



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

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UNITED STATES TO REVIEW STATUS OF DECLINING AFRICAN ELEPHANT,  
INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN ANNOUNCES

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan announced today that he has directed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a full status review to determine whether the African elephant should be reclassified from its current status as a "threatened" species to the more severely imperiled "endangered" listing.

"I am deeply concerned about the future of the African elephant," Lujan said. "Its numbers are declining at a rate of about 8 percent each year, mostly because of poaching for illegal ivory trade."

Lujan said he is sending Susan Recce Lamson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, to Nairobi, Kenya, this month as a member of the U.S. delegation to the meeting of the governing council of the United Nations Environmental Program in order to discuss the elephant situation with African government officials.

The Department of the Interior was petitioned in February 1989 to reclassify the elephant from its current status as a "threatened" species to "endangered" status under emergency provisions of the Endangered Species Act. Reclassification to

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"endangered" would ban all importation of ivory into the United States, including trophies taken in legal sport hunts, and prohibit interstate commerce in ivory, except under permits, which are available only for conservation purposes.

Lujan said the petition presented to the Department of the Interior provides evidence that a reclassification to "endangered" may be warranted, and that Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service will proceed immediately with a full status review of the species including an opportunity for public comment.

"We have already taken a number of steps to reduce illegal ivory trade, and are continuing to work with other countries to deal with this international conservation problem," Lujan said.

Under the African Elephant Conservation Act of 1988, the Fish and Wildlife Service already has banned ivory importations from certain countries, and is currently reviewing whether the ban should be extended to include additional countries.

Service representatives will meet this summer with representatives of other nations which have signed the Convention on International Trade In Endangered Species (CITES) to develop African elephant conservation strategies.

Service officials will propose the elephant for the more restrictive "Appendix I" CITES listing from its present "Appendix II" classification at the next full meeting of member nations in October 1989. Reclassification to "Appendix I" would end all commercial ivory trade among the 101 member nations.

In the past, emergency listings under the Endangered Species Act have been used only for species that are in imminent danger of extinction because of very low numbers and immediate threat to their habitat. Although the elephant does not fit these criteria, Secretary Lujan said, "This does not lessen our deep concern for the African elephant and our determination to ensure its survival."

# FACT SHEET — AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

- o African elephants occur in 34 nations from the southern edge of the Sahara to South Africa.
- o Estimates of numbers range from 400,000 to 700,000, down from 1.5 million in 1978.
- o Poaching for the illegal ivory trade is the major cause of the decline. Poachers are believed to take 200 to 300 elephants every day. Ivory trade is strictly regulated under the 101-nation Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), but 80 percent of the ivory trade is believed to be occurring illegally outside the CITES system.
- o The African elephant is currently classified as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act and on "Appendix II" of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It is also protected under the African Elephant Conservation Act of 1988.
- o The Fish and Wildlife Service will soon publish a finding that the petition presents sufficient evidence that reclassification of the elephant to "endangered" may be warranted, and will announce a full status review for the species with an opportunity for public comment. The Service must announce the findings of its status review no later than February 1990 and at that time decide whether to proceed with a formal proposal to reclassify the elephant from "threatened" to "endangered."
- o Under the authority of the African Elephant Conservation Act of 1988, the Fish and Wildlife Service already has banned the importation of ivory from all countries that are not parties to CITES and from Somalia, which the United States has found to be violating CITES ivory trade regulations. The Service has requested information from all 34 elephant producing countries to determine the adequacy of their conservation programs and is reviewing whether the importation ban should be extended to include additional ivory-producing or intermediary countries.
- o The Department of the Interior is a member of the African Elephant Working Group composed of CITES ivory producer and consumer nations. In July 1989 the Working Group will meet in Botswana to develop African elephant conservation strategies. Successful elephant conservation strategies must include ecological, economic, social, diplomatic, and cultural components. The State Department and conservation groups are actively working with the Department of the Interior to develop such strategies.

- o The Service is considering proposing the elephant for reclassification from "Appendix II" to the more restrictive "Appendix I" CITES list at the next full meeting of the party nations in October 1989.
- o Reclassification to "Appendix I" would prohibit all commercial ivory importation but would permit trophy imports. Some African nations and world conservation groups believe that permitting some sport hunting provides an economic incentive for poor African countries to preserve elephants and their habitats.
- o On May 5 the Fish and Wildlife Service proposed revised regulations governing ivory importations into the United States. The proposed regulations are based on the elephant's current "threatened" status and would need changes if the elephant is reclassified to "endangered."
- o The United States imports about 10 - 12 percent of the annual exports of ivory from Africa. In 1988, the United States imported 2,248 commercial shipments of ivory valued at \$32.2 million and 112 hunting trophies. Sixty-five percent of the ivory imported to the United States comes from Hong Kong, which is the major world ivory dealer and carver. Japan is the major world consumer of ivory.