



NOTICE TO THE WILDLIFE IMPORT/EXPORT COMMUNITY



September 4, 2025

Subject: Declaration of Fish in the Genus *Hypancistrus*

PB 25-003

This bulletin replaces the January 20, 2023 bulletin "Declaration of Wildlife."

Background:

Hypancistrus is a genus of freshwater armored catfish that is commonly found in aquarium trade, including the CITES Appendix II listed *Hypancistrus zebra*. The aquarium trade uses L codes as an informal, non-scientific method of naming undescribed fish, including fish in the genus *Hypancistrus*.

Shipments of fresh water tropical fish are commonly declared on Wildlife Declaration Form 3-177 as "FWTF". The use of L codes to describe species that do not have a scientific classification has historically not been accepted due to L codes not being scientific classifications.

Action:

The Service will accept the use of "L" codes to declare *Hypancistrus* specimens when an imported or exported shipment includes *Hypancistrus* specimens that are not taxonomically described to the species level, unless otherwise required by CITES or other applicable law or regulation.

To further clarify, if *Hypancistrus* specimens are described to the species level, importers and exporters must provide the species level nomenclature on all appropriate relevant import or export documents. All requirements of CITES and other applicable laws or regulations must continue to be met.

All *Hypancistrus* genus fish must be declared on the Wildlife Declaration Form 3-177 and may not be lumped into the general freshwater tropical fish "FWTF" code. If the fish has been described and has a full scientific name, the genus and species must be declared on the declaration, as well as on all relevant shipment documents.

Hypancistrus genus fish not described to the species level must be declared on the declaration with the appropriate species code designated for each L-code. See example below:

Item 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Clear	<input type="checkbox"/> Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> Seize	Seizure#		Disposition		Date	
	Species Code*	L527	Search	Split	Delete	Category=FSH	Class=F	Family=LO	Order=
16a	Gen* Spec* Subsp	HYPANCISTRUS		SPECIES					
16b	Common Name	L527 PLECO							

If the fish you are declaring does not have an appropriate code, you may use the general *Hypancistrus* code, “HNC?”, on the declaration along with the proper L code designation on all shipment documents. See example below:

Item 2		<input type="checkbox"/> Clear	<input type="checkbox"/> Refuse	<input type="checkbox"/> Seize	Seizure#	<input type="text"/>	Disposition	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>
Species Code*		HNC?	Search	Split	Delete	Category= Class= Family= Order=				
16a	Gen* Spec* Subsp	HYPANCISTRUS		SPECIES						
16b	Common Name	CATFISH								

CITES-listed *Hypancistrus* species, and hybridized *Hypancistrus* species resulting from the cross between a CITES and non-CITES listed species are regulated under CITES and require a CITES document for international trade in accordance with 50 CFR 23.

Service officers reviewing wildlife shipments may use their discretion to request more information if they have reason to believe the identity of the fish contained in a shipment is incorrect or that the fish may be a protected species.

This public bulletin is effective immediately and will remain in effect and may be updated as additional information is received by the Service related to undescribed *Hypancistrus* species. This bulletin does not apply to other genera of wildlife in trade.

Please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement with any questions.

Contact:

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Office of Law Enforcement
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