

CITES Meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COPs)

What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international treaty aimed at regulating the worldwide trade in protected species. CITES became effective July 1, 1975, with the United States as one of the original 10 Party countries. There are currently over 160 Party countries. CITES is administered through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. English, French, and Spanish are the official working languages.

CITES provides for a permanent Secretariat. The Secretariat: (1) provides Parties with trade information and technical support; (2) acts as a liaison among Parties; (3) contracts trade studies; (4) informs governments and the public about CITES wildlife trade developments; (5) investigates possible CITES violations and trade threats to wildlife; and (6) organizes meetings of the COPs.

CITES is implemented in the United States under the Endangered Species

Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the lead agency for U.S. CITES implementation.

How do the permanent committees work?

The Parties adopted a resolution that establishes the CITES Standing, Animals, Plants, and Nomenclature Committees. Each Committee works between COPs to resolve issues carried over from past committee meetings and COPs, as well as identifying new issues in need of resolution.

The Standing Committee provides the Secretariat with policy and operational direction concerning CITES implementation. The Animals and Plants Committees provide scientific expertise on species, and review trade impacts on species of particular concern. The United States is an active participant in all CITES matters and attends committee meetings. The Nomenclature Committee consists of one botanist and one zoologist, who develop standardized lists of species and provide guidance on matters involving scientific names used in the CITES Appendices.

What is a COP?

The Parties meet approximately every 2 years at a COP. During this 2-week long meeting, they review and vote on (1) proposed resolutions and decisions to improve the effectiveness of CITES and (2) amendments to the listings of protected species on the CITES Appendices. They also resolve policy and implementation issues.

Each COP is hosted by a Party. Attendants include delegations from the Parties, representatives of the CITES Secretariat and UNEP and approved non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who attend as observers.

What is involved in preparing for a COP?

Any Party may submit agenda items, proposed resolutions, decisions, and amendments to the Appendices for consideration by the Parties at a COP. Parties must submit them to the Secretariat 150 days prior to the COP. The Secretariat, Standing Committee, Animals Committee, and Plants Committee may also submit agenda items, and proposed resolutions and decisions at a COP.



CITES text finalized at the 1973 Conference held in Washington, D.C.

photograph taken at the U.S. Department of State

Prior to the start of a COP, the Secretariat provides the Parties with all of the agenda items, proposed resolutions, decisions, and amendments to the Appendices submitted for consideration. Each Party reviews this information and develops negotiating positions.

How does the United States prepare for a COP?

The U.S. Government begins to prepare for a COP almost immediately after the previous COP ends. Through a series of **Federal Register** notices and public meetings, the Service includes the public in the process. An approximate schedule for COP preparation is:

- 16-22 months prior to the COP, the Service publishes a public notice in the **Federal Register** requesting recommendations on proposed amendments to the Appendices.
- 16 months prior to the COP, the Service publishes a public notice requesting recommendations on agenda items, and proposed resolutions and decisions.
- 10 months prior to the COP, the Service publishes a notice announcing agenda items, and proposed resolutions, decisions, and amendments to the Appendices that the United States is considering submitting for the COP. The notice asks for public comment and schedules a public meeting.
- 9 months prior to the COP, the Service holds a public meeting to discuss proposed U.S. submissions for the COP.
- 5 months prior to the COP, the Service provides the Secretariat with U.S. submissions for consideration at the COP, and posts on its website an announcement of the agenda items, and proposed resolutions, decisions, and amendments to the Appendices that the U.S. submitted for the COP.
- 2 months prior to the COP, the Service publishes a notice announcing proposed U.S. negotiating positions on agenda items, and proposed resolutions and amendments to the Appendices submitted by other Parties for the COP. The notice asks for public comment and schedules a public meeting.

- 1½ months prior to the COP, the Service holds a public meeting to discuss proposed U.S. negotiating positions.

What happens at a COP?

Each Party may send a delegation to the COP to discuss the issues for consideration. Representatives of the Secretariat attend and are responsible for taking the minutes of the meeting and providing the delegations with copies of the meeting documents.

Approved observers may attend Plenary and committee sessions and comment in these sessions on issues. However, they are not permitted to vote on proposals raised. In addition, the U.S. delegation holds daily meetings during the COP to brief U.S. NGOs on current developments.

The business of the COP is discussed in sessions of the Plenary, Committee I, and Committee II:

- **The Plenary**
The first session of the Plenary opens the COP, establishes the rules of procedure, and adopts the COP agenda and working programs. The COP then breaks into committees where most of the issues for consideration of the Parties are discussed. Although the committees make recommendations to the Plenary, the Plenary is the forum where amendments, resolutions, and decisions are actually approved. The Plenary meets again near the end of the COP to resolve outstanding issues, finalize recommendations from the committees, select the host country of the next COP, and close the meeting. During the closing session of the Plenary, Parties may reopen discussion of issues from any of the other committees before approval.

All Parties with credentialed delegations present at the COP may vote “yes,” “no,” or “abstain” on any of the items put to a vote in the committees and the Plenary.

- **Committee I**
Agenda items related to proposed amendments to the Appendices and other scientific issues are discussed in Committee I. Parties may propose to list, uplist, downlist, or delist species in Appendix I and II. Committee I also considers proposals regarding

export quotas and ranching operations. In order for a proposed amendment to the Appendices to be adopted, it must be approved by consensus or by a 2/3 majority vote of the Parties voting. The determinations reached in Committee I are held until the closing Plenary session for final approval.

- **Committee II**
Agenda items related to CITES implementation are discussed in Committee II. Resolutions and decisions are adopted by consensus or a 2/3 majority vote of the Parties voting. Often, a proposed resolution or decision is revised based on discussions in Committee II and submissions from working groups, and the revised version is then adopted. The determinations reached in Committee II are held until the closing Plenary session for final approval.

What are the results of a COP?

At each of the meetings, the Parties adopt resolutions and decisions and amendments to the Appendices. Resolutions provide long-term guidance on the interpretation and implementation of the treaty. Decisions typically contain instructions to one of the permanent committees, the Parties, or the Secretariat on actions that are to be implemented, often by a specified time, and then become out of date.

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