



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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**ENDANGERED STATUS GIVEN TO WILD CHIMPANZEES;
CERTAIN CAPTIVE POPULATIONS REMAIN THREATENED**

The Interior Department Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Constance Harriman, announced today that wild populations of the chimpanzee and all populations of the pygmy chimpanzee are to be reclassified from their current "threatened" status to the more critical "endangered" status under the United States Endangered Species Act. Captive chimpanzees are to remain listed as threatened and subject to special regulation.

"Most populations of wild chimpanzees have deteriorated to such an extent in the last decade that 'endangered' best describes their status in the wild," Harriman said. "This action provides wild chimpanzees additional protection under the Endangered Species Act and should provide a strong deterrent to individuals who illegally remove chimps from dwindling wild populations."

The Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will continue to employ current special regulations to govern captive chimpanzee populations held in the United States. The agency also will tighten import restrictions on captive chimpanzees from countries having wild populations in order to discourage any further taking of chimpanzees from the wild.

The Service proposed this action in February 1989 after conducting a comprehensive status review of wild chimpanzees and pygmy chimpanzees. The review was prompted by a petition to reclassify the species submitted by the Jane Goodall Institute, World Wildlife Fund, and the Humane Society of the United States in November 1987. The petition presented evidence of a drastic decline in wild chimpanzee populations due to massive habitat destruction, fragmentation of populations, excessive local hunting, and international trade.

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The chimpanzee has disappeared from 5 of the 25 countries in which it is known to have occurred. Its numbers have been reduced to fewer than 1,000 individuals in 10 countries; to fewer than 5,000 in 6 others; and to fewer than 10,000 in 2 of the remaining 4 countries. The estimate of total wild chimpanzee numbers is approximately 175,000.

An estimated 1,100 to 1,450 chimpanzees are held by biomedical facilities in the United States, and many are part of a national chimpanzee breeding program. Without the availability of these captive chimpanzees, the Fish and Wildlife Service believes research probably would be done by others, perhaps in foreign countries using wild-caught animals and their progeny. Thus, the Service believes severe restrictions on the use of captive animals in the United States could both discourage breeding efforts here and lead to greater demand for wild-caught animals elsewhere. The Service will closely monitor the viability of U.S. captive populations.

The pygmy chimpanzee occurs only in Zaire. It is considered common only in a few scattered localities, with the most reliable population estimate being around 15,000 animals. It is threatened primarily by habitat loss through slash-and-burn agriculture and commercial logging, and by local taking for food, pets, or use in religious rituals. The pygmy chimpanzee actually is about the same size as the chimpanzee but has a narrower chest and larger lower limbs.

Very few chimpanzees have been legally imported to the United States since the chimpanzee was listed as a threatened species in 1976. However, commercial trade has continued elsewhere, and there has been a trend toward the killing of adult females both for local use as meat and in order to secure young chimps for export. Chimpanzees reproduce slowly, with few adult females raising more than two young to maturity.

According to Dr. Goodall, "The continued removal of infants from wild populations (even if it does not involve the killing of breeding females) will, within a relatively short period of time, bring wild chimpanzees to the verge of extinction in Africa." Chimpanzees also are susceptible to many of the diseases that afflict people, and wild populations are being exposed to infectious diseases as they come into increasing contact with expanding human populations.

Reclassification of the species will take effect upon notice in today's Federal Register.