

Preparing for the 20th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES

What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) entered into force in 1975, and became the only treaty to ensure that international trade in plants and animals does not threaten their survival in the wild. A country that has agreed to implement CITES is called a Party to CITES. The United States was the first country to become a Party to CITES. Currently there are 184 Parties, including the United States, 183 other member countries, and the European Union.

CITES is administered through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). A Secretariat, located in Geneva, Switzerland, oversees the treaty. The Secretariat:

1. Provides Parties with trade information and technical support
2. Acts as a liaison among Parties
3. Contracts trade duties
4. Informs governments and the public about CITES wildlife trade developments
5. Investigates possible CITES violations and trade threats to wildlife
6. Organizes meetings of the Conference of the Parties

How are species protected by CITES?

Species protected by CITES are included in one of three appendices.

Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and provides the greatest level of protection, including restrictions on commercial trade. Examples of species listed in Appendix I include gorillas, sea turtles, most lady slipper orchids, and giant pandas.



The elephant-shaped CITES logo was first used at CoP3 in 1981. The original version, a simple black and white design, has since evolved to include species protected by CITES

Appendix II includes species that, although not necessarily threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. Most CITES species are included in this appendix, including American ginseng, paddlefish, African lions, and many corals.

Appendix III includes species protected by at least one country, which needs assistance from other Parties to regulate trade. Examples of species currently listed in Appendix III include map turtles, walrus, and Cape stag beetles.

Changes to Appendices I and II must be proposed at a meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) and agreed to by a two-thirds majority of the Parties present and voting at the CoP. Changes to Appendix III can be requested by individual Parties at any time.



Frank Kohn/USFWS

Delegations from the Parties meet at CoP19

What is the purpose of a CoP?

The Parties meet every two to three years at a CoP. During this 2-week meeting, they review and vote on:

1. Proposed resolutions and decisions to improve the effectiveness of CITES
2. Amendments to CITES Appendix I and Appendix II

They also work to resolve policy and implementation issues. Attendants include delegations from the Parties, representatives of the CITES Secretariat, and approved non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations (NGOs and IGOs), that attend as observers.

How is the United States preparing for CoP20?

The United States began to prepare for CoP20 almost immediately after CoP19 ended. The Department of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) lead the U.S. delegation to each CoP. All preparations for CoP20 are coordinated through the Service, in close consultation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of State (DOS), U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), and other government agencies.

The Service examines international trade and biological data for species that may warrant a change in their protection status under CITES. Through a series of Federal Register notices, website postings, and public meetings, the Service solicits public input, evaluates the public's recommendations, and prepares formal documents and negotiating positions for consideration at CoP20.

How does the public provide input for the United States to consider in drafting its submissions and negotiating positions for CoP20?

The Service solicits public input through a series of announcements, including Federal Register notices, website postings, and public meetings. Details on how to submit public comments are contained in each Federal Register notice. A tentative timeline for CoP20 preparations is:

The Service published a Federal Register notice requesting recommendations for amendments to the CITES Appendices and requesting information and recommendations on resolutions, decisions, and agenda items for consideration that would provide clear guidance on the interpretation and effective implementation of CITES. A 60-day public comment period was opened.

March 22, 2024

The Service published a list of proposed resolutions, decisions, and agenda items that it might submit for consideration and will seek additional information and comments. This notice will take into account all public comments received in response to the Federal Register notice in March 2024. A 60-day public comment period will open. The Service will also publish a list of plants and animals for which the United States is considering submitting proposals (species proposals) to amend the CITES Appendices. In this notice, the Service will seek additional biological and trade information on potential species proposals. This notice will take into account all public comments received in response to the Federal Register notice in March 2024. A 60-day public comment period will open.

October 2024

The Service will publish a Federal Register notice announcing the tentative agenda for CoP20 and will seek comments on agenda items. A public meeting will also be announced. A 45-day public comment period will open.

July 2025

A public meeting, location to be determined, will be held to discuss tentative agenda items for CoP20.

August 2025

The Service will publish a Federal Register notice announcing tentative U.S. negotiating positions on other Parties' CoP20 species proposals, resolutions, decisions, and agenda items.

September 2025

20th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties
Estimated late 2025
Location TBD

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