

CITES Supports Sustainable Use

by Kenneth Stansell



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While there have been, and will continue to be, new challenges to conservation, as well as necessary and creative adaptations for implementation of the Treaty, the basic tenets of this Convention remain as vital and prophetic as they were more than a quarter century ago. CITES has seen many analyses and interpretations. Its worth and timeliness are continually questioned and debated. So are its effectiveness and arguments for its appropriate role in global resource conservation. In civil society, such discourse is right and appropriate. That said, the simple words of the preamble that ground the Convention continue to provide the foundation for one of the most important tools in global resource conservation today.

Kenneth Stansell

On July 1, 1975, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) entered into force after ratification by the tenth signatory country. It emerged out of long-standing concern for the future of animals and plants used in international trade. The simple, elegant language of the treaty lays down the principles upon which those early framers felt it possible to balance conservation of species with their use.

The treaty recognizes that “peoples and States” are the best protectors of their own wild fauna and flora. In the United States, the Endangered Species Act designates responsibility for CITES implementation to the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Seahorses are traded for use in traditional Chinese medicine and as aquarium pets, souvenirs, and curios.



Frank Koim/USFWS

Given the wide range of species-trade issues, other federal agencies, the states, and the public also play critical roles. The Service works closely with the states, which manage native CITES-listed animals and plants within their boundaries. The American alligator and paddlefish illustrate the states’ role in CITES (see articles in this issue).

Species regulated under CITES are placed on one of three appendices. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction, Appendix II includes species that are not currently threatened with extinction, but may become so without trade controls, and Appendix III includes species for which a range country has requested international cooperation to control trade.

During the 30 years of the treaty’s existence, global membership in CITES has expanded from 10 to more than 165 nations, a tribute to its effectiveness. With membership comes agreement to use a permit system to monitor trade and ensure use is sustainable. Exporting countries issue CITES permits only after finding that the animals or plants, and their parts and products, are legally acquired and that exports are not detrimental to the survival of the species.



Left: Green pitcher plant
Above top: Humphead wrasse
Above: Box turtle

Importing countries become partners in this effort. They are obligated to refuse imports of Appendix-I species for commercial or detrimental purposes, and to ensure that imports of Appendix-II species are accompanied by valid permits. A CITES Appendix-II listing is not a ban or boycott of commercial trade, but a way to regulate and monitor trade to ensure legal, sustainable harvest. A country may not be able to make the required non-detriment finding to allow trade when species are vulnerable to wild harvest, are harvested in quantities too large to ensure sustainability, or are not subject to a management program. This was the case in 1997 when the U.S. set a zero quota for the commercial export of Appendix-II box turtles (*Terrapene* spp.).

CITES recognizes that international cooperation can encourage support

for sustainable use rather than overuse of species in trade. It requires member countries to monitor Appendix-II exports to ensure that species such as the American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) and paddlefish (*Polyodon spathula*) are maintained throughout their ranges at a level consistent with their role in the ecosystem. Thus, the treaty supports natural resource management programs in range countries that help prevent a species from becoming threatened.

The treaty requires CITES countries to monitor trade and take appropriate measures to enforce treaty provisions. The U.S. has a highly sophisticated inspection program to detect and confiscate illegal shipments (see article elsewhere in this issue) and an investigation program to combat illegal trade.

Pitcher plants, American ginseng, red-kneed tarantulas, box turtles, brown bears, and gray wolves are among some of the approximately 5,000 species of animals and 28,000 species of plants listed by CITES.

Why a Fish and Wildlife Service International Program?

- International species are important to Americans for their aesthetic, scientific, cultural, recreational, and economic value
- Wildlife and their habitats go beyond political boundaries, and international cooperation is essential for the protection of certain species
- Implementation of wildlife laws and treaties results in global conservation of species, and contributes to environmental health and economic development for range countries

Countries also are directed to return or care for live animals and plants that have been confiscated for noncompliance with import and export requirements. Specimens may be returned to the country of origin for *in-situ* conservation or placed in public institutions to contribute to *ex-situ* conservation, research, and education. The U.S. has enlisted more than 70 botanical gardens, arboretums, zoological parks, and research institutions in over 18 states to participate in its Plant Rescue Center program. During 2004, the U.S. confiscated 269 live plant shipments that contained 6,422 plants, consisting mainly of orchids, cacti, and euphorbia.

