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Proposed amendment would alter compliance requirements for illegally harvested timber species

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The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) held its regular global meeting Aug. 17–28 in Geneva, Switzerland. During this event, CITES considered amendments and proposals to increase or decrease protection for certain species, as well as other matters of protocol. One of the featured discussions involved the illegal trade in rosewood, a hardwood used in musical instruments and high-end furniture. According to an article in National Geographic, the trade in rosewood has an estimated value of more than USD 1 billion per year and is currently the “world’s most trafficked wild product by value or volume — more than ivory, rhino horn, and pangolin scales combined.”

CITES requirements cover some 35,000 species of plants and animals, and compliance with the trade measures is determined by the member states and their national laws. Non-compliance can result in several sanctions from CITES itself, as well as significant reputational damage to the countries involved. Fines and sanctions levied on organizations by specific national laws may also apply for certain species.

The basics

CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, March 3, 1973) is a multilateral treaty for the protection of endangered plants and animals, which went into force in 1973 and includes 183 members, making it one of the oldest and largest conservation and sustainable use agreements in existence. CITES requires member states to enact legislation to enforce measures adopted during its conferences. The convention also has several enforcement mechanisms, including:

- “Mandatory confirmation of all permits by the Secretariat.
- “Suspension of cooperation from the Secretariat.
- “A formal warning.
- “A visit by the Secretariat to verify capacity.
- “Recommendations to all Parties to suspend CITES related trade with the offending party.
- “Dictation of corrective measures to be taken by the offending Party before the Secretariat will resume cooperation or recommend resumption of trade.”

CITES categorizes species according to three appendices.

Appendix I includes species that are in danger of extinction due to international trade. Commercial trade in wild-caught species categorized in Appendix I is prohibited, and permits are required for import and export for research or law enforcement purposes. Captive-bred species listed in Appendix I are considered Appendix II specimens. There are roughly 1,200 species listed in Appendix I.

Appendix II is for species that are endangered, but not in imminent danger of extinction. Trade is allowed if the species was obtained legally and the trade does not further endanger the species. According to CITES, hundreds of thousands of the more than the 21,000 species listed in Appendix II are traded annually.

Appendix III includes species that one country has identified as in need of protections. Other CITES members are generally required to assist that country in controlling trade in that species.

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