



CITES Scientific & Management Authority
Canadian Wildlife Service
Environment Canada
351 St. Joseph Blvd, 16th floor,
Gatineau, Québec K1A 0H3
ec.scientificauthority.ec@canada.ca

30 July 2016

Submitted by email

Re: Comments on proposals for September/October 2016 CITES Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17)

Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Canada, we are pleased to submit our comments on many of the proposals and other documents that have been submitted for consideration at CoP17. We trust that the information and perspectives we bring will inform Canada's own positions at this important meeting.

WCS Canada's scientists specialize in fish and wildlife ecology, conservation biology, landscape ecology, and species at risk assessment and recovery in Canada. We are affiliated with sister programs of WCS in nearly 60 countries with long-term commitments and conservation programs in dozens of landscapes and seascapes across the globe.

WCS's 'on-the-ground' presence where we work enables us to address multiple aspects of wildlife exploitation and trade, including wildlife crime, at all points along the trade chain in source, transit and consumer countries. WCS is a strong supporter of CITES, has staff who have attended all meetings of the Conference of the Parties since CoP7 in 1989, and will be represented by many international wildlife and policy experts at the Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP17) in Johannesburg, South Africa. One of us (Dr. Lieberman), leads this and other international policy initiatives at WCS along with all matters of international policy, and also serves as the Chair of the Board of WCS Canada.

Our views on the proposals to amend the Appendices are based on the CITES listing criteria, the best available scientific and technical information, and information from WCS field and country programs around the world. We have not included recommendations for species we do not work on, or that are found in countries where we do not work; we also are still analyzing some proposals and consulting our field experts, and will have updated recommendations closer to

WCS CANADA
344 BLOOR STREET WEST, SUITE 204
TORONTO, ONTARIO, M5S 3A7, CANADA
WWW.WCSCANADA.ORG

JUSTINA C. RAY
JRAY@WCS.ORG
PHONE: (CAN) 416 850 9038 x.22
SKYPE: JUSTINA.RAY

CoP17. We have developed positions on species proposals, several implementation and strategic issues, and draft resolutions and decisions before the Parties.

Prior to our remarks on the individual CoP17 proposals, we comment for the record on two procedural issues regarding Canada's implementation of CITES, related to 1) entering of reservations and 2) reporting.

Reservations entered by Canada

Following the most recent CoPs, Canada has entered reservations to the amendments to the Appendices. We understand that such an action is based on internal legal advice you have received and that the reservation is intended as a placeholder before Canada has its national regulations in place. We are not aware of any country other than Canada that enters reservations to all the amendments to the Appendices adopted at a CoP, and then takes a year or more to put the new listings into domestic regulations, only after which it removes the reservations. This delay is potentially harmful for conservation and sends an unnecessarily bad message about Canada's commitment to the effective implementation and enforcement of CITES. We find it particularly strange that Canada entered reservations to amendments to the Appendices that it supported at the CoP.

We recommend that Canada change its regulatory procedure. One option would be to implement the system the US has put in place, which includes the "official CITES list" in its Code of Federal Regulations (50 CFR Part 23) and refers to the official list of species in the Appendices as maintained by the CITES Secretariat, thus not requiring an amendment of US regulations after every CoP. The US regulations in 50 CFR §23.91 state: "The official CITES list includes species of wildlife and plants placed in Appendix I, II, and III in accordance with the provisions of Articles XV and XVI of the Treaty. This list is maintained by the CITES Secretariat based on decisions of the Parties. You may access the official list from the CITES website (see §23.7)."

Reporting by Canada

Article VIII paragraph 7 of the CITES treaty requires all Parties to submit annual reports, which serve as a critical means of monitoring the implementation of the Convention and the level of international trade in CITES-listed species. It has come to our attention that the imports of specimens of Appendix II and III species have been incomplete or lacking altogether in Canada's annual reports, since 2007. As a result, there has been ineffective documentation of specimens of species included in Appendices II and III coming into Canada for a number of years. We are concerned with this lack of compliance and inadequate reporting, and we urge Canada to address this issue.

Proposals

We submit two documents from WCS: 1) our position statement on a number of species proposals (also available at <https://www.wcs.org/about-us/position-statement> in English, French, and Spanish), and 2) our draft position statement on selected implementation and strategic issues. Please note that the latter contains almost all our final positions, with some

items identified as “pending, due to late posting on the CITES website”; it also has not yet been formatted and translated. We will send you a final document, which should be ready within the next week, and request that you post that final version on the CITES public consultation website rather than the attached draft.

In addition, we have the following comments on Canada’s wood bison proposal, which we will share with the US, European Union, and other Parties.

Wood Bison

Wood bison (*Bison bison athabasca*) is listed as threatened in Canada under SARA and was recently (2013) re-assessed by COSEWIC as Special Concern. The reasons behind this scientific recommendation for downgrading of status relates to the steady population growth wild wood bison have experienced over the past three generations (since 1987), primarily due to the establishment of new wild subpopulations within the subspecies’ original range.

While there are still serious threats to wood bison persistence in Canada that limit the recovery of this subspecies in Canada, international trade is not among them. The overall trade level for wild wood bison has remained minimal¹ and steady over the almost 20 years since it was transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II, while the wild population itself has increased. There have been no outside forces that have promoted any meaningful increases in pressure to stimulate international trade. Adequate controls are in place to prevent any unauthorized taking of wild bison for commercial farming, and the trade in farmed (or captive) animals is subject to strict farming regulations.

We agree that wood bison no longer meets the criteria for inclusion or retention in Appendix II, in that the status and trends of the wild populations have improved. There is no evidence that wild populations are affected by trade. The regulation of trade in the species is not necessary to prevent it from “becoming eligible for inclusion in Appendix I in the near future” and is not required to ensure that harvest of wild specimens is “occurring at a level continued harvesting or other influences” (Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16), Annex 2). All available evidence indicates that wood bison recovery does not rest on regulation or effective control of the international trade of this species.

We note that Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16) Annex 4 paragraph A.1. states “No species listed in Appendix I shall be removed from the Appendices unless it has been first transferred to Appendix II, with monitoring of any impact of trade on the species for at least two intervals between meetings of the Conference of the Parties.” The wood bison was transferred from Appendix I to II at CoP10 in 1997, and as such seven intervals between meetings of the CoP have transpired, with no evidence of negative impact of trade on the species. We therefore support Canada’s proposal to delete wood bison from Appendix II in accordance with the Precautionary measures in Annex 4 of CITES Resolution Conf. 9.24 (Rev. CoP16).

¹ Trade has been minimal, as per the UNEP WCMC-maintained CITES trade database, at <http://trade.cites.org/> and supplementary information received by WCS Canada from the CITES secretariat.

Thank you for your consideration of our remarks. We are on hand to clarify any aspects of this letter or our position statements, and look forward to continued dialogue during the time approaching the CoP and at the conference itself, where one of us (Dr. Lieberman) will be in attendance.

Sincerely,



Justina C. Ray, Ph.D.
President and Senior Scientist



Susan S. Lieberman, Ph.D.
Chair, WCS Canada Board of Directors
Vice President, International Policy, WCS
slieberman@wcs.org