

# Denver Post

## New plan: Kill endangered species to save them

By Shankar Vedantam  
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**Sunday, October 12, 2003** - WASHINGTON - The Bush administration is proposing far-reaching changes to conservation policies that would allow hunters, circuses and the pet industry to kill, capture and import animals on the brink of extinction in other countries.

Giving Americans access to endangered animals, officials said, would both feed the gigantic U.S. demand for live animals, skins, parts and trophies, and generate profits that would allow poor nations to pay for conservation of the remaining animals and their habitats.

This and other proposals that pursue conservation through trade would, for example, open the door for American trophy hunters to kill the endangered straight-horned markhor in Pakistan; license the pet industry to import the blue-fronted Amazon parrot from Argentina; permit the capture of endangered Asian elephants for U.S. circuses and zoos; and partially resume the international trade in African ivory.

No U.S. endangered species would be affected.

Conservation groups counter that killing or capturing even a few animals is hardly the best way to protect endangered species, and say the policies cater to individuals and businesses that profit from animal exploitation.

"It's a very dangerous precedent to decide that wildlife exploitation is in the best interest of wildlife," said Adam Roberts, a senior research associate at the nonprofit Animal Welfare Institute, an advocacy group for endangered species.

The latest proposal involves an interpretation of the Endangered Species Act that deviates radically from the course followed by Republican and Democratic administrations since President Nixon signed the act in 1973.

The law established broad protection for endangered species, most of which are not native to America, and effectively prohibited trade in them.

Kenneth Stansell, assistant director for international affairs at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said there has been a growing realization that the Endangered Species Act provides poor countries no incentive to protect dying species.

Allowing American hunters, circuses and the pet industry to pay countries to take fixed numbers of animals from the wild would fund conservation programs for remaining animals, he said.

U.S. officials note that such trade is already open to hunters, pet importers and zoos in other Western nations. They say the idea is supported by poor countries that are home to the endangered species and would benefit from the revenue.

Officials at the Department of Interior and Fish and Wildlife, who are promoting many of the new policies, said the proposals merely implement rarely used provisions in the law.

"This is absolutely consistent with the Endangered Species Act, as written," said David Smith, assistant deputy interior secretary for fish, wildlife and parks.

"I think the nature of the beast is such that there are critics who are going to claim some kind of ulterior motive."

Animal-welfare advocates question the logic of the new approach, saying that foreign countries and groups that stand to profit will be in charge of determining how many animals can be killed or captured.

Advocates also warn that opening the door to legal trade will allow poaching to flourish.

"As soon as you place a financial price on the head of wild animals, the incentive is to kill the animal or capture them," Roberts said.

"The minute people find out they can have an easier time killing, shipping and profiting from wildlife, they will do so."

The proposals also trigger a visceral response: To many animal lovers, these species have emotional and symbolic value, and should never be captured or killed.

The Endangered Species Act prohibits removing domestic endangered species from the wild.

Until now, that protection was extended to foreign species. Explaining the change, Stansell said: "There is a recognition that these sovereign nations have a different way of managing their natural resources."

Indeed, many of the strongest advocates for "sustainable use" programs - under which some animals are "harvested" to raise money to save the rest - have been countries that are home to various endangered species.

Foreign trade groups and governments have tried for years - mostly in vain - to convince the United States that animals are no longer in limited supply or that capturing or killing fixed numbers would not

drive a species to extinction.

That could change after Friday, the end of the public comment period on one proposed change.

According to the proposal, "allowing a limited number of U.S. hunters an opportunity to import trophies from this population could provide a significant increase in funds available for conservation."

John Monson, a New Hampshire trophy hunter and former chairman of that state's Fish and Game Commission, said the program would help preserve rare animals. In 1999, Monson applied for a permit to shoot and import a straight-horned markhor. He was turned down.

Monson said the money he has spent hunting trophies - including a leopard from Namibia and a bontebok antelope from South Africa - has funded conservation programs.

Monson is president-elect of Safari Club International, a national hunting advocacy group.

He agreed to an interview only in his personal capacity.

Safari Club International gave \$274,000 to candidates during the 2000 election, 86 percent of it to Republicans. It also spent \$5,445 printing bumper stickers for the Bush presidential campaign.

Monson has made a variety of contributions himself, including \$1,000 to the Bush for President campaign.