



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Washington, D.C. 20240



FEB 20 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter dated February 6, 2015, to Secretary Jewell, requesting information about international travel by Department of the Interior (Department) employees and officials related to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Your letter has been referred to me for response.

As you know, CITES is an international agreement among 180 member nations, including the United States. This agreement is designed to control and regulate global trade in certain wild animals and plants that are or may become threatened with extinction due to international trade.

More than 35,000 species currently benefit from CITES protection. International trade in plants and animals, whether taken from the wild or bred in captivity, can pose serious risks to species. Without international cooperation, wildlife trade can deplete wild populations, leading to extinction. Wildlife trafficking jeopardizes the survival of iconic species such as elephants and rhinos, threatens food supplies and food security, and presents national and global security implications, as wildlife trafficking networks may include insurgent groups, rogue security personnel and criminal syndicates which also deal in other illicit goods such as weapons and drugs.

As the first nation to ratify CITES in 1974, the United States has consistently been a leader in combating wildlife trafficking and protecting natural resources. Consistent with our statutory obligations under the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in particular, provides key leadership in CITES fora, including strengthening the capacity of CITES member nations to address wildlife trafficking.

Since 2010, Department officials and employees have participated in 2 meetings of the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP), 3 CITES Animals Committee meetings, 3 CITES Plants Committee meetings, 2 joint meetings of the Animals Committee and the Plants Committee, and 7 CITES Standing Committee meetings (4 of which were held in conjunction with CoPs). Within that timeframe, the Department sent delegations ranging in size from as few as 4 to as many as 19 people to those meetings.

The total cost to the Department over this 5-year period for travel expenses related to those CITES meetings is roughly \$400,000. Detailed information on the Department's travel costs and participation in CITES meetings is included in the attached table. Also enclosed is a CD labeled "00060940\_001" containing 17 documents and 69 pages of information pertaining to the

purpose, dates and agendas of those meetings. CITES meeting locations are determined by the CITES Secretariat and CITES Parties who offer to host meetings. The Department officials and employees sent to these CITES meetings are knowledgeable experts who play a key role in the appropriate representation of Department and U.S. interests in those international meetings. As Congressional staff who have participated as members of the U.S. delegation to a CITES CoP will attest, these meetings involve rigorous agendas and long work days, including side meetings and working groups that convene in the margins, often during evenings and weekends.

The Service's participation in CITES has helped shape CITES priorities and contributed to its successes. For example, the focus on combating elephant poaching and illegal ivory trade is more intense than ever before. In March 2013, at the most recent meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16), eight countries—China, Kenya, Malaysia, the Philippines, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, and Vietnam—that were identified as significant source, transit, or destination points for illegal ivory trade agreed to develop time-bound action plans to actively address illegal ivory trade. Also at CoP16, the CITES Parties recognized the importance of addressing the entire crime chain by working to ensure that modern forensic and investigative techniques are applied to the illegal trade in ivory. The CITES Parties also agreed, for the first time, to list several commercially exploited shark species in the CITES Appendices, ensuring that future harvest for international trade is legal and sustainable.

The United States played a major role in the development of these listings, decisions, and actions, and is committed to continuing our leadership role in their implementation, including ensuring accountability if commitments are not met.

Despite our continued commitment to CITES implementation, the Department has made a conscious effort to limit international travel to CITES meetings to the most essential Department officials and personnel in order to minimize taxpayer costs. For example, only 10 people were sent to Bangkok, Thailand, to represent the Department at the most recent CoP meeting in 2013. That delegation was nearly two-thirds smaller than the Department's contingent of 29 individuals who travelled to the 12<sup>th</sup> CoP meeting in Santiago, Chile, in 2002, and more than a third smaller than the delegations to the 2004, 2007, and 2010 CoP meetings, which consisted of 17, 16 and 19 Department participants, respectively.

Effective engagement on international issues requires international travel by Department officials and employees in order to appropriately represent the interests of the United States, and the Department is committed to the efficient allocation of taxpayer resources in furtherance of those interests.

We appreciate your interest in this matter. If you or your staff has additional questions, please feel free to contact Mr. Jason Powell at (202) 208-4946 or [jason\\_powell@ios.doi.gov](mailto:jason_powell@ios.doi.gov).

A similar letter is being sent to Representative Louie Gohmert, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, who cosigned your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dom Ash", with a large, sweeping flourish above the first few letters.

DIRECTOR

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva, Ranking Member, House Committee on Natural Resources  
The Honorable Debbie Dingell, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, House Committee on Natural Resources