

CITES TECHNICAL WORK GROUP REPORT

Report of the Twentieth Meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties
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Samarkand, Uzbekistan



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES



INTRODUCTION

The CITES Technical Work Group (Team) including Buddy Baker (SEAFWA), Carolyn Caldwell (MAFWA), Stewart Liley (WAFWA), and Gordon Batcheller (NEAFWA) represented the state fish and wildlife agencies at the CITES 20th Conference of the Parties (CoP). AFWA International Relations Committee Co-chair Ryan Brown (Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources) served as the state representative on the U.S. Delegation.

SUMMARY

More than 4,600 participants attended CoP20, including government representatives from 164 CITES Parties (of 184 countries who signed the Treaty), non-governmental organizations, and the press. Our Team participates as an observer organization with no voting rights but with the ability to express viewpoints and take positions (called interventions) on agenda items being considered by the Parties. During CoP20, 114 agenda items were deliberated, over 350 decisions were adopted, and 50 species listing proposals were considered. Revisions to the CITES Appendices, a core responsibility of the CoP, included 77 new species being added to the appendices, including marine species, endemic reptiles, sloths, sea cucumbers, deep-water sharks, Dorcas gazelle, and avian, plant, and timber

species. Priority species proposals and documents for the States that will be further discussed in this report include:

Proposal 35: Listing *Anguilla* spp. in Appendix II (including American eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) in Appendix II (advanced by the European Union and Honduras);

Proposal 25: Listing of *Crotalus lepidus* and *Crotalus ravus* in Appendix II and inclusion of the genera *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus* in Appendix II (advanced by Mexico and Bolivia);

Proposal 17: Transfer Peregrine Falcon from Appendix I to Appendix II (advanced by Canada and the United States);

Proposal 40: Amend annotation for American Ginseng (advanced by the United States);

Doc. 14: Enhancing the Work and Efficiency of the Convention;

Docs. 15.1 & 15.2: The Role of CITES in Reducing Zoonotic Disease;

Doc. 61: Rapid Movement of Wildlife Diagnostic Samples and Musical Instruments; and

Doc. 102: Considering the 'look-alike' criterion.

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An important function of the Team is to build relationships with government officials from various countries, along with non-governmental conservation organizations that attend CITES meetings. During the CoP, the Team met with representatives of the Canadian, Mexico, Japanese, Namibia, South Africa, and EU delegations, as well as had informal discussions with representatives from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE), Safari Club International (SCI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA). The Team met regularly with members of the U.S. Delegation to discuss areas of concern and enjoyed a collaborative and cooperative relationship with colleagues from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), including Director Brian Nesvik. As a result, AFWA President Paul Johansen sent a letter to Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum in which he underscored the high level of collaboration enjoyed by the Team at CoP20. He noted, “We wish to express our appreciation for our counterparts within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), who actively listened to our concerns...” and “We fully recognize the enormous workload associated with the preparation for and attendance at the CoP. The issues considered by the Parties are exceptionally complex, important, and require skillful engagement... On behalf of the Directors of the 50 State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for their work.”

KEY OUTCOMES:

1. The European Union’s listing proposal to add all eel species to Appendix II was not adopted.
2. The Parties voted to endorse a comprehensive resolution on the management of eels which was supported by the States as well as the U.S. Delegation. This resolution is designed to encourage collaboration and cooperation amongst eel range countries, especially in data sharing and evaluation of various management systems practiced worldwide.
3. The Mexican proposal to list all *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus* rattlesnakes in Appendix II was not adopted.
4. The proposal to move Peregrine Falcons from Appendix I to Appendix II was not adopted.
5. The proposal to amend annotations for American Ginseng with a limited exemption for low risk, retail ready products of 1-3mm sliced roots from artificially propagated ginseng was not adopted.
6. CoP20 reported several successes with the transfer from Appendix I to Appendix II of the Saige antelope, bontebok, and the Guadalupe fur seal. The extinct Caribbean Monk Seal was deleted from Appendix I.



