

CITES: Environmental Mandate & Activities

Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

Environmental mandate

CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. CITES has now 169 Parties. The Depositary Government is the Government of Switzerland.

Annually, international wildlife trade is estimated to include hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens. The trade is diverse, ranging from live animals and plants to a vast array of wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, wooden musical instruments, timber, tourist curios and medicines. Levels of exploitation of some animal and plant species are high and the trade in them, together with other factors, such as habitat loss, is capable of heavily depleting their populations and even bringing some species close to extinction. Many wildlife species in trade are not endangered, but the existence of an agreement to ensure the sustainability of the trade is important in order to safeguard these resources for the future. Because the trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, the effort to regulate it requires international cooperation to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation

Environmental activities

CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of more than 30,000 species of animals and plants to certain controls. All import, export, re-export and introduction from the sea of species covered by the Convention has to be authorized through a licensing system. Each Party to the Convention must designate one or more Management Authorities in charge of administering that licensing system and one or more Scientific Authorities to advise them on the effects of trade on the status of the species. The species covered by CITES are listed in three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need.