Countries also collect species-specific trade data to produce an annual report that tallies all imports and exports. These data are entered into a single database by the World Conservation Monitoring Center in the United Kingdom. This database is used to determine trends in trade and ensure that significant trade in wildlife is sustainable.

CITES provides for international measures when trade may be adversely affecting listed species or in circumstances where treaty provisions are ineffectively implemented. At the CITES meeting in Thailand in 2004, countries discussed treaty compliance, and work

Confiscated CITES plants are placed in public institutions to contribute to conservation, research, and education.



American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*), listed in CITES Appendix II, must come from a State or Tribe with an approved ginseng management program to be exported from the United States.

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continues on development of guidelines. Generally, compliance measures involve consultation and assistance, but may result in voluntary or CITES-recommended bans on trade. In October 2003, the Dominican Republic and Honduras suspended exports of queen conch (*Strombus gigas*) based on CITES recommendations, and the CITES Secretariat recommended that CITES countries not allow the import of queen conch from Haiti. This temporary suspension of international trade will be lifted once these countries implement specific long-term conservation measures to sustainably manage queen conch populations in their waters.

Thirty years have brought many changes to CITES. As advancing technology makes it possible to ship wildlife anywhere in the world, and as issues of wildlife use grow ever more complex, CITES provides tools to effectively conserve the world's diverse natural resources. It is a living instrument that has proven its flexibility.

At the last two CITES meetings (Thailand in 2004 and Chile in 2002), countries adopted listings of commercial marine species and timber, new arenas for CITES regulation. One of the marine species was the U.S. proposal to include seahorses in Appendix II. Seahorses, which live in ocean waters, are harvested for use in traditional Chinese medicine or as aquarium pets, souvenirs, and curios. Over 20 million seahorses are captured annually from the wild. Seahorses will now be protected from overharvest, another example of CITES' continuing record of progress in sustainable use for the world's wildlife—something the original framers of the treaty may well be proud of.

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The world's plants and animals are a treasure shared by all nations, and CITES plays a vital role in the conservation of species affected by trade. As head of the U.S. delegation at COP(Conference of Parties)12 in Santiago, Chile, in 2002 and COP13 in Bangkok, Thailand, in 2004, I worked actively with my counterparts from other countries on elephants, mahogany, ramin, whales, and other issues of importance to the United States. I was particularly pleased with the passage of U.S. proposals to conserve seahorses and a variety of Asian turtles threatened by commercial trade. The United States also helped develop consensus on the conservation and sustainable use of mahogany and ramin (another tropical hardwood), which were listed in Appendix II. We cannot take the risk that 50 years from now the only place anyone will see mahogany is in an old desk or chair, or that the pool cues made of ramin will cause the loss of vital orangutan habitat. After participating in the CITES process, I can truthfully say that serving as head of the U.S. delegation has been the highlight of my career. I find nothing more satisfying than quietly conferring with other nations to develop a proposal that improves species conservation. Loud protests often make headlines, but quiet diplomacy gets the results. Definitely, CITES is a treaty that works!

Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Department of the Interior

CITES Implementation in the United States

U.S. CITES Authorities—International Affairs

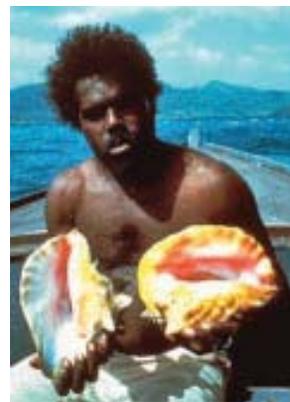
- Division of Management Authority
- Division of Scientific Authority

Border Inspection and Clearance of Shipments

- FWS, Law Enforcement (wildlife)
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Department of Homeland Security) (plants)
- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA) (plants)

Other Federal and State Participants

- Department of the Interior
- Department of Justice
- Department of State
- Environmental Protection Agency
- International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- NOAA Fisheries
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Trade Representative



TRAFFIC

International trade in queen conch has been suspended temporarily from some Caribbean countries until they implement measures for sustainable management.