

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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AFRICAN ELEPHANT LISTED AS THREATENED

The African elephant, the largest living land mammal, is being listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Director Lynn A. Greenwalt said today.

Though it once was found in immense numbers, the African elephant's population has been declining for many years because of habitat loss and world demand for ivory. Current African elephant populations are estimated to total between 1 million and 1.4 million animals, but growing demand for ivory makes them vulnerable to possible future endangerment if they are not protected.

In establishing protective regulations for the African elephant, the Service was most concerned with meaningful control of commercial exploitation. Import of African elephant parts or products into the United States, therefore, will be allowed only from those nations which are members of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

An important consideration in this decision was the assurance by Britain that Hong Kong would formally agree to apply all provisions of CITES to ivory imports and exports. Hong Kong had earlier declined to fully regulate trade in ivory in accordance with the Convention, although it is a member. Hong Kong is a center of world ivory trade, and this

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decision to regulate ivory trade in accordance with CITES means that all ivory passing through Hong Kong will be affected and not just the 30 percent that is normally shipped to the United States.

American tourists traveling abroad should be aware that curios or other ivory products which they purchase will be subject to the regulations protecting the African elephant, and only those products which originate in nations which are members of CITES will be allowed to be imported into the United States. Firms in the United States engaged in interstate commercial use of ivory will be restricted to use of ivory originating in member nations of CITES and will be subject to threatened species permits.

Because the African elephant is an Appendix II species under CITES, exports from member nations must be accompanied by an export permit which establishes that the elephants were legally taken and that such taking was not detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild. The African nations with significant elephant populations that are also members of CITES include Zaire, Botswana, and South Africa. Together they account for about 27 percent of the total elephant population. Other African nations that have indicated they intend to become members of CITES in the near future will increase to 56 percent the elephant population under regulation by CITES members.

No commercial import of African elephant parts or products will be allowed into the United States from nations which are not members of CITES.

To gain more information on the implications of trade in ivory as it relates to elephant conservation, the Service has contracted for a special study through the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) with the internationally known elephant scientist Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton.

A complete curtailment of trade in elephant products would be undesirable since economic benefit is the main incentive in some African countries for properly managing elephant populations. If all trade were curtailed, the elephant could quickly be viewed as nothing more than a pest in these areas and attempts could be made to exterminate it to prevent agricultural damage.

If recommendations from the study or information from the Service's monitoring of the effectiveness of its regulations indicate that the present system of elephant protection is not adequate, immediate steps will be taken to implement more stringent protective measure, Director Greenwalt said.

To strengthen present requirements for reexport under CITES which have been criticized as inadequate, the United States will develop proposals to strengthen the Convention's reexport certification procedures and will present them at the next meeting of member countries in March 1979 in Costa Rica.