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PROPOSALS TO AMEND THE APPENDICES AND CITES DOCUMENTS OF INTEREST:

Listing *Anguilla* spp. in Appendix II (including American eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) in Appendix II (advanced by the European Union and Honduras), Proposal 35: The European Union's proposal to list all eel species in CITES Appendix II was rejected. Concerns about this proposal from the States were: (1) The harvest of American eel is robustly managed and regulated by state fish and wildlife agencies under the American Eel Fishery Management Plan, overseen by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Maine has implemented effective measures to control the fishery from harvest to export. This close oversight makes an Appendix II listing for the American eel redundant and burdensome. (2) The U.S. eel fishery is culturally and economically valuable. In 2023, the trade was worth over \$19 million in Maine and more than \$20 million across the U.S. In some years, the glass eel fishery is Maine's second most valuable fishery after lobster. The listing of all eel species, including the American eel, would negatively impact livelihoods including those of the four tribes in Maine involved in this sustainable trade. (3) A listing of American eels in Appendix II would require entirely new systems to enable the USFWS to make the required non-detriment findings, and to certify legal acquisition.



An official from the ASMFC participated in CoP20 to personally represent the interests of this important state-managed fishery, and to assist the Team in opposing the Appendix II listing while advocating for the genus-wide eel resolution which was adopted.

Listing of *Crotalus lepidus* and *Crotalus ravus* in Appendix II and inclusion of the genera *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus* in Appendix II (advanced by Mexico and Bolivia), Proposal 25:

This proposal sought to include the rock rattlesnake (*Crotalus lepidus*) and the Mexican pygmy rattlesnake (*Crotalus ravus*) and also the genera of *Crotalus* and *Sistrurus* in Appendix II. WAFWA representative Stewart Liley (NM) intervened in opposition to the proposal. The key points were: (1) The implications of international trade cannot be determined without a better understanding of the level of threats from other factors such as habitat loss, human encroachment and persecution, and disease. Furthermore, estimated wild population sizes and geographic distributions of the species are not readily available nor has the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species assessments been updated since 2007 when both species were considered as Least Concern; and (2) While *Crotalus lepidus* occurs in eastern Arizona, New Mexico, and southwest Texas, only 126 snakes were exported from the U.S. from 2014-2024, as documented in the Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS) trade data. Trade consisted solely of live individuals.



While this proposal failed at CoP20, the Team believes that it would be prudent for rattlesnake range states to consider improving their systems for monitoring and managing these species in the likelihood of future proposals to list rattlesnakes in the CITES appendices.

Transfer Peregrine Falcon from Appendix I to Appendix II, Proposal 17: The proposal submitted by Canada and the U.S. was to transfer the peregrine falcon from Appendix I to II, since this species no longer meets the criteria for an Appendix I listing. North American populations are secure, with the USFWS estimating over 100,000 birds combined in the northern and southern management populations. According to a 2023 USFWS analysis, both management populations showed an overall increasing trend. Falconry, which uses peregrine falcons, is highly regulated by both the USFWS and state fish and wildlife agencies. Transferring peregrine falcons to Appendix II would not affect the existing management controls at the state and federal levels. Moreover, peregrine falcon populations in North America should remain secure, with increasing populations. This proposal was not adopted. The primary arguments against the proposal asserted that there were significant data gaps on the status of peregrine falcons in some parts of the World (e.g., Africa, South America), and that highly pathogenic avian influenza may threaten peregrine falcon populations in the future.



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Amend annotations for American Ginseng, Proposal 40: The proposal was to revise Annotation #3 with a limited exemption for low risk, retail ready products of 1-3mm sliced roots from artificially propagated ginseng. The States supported this revision after consultation with the USFWS to ensure there were no negative implications for wild ginseng. The proposal was not adopted.

