

Fauna and Flora, hereinafter referred to as CITES or the Convention, is an international treaty designed to control and regulate international trade in certain animal and plant species that are now or potentially may be threatened with extinction. These species are listed in the Appendices to CITES, which are available on the CITES Secretariat's Website at <http://www.cites.org/eng/append/index.shtml>. Currently, 162 countries, including the United States, are Parties to CITES. The Convention calls for biennial meetings of the Conference of the Parties, which review its implementation, make provisions enabling the CITES Secretariat in Switzerland to carry out its functions, consider amendments to the list of species in Appendices I and II, consider reports presented by the Secretariat, and make recommendations for the improved effectiveness of CITES. Any country that is a Party to CITES may propose amendments to Appendices I and II, resolutions, decisions, and/or agenda items for consideration by all the Parties.

This is our first in a series of **Federal Register** notices that, together with announced public meetings, provide you with an opportunity to participate in the development of the U.S. negotiating positions for the thirteenth regular meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (COP13). Our regulations governing this public process are found in 50 CFR 23.31–23.39.

#### **Announcement of the Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties**

We hereby notify you of the convening of COP13, which is scheduled to be held October 3–14, 2004, in Bangkok, Thailand.

#### **U.S. Approach for COP13**

*What Are the Priorities for U.S. Submissions to COP13?*

Priorities for U.S. submissions to COP13 continue to be consistent with the overall objective of U.S. participation in the Convention: to maximize the effectiveness of the Convention in the conservation and sustainable use of species subject to international trade. With this in mind, we plan to consider the following factors in determining which issues to submit for inclusion in the agenda at COP13:

(1) *Does the proposed action address a serious wildlife trade issue that the United States is experiencing as a range country for species in trade?* Since our primary responsibility is the conservation of our domestic wildlife

resources, we will give native species our highest priority. We will place particular emphasis on terrestrial and freshwater species with the majority of their range in the United States and its territories that are or may be in significant trade; marine species that occur in U.S. waters or for which the United States is a major exporter; and threatened and endangered species for which we and other Federal and State agencies already have statutory responsibility for protection and recovery. We also consider CITES listings as a proactive measure to monitor and manage trade in native species to preclude the need for the application of stricter measures, such as listing under the Endangered Species Act and/or inclusion in CITES Appendix I.

(2) *Does the proposed action address a serious wildlife trade issue for species not native to the United States?* As a major importer of wildlife and wildlife products, the United States has taken responsibility, by working in close consultation with range countries, for addressing cases of potential over-exploitation of foreign species in the wild. In some cases, the United States may not be a range country or a significant trading country for a species, but we will work closely with other countries to conserve species being threatened by unsustainable exploitation for international trade. We will consider CITES listings for species not native to the United States if that listing will assist in addressing cases of potential over-exploitation of foreign species in the wild, and in preventing illegal, unregulated trade, especially if the United States is a major importer. These species will be prioritized based on the extent of trade and status of the species, and also the role the species play in the ecosystem, with emphasis on those species for which a CITES listing would offer the greatest conservation benefits to the species, associated species, and their habitats.

(3) *Does the proposed action address difficulties in implementing or interpreting the Convention by the United States as an importing or exporting country, and would the proposed action contribute to the effective implementation of the Convention by all Parties?* Differences in interpretation of the Convention by 162 Party nations can result in inconsistencies in the way it is implemented. In addition, wildlife trade is dynamic and ever-changing, thus presenting problems when established procedures are not readily applicable to new situations. The United States experiences some of these problems and

inconsistencies directly through its own imports and exports, but we also learn of these difficulties through our participation in various fora, such as the CITES Standing Committee and the technical committees, and through discussions with other countries, non-governmental organizations, and the Secretariat. When the United States cannot resolve these difficulties unilaterally or through one-on-one discussions with trading partners, it may propose resolutions or decisions, usually in collaboration with other Parties, or have these topics placed on the agenda of the meeting of the Conference of the Parties for discussion by all of the Parties.

(4) *Does the proposed action improve implementation of the Convention by increasing the quality of information and expertise used to support decisions by the Parties?* With increased complexity, sophistication, and specialization in the biological sciences and other disciplines, it is critical that the CITES Parties have the best available information upon which to base decisions that affect the conservation of wildlife resources. Where appropriate, the United States will recommend actions to ensure the availability of up-to-date and accurate information to the Parties, including through the establishment of relationships with relevant international bodies, including other conventions, interjurisdictional resource management agencies, and international non-governmental organizations with relevant expertise.

#### **Request for Information and Recommendations for Amending Appendices I or II**

One of the purposes of this notice is to solicit information and recommendations that will help us identify species that the United States should propose as candidates for addition to, removal from, or reclassification in the CITES Appendices, or to identify issues warranting attention by the CITES Nomenclature Committee. This request is not limited to species occurring in the United States. Any Party may submit proposals concerning animal or plant species occurring in the wild anywhere in the world. We encourage the submission of information on species for possible inclusion in the Appendices if these species are subject to international trade that may be detrimental to the survival of the species. We also encourage you to keep in mind the U.S. approach to COP13, described above in this notice, when determining which species the United