

purposes may, in some cases, facilitate the eventual release to the wild of a percentage of the progeny from such operations.

In 1986, efforts began on the development of captive propagation techniques for the Asian bonytongue. In 1992, the first captive-breeding facility was registered under the requirements of CITES, and legal exports began. There are currently 28 registered breeding facilities in these three countries, reportedly with an annual production level of around 300,000 fish. Each exported specimen is marked with a coded microchip to assist law enforcement efforts to help ensure that only legally produced fish are traded. The CITES requirement for certifying facilities as bred in captivity is designed to remove collection pressure on wild populations and ensure that trade is not detrimental to the survival of the species, but CITES does not require in-situ conservation projects.

Since the approval of the first captive-breeding facility, we have denied several permit applications for the import of captive-bred Asian bonytongue. As one of the world's largest importers of aquarium fish, the United States could play a significant role in encouraging conservation of the Asian bonytongue through the issuance of permits if we require, as a condition of issuance of an import permit, that the specimens are bred in captivity and, a program is established to conserve the species in the wild. Our willingness to consider allowing import of captive-bred fish under "enhancement of survival" permits could provide an incentive for development of new conservation programs.

#### Wood Bison

The wood bison (*Bison bison athabasca*), native to Canada, is currently listed in CITES Appendix II and as an endangered species under the ESA. Because the wood bison is an Appendix-II species, Canadian wildlife authorities are not required to establish a quota for the export of live or trophy animals. Therefore, Canada is actively managing their bison population with a variety of management techniques, including limited sport-hunting. The FWS is currently evaluating whether downlisting the species is warranted under the ESA; however, this process is time consuming. Under this proposed policy, if an enhancement finding could be made based on Canada's present management practices, a limited number of sport-hunted trophies and live animals could be imported to further the conservation and recovery of the species while the downlisting

process continues. A significant demand exists for both live animals and sport-hunted trophies in the United States. By issuing a limited number of permits that would require continuing conservation of the species in the wild the species would benefit.

The free-ranging population of about 5,000 wood bison is restricted to 11 herds in the Canadian provinces of Manitoba, Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. As of 2000, approximately 2,500 of the free-ranging animals were in 7 disease-free herds. There are also around 400 animals in the Elk Island and Hook Lake Salvage captive-held disease-free herds that will be used for restocking and recovery purposes. The remaining bison in four herds in the Wood Buffalo National Park area are not disease free. It is estimated that the provincial and First Nation herds (diseased and disease-free combined) will double by 2004 at the present rate of increase. The Canadian recovery program goal is the establishment of 4 free-roaming, disease-free herds of 400 animals each. The recovery team estimates this goal will be achieved by the end of 2003. Throughout Canada and the United States, 700 to 1,000 animals are in private ownership. There are no wild or free-ranging populations in the United States.

The provincial and First Nation herds are managed with consideration for the national wood bison objectives: (1) Re-establish viable, healthy, free-ranging populations where possible in the original range; (2) ensure the genetic integrity of wood bison; (3) restore healthy herds for long-term sustainable use (for rural communities); and (4) encourage long-term cooperative management programs in which rural communities and aboriginal people play an integral role. Both the genetic management of the herds and the community programs involve limited sport hunting of surplus animals.

Because of the current listing of wood bison under the ESA, we have not issued import permits for sport-hunted trophies. Under this proposed policy, however, we could take into account Canada's excellent management of the bison. If, by reviewing the management program that has been established by the Canadian Government and the First Nations, we can determine that the importation of sport-hunted trophies could further enhance the survival of the species, then we could consider the issuance of a limited number of permits. As with most conservation programs around the world, work is limited by the availability of funds to carry out the goals of the program. Allowing a limited

number of imports of sport-hunted trophies and live animals into the United States could provide a significant increase in funds available for conservation of the species in the wild, and would provide a nexus to encourage continuation and expansion of the project into other areas.

#### Asian Elephant

The Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) is listed as endangered under the ESA and in Appendix I of CITES. The Asian elephant historically ranged throughout India, Southeast Asia, and China. However, due to extensive habitat loss and poaching, its numbers have been dramatically reduced and are restricted to isolated populations within its range. In many areas, the species has been extirpated. Given its current status, it is very unlikely that the species could be downlisted under the ESA. In addition, although the Asian elephant is provided the protection of listing in Appendix I, only a limited number of other activities under CITES contribute to ensuring the species' survival. While the listing of the species in Appendix I does control international trade, this listing provides little for the conservation for the species within its range. Under this proposed policy, the permitting process could contribute to the enhancement of the species through the consideration of the importation of live animals when linked with conservation efforts within the elephant's range.

The Asian elephant is one of the more recognized animals to people from around the world due to exposure to the species through circuses and zoos. The United States has a relatively large population of captive Asian elephants. However, captive breeding has not been very successful, and the breeding stock is getting old and may soon be unable to breed. While offspring, particularly first generation, have been born, second-generation offspring have not had reproductive success. Therefore, currently, given the breeding animals available, it would appear that the captive Asian elephant population within the United States will continue to decline. This decline has raised a significant demand among the zoo and circus community to obtain additional stock from Asia. In relation to this, the number of elephants available for export within Asia is increasing due to the capture of problem animals and the decline in the use of elephants for traditional labor, such as timber harvest. Many countries within the elephants' range are facing a crisis due to the inability to handle these "surplus" animals.