further reduced, and the remnant populations in western Africa could be entirely wiped out.

The Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes that ivory may be taken from elephants that die of natural causes or are killed legally without threatening the species. The sale of such ivory could provide extra funds for conservation programs or could at least provide an economic incentive for such programs. On the other hand, legal sales could stimulate poaching, and it may be impossible to determine whether a particular product was obtained legally or illegally.

The Service acknowledges that there is no easy solution to this problem, and so, for the first time in a proposal of this type, it has issued a series of options to be considered by the public, scientific

community, government officials, and commercial interests. Under each option the elephant would be listed as threatened, but the options propose different measures regarding the importation and use of elephant products.

Option I would apply all the standard prohibitions for threatened species to the African elephant, and would essentially end legal commercial import of ivory and other elephant products into the United States. Permits for exceptions, however, would be available, and would include economic hardship permits that could allow some otherwise prohibited commercial activity for a limited period.

Option II would allow the importation and use of elephant products only from nations that had ratified the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The African elephant is on Appendix II of the Convention, which means that import into the United States would be allowed only if the nation of origin issues an export permit certifying that the item involved was taken legally and export will not be detrimental to the species. The United States has ratified the Convention, and under this option would be accepting the judgment of its fellow members.

Option III would allow importation only from nations that could provide satisfactory certification and evidence that exports to the United States would be consistent with the conservation of the African elephant. This option would give the United States a basis for evaluating the conservation programs of exporting countries in which the species is present.

Option IV would provide for importation of elephant parts and products from countries that may not have elephant populations, if such countries could demonstrate that the product involved originated in a nation meeting the criteria in Options II or III. Such an arrangement should be considered because most ivory that enters the United States probably first goes through a third country where the raw material is made into a finished product.

One of the major problems that the Fish and Wildlife Service faces is lack of knowledge about the total world trade in African elephants and their parts and products. To overcome this problem the Service is in the process of contracting a survey of the world trade in elephant products. It is anticipated that it will take about a year to get the needed information, but this will not be a deterrent to publishing a final rulemaking on the proposal to list the African elephant if the facts available at the time support the proposal.

In any final rulemaking, the Service may issue some variation of one or more of these options, but does not presently contemplate adopting a measure that is more restrictive than those proposed. The Service will consider comments and suggestions that call for regulations other than the specific choices set forth above.

Interested persons have until March 20, 1978, to comment on the proposal. Comments should be addressed to the Director (FWS/OES), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.