



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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IMPORT/EXPORT USER FEE EXEMPTION PROPOSED FOR SOME SMALL BUSINESSES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to exempt certain wildlife shipments containing furs, hides, and skins from user fees charged under its wildlife import/export regulations. "Our goal in the proposed rule is to provide economic relief to small businesses and individuals while maintaining an efficient inspection program for wildlife trade," said Kevin Adams, chief of the Service's Division of Law Enforcement.

The Service published a proposed rule in the January 22, 1998, Federal Register and invites public comment on the suggested fee exemption.

Commercial importers and exporters of wildlife and wildlife products now pay user fees for each shipment they bring into or out of the United States. These fees include a \$55 inspection fee at the Nation's 13 designated ports and higher administrative fees if goods are shipped through other approved locations. The current fee system, established in 1996, allows the Service to recoup more of the costs of the wildlife inspection program from the companies that use it.

The proposed rule would waive these basic inspection and administrative fees for certain shipments. The fee exemption would apply only to shipments containing 100 or fewer raw furs; raw, salted, or crusted hides or skins; or separate parts of furs, hides, and skins from animals legally taken from the wild in the United States, Canada, or Mexico, that are imported or exported between the United States and Canada or Mexico.

The exemption would not cover shipments that require permits because they contain injurious wildlife, endangered and threatened species, protected marine mammals, migratory birds, or animals and plants subject to trade controls under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Nor would it apply to manufactured products or live animals of any kind.

To qualify for the proposed fee exemption, the wildlife shipment must be imported or exported by the person who took the animal from the wild or by a member of that person's immediate family: spouse, parent, sibling, or child. The contents of the shipment cannot have been previously sold, and the importer or exporter must hold a valid wildlife import/export license.

These criteria are intended to limit the fee exemption to small, low-volume businesses that trade furs, skins, or hides on a small scale, or to individuals who hunt or trap as a hobby or to supplement their income. "We've carefully tried to focus on small shippers who are disproportionately affected by user fees," Adams explained.

Importers and exporters covered by the exemption will still have to obtain an import/export license from the Service at an annual cost of \$50, pay any overtime fees or other charges associated with inspection and clearance of the shipment, and complete and file the declaration form required for wildlife imports and exports. They will also be required to sign a statement certifying that they or a family member took the animals from the wild.

The Service's wildlife inspection program helps the Nation control the importation and exportation of wildlife and wildlife products. Its staff of trained inspectors stationed at U.S. ports of entry and border crossings provides a frontline defense against illegal wildlife trafficking--a threat to animal species worldwide.

Comments on the proposed user fee exemption should be submitted to the Service by March 23, 1998. Comments may be sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Law Enforcement, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 500, Arlington, VA 22203-3247.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 511 national wildlife refuges covering 92 million acres, as well as 67 national fish hatcheries.

The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes Federal excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state wildlife agencies. This program is a cornerstone of the Nation's wildlife management efforts, funding fish and wildlife restoration, boating access, hunter education, shooting ranges, and related projects across America.