Enhancing the Work and Efficiency of the Convention, Doc. 14: The CoP adopted Doc. 14 which assesses the efficiency of the Convention through the permanent committees (Standing, Animals, and Plants Committees). During the last five meetings of the Parties, the number of action items has steadily increased, stressing the work of the permanent committees. In some cases, this means that important issues are not being addressed, due to lack of time. The primary conclusion in Doc. 14 states: “The current situation has brought us to a critical point, where addressing the increasing demands and expectations of every issue simultaneously has already gone beyond the capability of the Convention’s operational framework. The current mode of work is no longer viable or sustainable.” In Samarkand, the CoP adopted the Secretary’s recommendations on “Prioritizing the workload for enhancing the efficiency of the Convention through the permanent committees...” These assessments will be done by the permanent committees between now and CoP21, tentatively scheduled to be held in Panama in 2029.



The Role of CITES in Reducing Zoonotic Disease, Docs. 15.1 & 15.2: The CoP adopted both documents, with amendments. However, a resolution on One Health was rejected. The resolution would have included a statement identifying “One Health approaches” for consideration by the Parties in exercising their responsibilities for implementation of the Convention.

Rapid Movement of Wildlife Diagnostic Samples and Musical Instruments, Doc. 60: Cumbersome CITES processes can often be an impediment to the rapid movement of medical and genetic diagnostic samples and wildlife research samples. Similar impediments occur with the international movement of musical instruments made of CITES listed species of wood and ivory. The Standing Committee recommended several actions aimed at assisting parties with making better use of the rapid movement processes available under the Convention. These recommendations were adopted during the CoP.

Considering the ‘look-alike’ criterion, Doc. 102: Species and taxa have been included in CITES Appendices based on their resemblance to other species for many years. The rationale for including look-alike species in Appendix II is to address the challenge of misidentification and potential for laundering. The inclusion of look-alikes should prevent their trade from impacting the conservation status of endangered species they resemble, and at the border it can simplify enforcement. Currently, there is minimal guidance in how the look-alike criteria are applied in listing proposals nor has the effectiveness of such listings been evaluated. Following lengthy discussions at the CoP, no consensus could be reached, and the document was not adopted. Based on comments made by Parties this is likely to be revisited in the 2026 Animals and Plants Committees.

Guadalupe fur seal
Credit: NOAA Fisheries



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ADDITIONAL MEETINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND SIDE EVENTS OF NOTE

Scales of Success: This celebratory side event highlighted one of CITES' greatest conservation triumphs—the recovery of the American alligator. The event consisted of a panel discussion on the species' recovery and sustainability. Included in the panel were the CITES Secretariat General and a number of world crocodylian experts. The panel also included Buddy Baker, one of our Team members who has had a long engagement with alligator recover, management, and CITES application.

Saiga antelope: new challenges- from strict protection to sustainable use: Scientific data was presented on population dynamics, the socio-economic impacts of overabundance, and Kazakhstan's rationale for lifting the zero-export quota under CITES. In 2025, there were an estimated 3 million Saiga antelope in Kazakhstan representing 99% of the global population. Conservation efforts helped to increase the population from just 21,000 animals in 2000. Special emphasis was provided on transboundary cooperation with Uzbekistan and other range states, as well as ensuring that any potential future use remains legal, traceable, and biologically sustainable.

Is "R" relevant to aquatic species: This side event examined ranching's evolution, its relevance for aquatic species, and associated sustainability, legal, and enforcement challenges for CITES-listed taxa like *Anguilla spp* and *Cheilinus undulatus*.

IUCN and CITES: The side event highlighted how the Red List informs and enhances CITES processes and detailed important updates to the Red List since CoP19, including the reassessment of all amphibian species in 2023 and the global freshwater assessment in 2024.

International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC)/Sustainable Use Organizations Reception: The Team attended a reception hosted by the CIC and twelve sustainable use organizations. The event provides an excellent opportunity to informally dialogue with numerous delegates and government officials from many countries.

To learn more about the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, visit the CITES website at: www.cites.org.

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