

Preparing for the 18th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES

What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) entered into force in 1975, and became the only treaty to ensure that international trade in plants and animals does not threaten their survival in the wild. A country that has agreed to implement the Convention is called a Party to CITES. The United States was the first country to become a Party to CITES. Currently there are 183 Parties, including the United States, 181 other member countries, and the European Union.

CITES is administered through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). A Secretariat, located in Geneva, Switzerland, oversees the treaty. 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
6. Organizes meetings of the Conference of the Parties

How are species protected by CITES?

Species protected by CITES are included in one of three appendices.

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction and provides the greatest level of protection, including restrictions on commercial trade. Examples of species currently listed in Appendix I include gorillas, sea turtles, most lady slipper orchids, and giant pandas.



The elephant-shaped CITES logo was first used at CoP3 in 1981. The original version, a simple black and white design, has since evolved to include species protected by CITES.

- Appendix II includes species that, although not necessarily threatened with extinction, may become so without trade controls. Most CITES species are included in this appendix, including American ginseng, paddlefish, African lions, and many corals.
- Appendix III includes species protected by at least one country, which needs assistance from other Parties to regulate trade. Examples of species currently listed in Appendix III include map turtles, walrus, and Cape stag beetles.

Changes to Appendices I and II must be proposed at a Conference of the Parties (CoP) and agreed to by a two-thirds majority of the Parties present and voting at the CoP. Changes to Appendix III can be requested by individual Parties at any time.



Frank Kohn/USFWS

Delegations from the Parties meet at CoP15

What is the purpose of a CoP?

The Parties meet every two to three years at a CoP. During this 2-week meeting, they review and vote on:

1. Proposed resolutions and decisions to improve the effectiveness of CITES
2. Amendments to CITES Appendix I and Appendix II

They also work to resolve policy and implementation issues. Attendants include delegations from the Parties, representatives of the CITES Secretariat, and approved non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations (NGOs and IGOs), who attend as observers.

How is the United States preparing for CoP18?

The United States began to prepare for CoP18 almost immediately after CoP17 ended. The Department of the Interior and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) lead the U.S. delegation to each CoP. All preparations for CoP18 are coordinated through the Service, in close consultation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of State (DOS), U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), and other government agencies.

The Service examines international trade and biological data for species that may warrant a change in their protection status under CITES. Through a series of Federal Register notices, website postings, and public meetings, the Service solicits public input, evaluates the public's recommendations, and prepares formal documents and negotiating positions for consideration at CoP18.

How does the public provide input for the United States to consider in drafting its submissions and negotiating positions for CoP18?

The Service solicits public input through a series of announcements, including Federal Register notices, website postings, and public meetings. Details on how to submit public comments are contained in each Federal Register notice. A tentative timeline for CoP18 preparations is:

