



# Understanding CITES

*Use after import of wildlife specimens of CITES Appendix-I species*

## What is CITES?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is the only global treaty aimed at ensuring that the international trade in CITES-listed animals and plants does not threaten their survival in the wild and is legal and traceable. The CITES Appendices contain the list of taxa that are regulated under the Convention. The trade and use of wildlife specimens in the United States may be subject to additional restrictions.

## CITES Appendix I

Species included in CITES Appendix I receive the highest level of protection, and commercial international trade in these species is generally prohibited. With certain exceptions, the international trade in specimens of Appendix-I species may only be authorized if they are legally acquired, if the specimen is not to be used for primarily commercial purposes, and if the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

## What are examples of CITES Appendix-I wildlife specimens found in the United States?

Examples of Appendix-I specimens include elephant ivory; items made from sea turtle shell; Brazilian rosewood; sperm whale teeth, ivory, and bone; leopard specimens; tiger specimens; and pangolin specimens.



Tiger Products: CITES Appendix I

Ryan Moehring/USFWS

The full list of taxa is listed on the [CITES Appendices website](#).

## What are the restrictions after import for Appendix-I wildlife specimens?

Once specimens of Appendix-I species are imported into the United States, there are restrictions on how they may be used. With few limited exceptions, use after import is allowed under CITES only for non-commercial purposes, such as for personal use. This means no commercial activity is allowed after import (no actual or intended import, export, re-export, sale, offer for sale, purchase, transfer, donation, exchange, or provision of a service, that is reasonably likely to result in economic use, gain, or benefit).

However, there are exceptions for certain Appendix-I specimens under particular conditions. Appendix-I specimens imported into the United States may be used for any lawful purpose in the United States (including commercial purposes) if either:

- (a) you can demonstrate (with written records or other documentary evidence) that your specimen was lawfully imported prior to the CITES listing, with no restrictions on its use after import; or
- (b) you can show that the specimen was imported into the United States with one of the following CITES exemption documents and the import was not allowed only for non-commercial purposes.

The relevant CITES documents are:

- Pre-Convention certificate with a source code of “O”
- Export permit or re-export certificate for wildlife from a registered commercial breeding operation under a permit with a source code of “D”
- Export permit or re-export certificate for a plant from a registered nursery or under a permit with a source code of “D”
- Certificate for artificially propagated plants with a source code of “A” for

artificially propagated hybrid specimens derived from one or more unannotated Appendix-I species or other taxa.

Read more about “use after import” for CITES-listed specimens in the U.S. CITES implementing regulations: [50 CFR §23.55](#).

If your item is not wanted, you can also read more about how to [donate](#) a specimen on our [National Wildlife Property Repository website](#).



Frank Kohnr/USFWS

White-bellied pangolin, CITES Appendix I

## May I import and export (or re-export) CITES Appendix-I specimens (into or out of the United States)?

Yes, if the appropriate CITES permits and documentation are obtained. Recognizing that Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction, the Convention requires that international trade in Appendix-I specimens is particularly strictly regulated and may take place only in exceptional circumstances with official CITES documents, if all applicable CITES [requirements are met](#). Both an export permit (issued by the country of export) and an import permit (issued by country of import) are required unless the trade is authorized under an applicable CITES exemption document. Read more about CITES permits and certificates [here](#).

[International Affairs Program](#)

5275 Leesburg Pike - MS: IA  
Falls Church, VA 22041, 800/358-2104