



# CITES CoP16

## What Will Make the Headlines?

In March, delegates from around the globe will converge on the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center in Bangkok, Thailand, for the world's most influential meeting on international wildlife trade—a meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to CITES. At this 16th meeting of the CoP, the most anticipated and potentially controversial proposals center on African elephants, white rhinos, polar bears and sharks.

### African Elephant Proposal

Burkina Faso and Kenya have submitted a proposal contending that any legal trade in ivory poses a very serious threat to elephant populations. If passed, CITES would not accept proposals to allow trade in elephant ivory from populations in Appendix II for nine years from the last ivory sale in 2008. This proposal, according to proponents, reflects the intention of a 2007 agreement among the elephant range states and ensures that African elephants are not put under threat from legalized ivory sales.

### White Rhinoceros Proposal

Kenya believes the export of white rhino trophies should not be allowed, citing evidence that suggests that hunting trophies offer a legal pathway for criminal networks to obtain horns, which are then illegally sold for medicinal and ornamental purposes. Range states have witnessed unprecedented poaching in recent years, with South Africa losing 668 rhinos in 2012 alone. Kenya's proposal also contends that the continued legal trophy hunting of rhino may be stimulating demand.

### Shark and Manta Ray Proposals

Shark species, especially those with low reproductive rates, are vulnerable to over-exploitation from the international fin trade and bycatch, or unintentional catch in nets meant for something else. Shark fins are particularly in demand as a food item and are highly valued in international trade, with a wholesale value up to \$39 per pound. Proposals have been put forth to include several species of sharks—oceanic whitetip, porbeagle and three species of hammerhead—and all manta rays in CITES Appendix II, to control trade at biologically sustainable levels. Adding commercially exploited marine species to the CITES Appendices has been controversial. Some countries argue that Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) are the only appropriate bodies for dealing with international fisheries issues. The United States firmly believes CITES action can be complementary to measures taken for sharks and other marine species by RFMOs.

### Polar Bear Proposal

From 2001 through 2010, an average of 3,200 items made from polar bears were exported or re-exported annually from range states. This represents about 400 to 500 polar bears per year. The United States has submitted a proposal to transfer the polar bear from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I, which would prohibit international trade for primarily commercial purposes. Over time, trade in polar bear skins has increased. The current level of trade may hurt the species because trade, particularly commercial trade, compounds the threat to the species posed by habitat loss. Inclusion of the polar bear in Appendix I would not affect the subsistence harvest of this species by Alaskan natives or other indigenous peoples or the creation of handicrafts using polar bear parts.

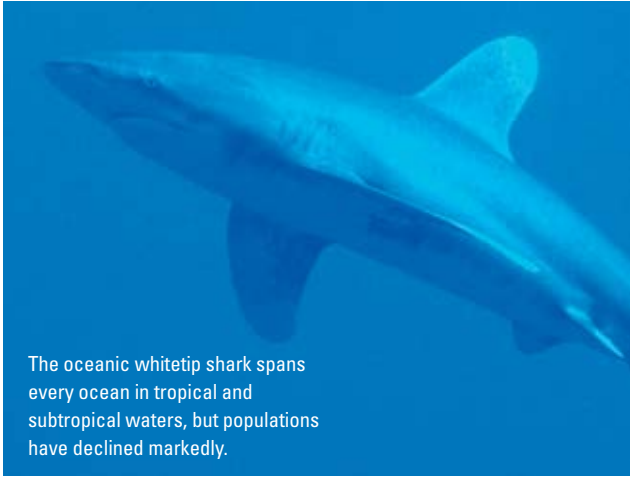
*When deciding its position on these proposals, the United States will consider a variety of information between now and CoP16, including the proposal itself, its own supplemental research, public comments received during a 60-day comment period, reviews by IUCN Specialist Groups and other consultations. The Service will update U.S. positions as they become available on its CoP16 webpage at <[www.fws.gov/international/cites/CoP16](http://www.fws.gov/international/cites/CoP16)>. □*

CLAIRE HOOD, International Affairs, Headquarters



White rhinos in Nakuru National Park in Kenya.

The most anticipated and potentially controversial proposals center on African elephants, white rhinos, polar bears and sharks.



The oceanic whitetip shark spans every ocean in tropical and subtropical waters, but populations have declined markedly.



A U.S. proposal would put the polar bear in Appendix I of CITES, which provides the most protection for species.



Elephants in Tanzania, Africa.

ELEPHANTS: GARY M. STOLZ/USFWS; SHARK: NOAA; RHINOS: KARL STROMAYER/USFWS; POLAR BEAR: MIKE DUNN, NC STATE MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCES VIA NOAA