

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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## WILDLIFE SPECIES PROTECTED BY THE ENDANGERED SPECIES TREATY MAY BE RECLASSIFIED

Twelve of the 134 species of native U.S. wildlife currently listed in appendices to the International Endangered Species Convention are being recommended for reclassification according to Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The recommendations, published in the May 3, 1978, Federal Register, are the preliminary results of a survey of the biological and trade status of the species. The survey was begun by the Service earlier this year to determine if the species are appropriately listed in the appendices.

The Federal Register notice is not a proposal, but it is a step that could precede a proposed rulemaking. It invites information and public comment on the recommendations. Further study of these species may lead the Service to formulate proposals to amend the appendices. Such proposals will be submitted for consideration by the nations that are parties to this treaty at their next meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica, in March 1979.

The endangered species treaty, formally called the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, has been ratified by 44 nations. The Convention applies international trade controls to plant and animal species on three lists of appendices, controls which vary according to the degree to which the species are threatened by trade with extinction. These recommendations concern only the Convention and not the U.S. Endangered Species Act under which certain of these species are listed.

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Based on the results of this survey, the Service is recommending that 12 of the species be reclassified. It recommends that the bald eagle in Alaska, American alligator, and southern sea otter be transferred from Appendix I (species threatened with extinction) to Appendix II (species potentially threatened with extinction by international trade). It is also recommending that the U.S. population of the American crocodile be transferred from Appendix II to Appendix I. Species on Appendix I recommended for complete removal are the northern elephant seal, West Indian monk seal, Mexican duck, longjaw cisco (a fish), blue pike, yellow-blossom mussel, and Sampson's pearly mussel. The American kestrel and greater prairie chicken are recommended for deletion from Appendix II.

A change in the status of the alligator from Appendix I to II, would permit international commerce in this species. However, this would first require a modification in the regulations protecting the alligator issued under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The Fish and Wildlife Service is currently considering such a change.

The Service identified 33 of the 134 native species as being appropriately placed in their present listings according to criteria adopted by the party nations. These include several species of great whales, the polar bear, manatee, Sonoran pronghorn, a number of falcons including the peregrine, and the sea turtles.

The Service has found that another 31 species should be reclassified because of their biological status, trade status, or both. These include the gray wolf, grizzly bear, bighorn sheep, golden eagle, and puma. However, the criteria for changes as adopted by the parties to the Convention prevent some appropriate changes being made. Therefore, the Service is considering proposing changes in listing and delisting criteria.

Four species are recommended to be kept in Appendix II because they are similar in appearance to other protected species or populations and may well need protection in their own right. These are the southern sea otter, river otter, Mexican pronghorn, and golden eagle.

Finally, there are 64 species for which biological and trade information is insufficient to indicate that reclassification is needed. These include the bobcat, lynx, and river otter which are on Appendix II and whose pelts are in high demand. The Fish and Wildlife Service believes that since their population status is still poorly understood they should remain on Appendix II. However, the United States may try to establish some of these as species to be "monitored" until more is known about them. Currently the Endangered Species Scientific Authority places limits on the number of these species which can be exported.

Persons interested in commenting on these recommendations have until July 3, 1978, to do so. Comments and requests for copies of the notice should be addressed to the Director (WPO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

The Service is holding a public meeting to discuss the survey at 9 a.m. on May 31, 1978, in the auditorium of the Matomic Building, 1717 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. Persons planning to attend are asked to inform Ms. Joan Caton, Federal Wildlife Permit Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240, (202) 632-8796.