

Exotic Wildlife Association



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Public Comments Processing
Attention: FWS-R9-IA-2010-0056
Division of Policy and Directives Management
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To whom it may concern:

The Exotic Wildlife Association (EWA), by way of this letter, is commenting on the proposed rule to revoke the current rule exempting the Scimitar Horned Oryx, Addax, and Dama Gazelle from the requirements of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The EWA is opposed to FWS's Proposed Rule. This Proposed Rule WILL restrict trade. Restricted trade stands in the way of economic incentive. Without economic incentive there will be no private breeding programs. Eventually instead of protecting animals born in the United States, it will severely impede anyone who wants to breed these animals. When it's too much of a burden and hassle to fight for permits, the animal value goes down as does the economic incentive. Then the U.S. captive bred animals will most assuredly become endangered.

The Exotic Wildlife Association is a 501 (c) (6) international trade organization with its headquarters in Ingram, Texas. Formed in 1967, the Exotic Wildlife Association has grown into what is now the oldest and most successful trade organization in North America. EWA's mission is to encourage and expand the conservation of indigenous and non-indigenous hoofstock animals and to help Exotic Wildlife members develop and strengthen the markets for their animals. The EWA promotes the mission by protecting the rights of private ranchers to manage and control their own land and the indigenous and non-indigenous hoofstock animals living on it. The EWA promotes "conservation through commerce" and articulates the need for "sustainable utilization" of wildlife as a conservation tool and as a viable tool to maintain proper carrying capacity on private property. The EWA also works to educate policy makers, the media, and the public through research and advocacy about the exotic wildlife industry and sustainable utilization of wildlife, and serves its members by providing technical support and information to benefit them, their animals, and their industry.

The Exotic Wildlife Association represents and serves members throughout the United States and in several foreign countries that have propagated and protected some of the largest populations of privately owned wildlife. Members own and raise Scimitar Horned Oryx, Addax, and Dama Gazelle on their private ranches and market them to other ranchers.

Through research and advocacy, EWA has taken action to protect its member's ability to continue to own, raise, and market these three species without unnecessary and burdensome legal restrictions that will detrimentally affect the EWA and its member's efforts to conserve these animals. EWA has consulted with experts in exotic wildlife and employs biologist to study the impact of EWA member's "conservation through Commerce" efforts on the health and number of Scimitar Horned Oryx, Addax, and Dama Gazelle both inside and outside the United States

In 2005, the FWS listed as endangered these three species of antelope native to Africa. These species are either extinct in their native range or nearly so, but are thriving in the United States because of private ownership and captive breeding. In 2005, when the FWS lumped the wild and semi-wild populations of the three antelope in their native African habitat, captive populations in the Middle East and elsewhere around the world, and also included the substantial captive-bred populations in the United States as endangered, this was erroneously done. The U.S. captive bred animals should have never been identified as endangered and it is the belief of the EWA the Endangered Species Act of 1973 was never intended to cover these privately owned animals.

"Promoting Conservation Through Commerce Since 1967"

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Furthermore the listing rule identified no danger to the captive bred U.S. populations of the three antelopes. The FWS stated in fact, that just the opposite is true---that captive breeding in the U.S. has stemmed the decline of the species and provided founder's stock for eventual reintroduction. The FWS also stated that the Scimitar Horned Oryx is possibly extinct in the wild and therefore, if not for captive breeding, may have become totally extinct. The Addax and Dama Gazelle occur in very low numbers in the wild and a significant percentage of remaining specimens survive only in captivity. The SSIG estimates that there are about 4000-5000 Scimitar Horned Oryx, 1500 Addax, and 750 Dama Gazelles in captivity worldwide. The EWA, whose members own more of these three species than any other association in North America, in a 2010 census among its members who own one or more of the these species showed the following census---11,032 Scimitar Horned Oryx---5112 Addax---894 Dama Gazelles. The EWA believes these numbers are very conservative estimates of the actual numbers on private ranches throughout North America. These numbers also do not reflect the numbers of these antelopes on member ranches in the country of Mexico.

Although these three species were listed as endangered, the FWS recognized that a cumbersome rule encompassing these U.S. captive bred species would disrupt all current and future breeding programs. Instead of burdening the ranchers with onus and arduous rules and regulations, the FWS gave incentives for the continued propagation of these species and as a result showed significant increases in the numbers of each of the three species over the 2004 census. Limited regulation also encouraged the ranchers to continue to provide the three species with habitats similar to their native homeland and to care for them using first-class animal husbandry practices. Although the three species living in the wild outside the United States still plainly do qualify for the endangered status, the U.S. captive-bred populations are certainly no longer endangered, if indeed they ever were.

In 2005 the FWS recognized the fact that a listing of the three species as endangered world-wide would be very detrimental to the U.S. captive populations because of the lengthy permitting process and severe restrictions on the management and trade of these animals. The individual ranchers who own and maintain these herds do so on a voluntary basis. Management and conservation of wildlife cannot be carried out without financial resources. Owners of these herds trade and sell members of their herds to bring in new blood lines and to maintain genetic diversity and health. As long as the three species are free of listing classification, their value remains high, which facilitates an important incentive for the continued conservation efforts of the U.S. ranchers. On the other hand, an arduous, cumbersome permitting process will severely interfere with the rancher's ability to participate in efforts that significantly increased the U.S. numbers of these animals that exists today. The additional burdens, costs, and uncertainties that an arduous, archaic permitting system brings will significantly reduce the value of these animals and will most assuredly force many of the ranchers to abandon their conservation efforts of these three species.

The astounding increases in the U.S. captive-bred populations of the three antelope species, coupled with incentives that Exotic Wildlife Association members, zoos, and other have for continuing to breed these magnificent animals, insures a very bright future for these animals. The very fact that these species have flourished under the traditional animal husbandry efforts of Exotic Wildlife Association members is more than enough evidence that the potential restrictions ranchers are facing will be the final stake in the heart for a large majority of these U.S. captive bred antelope.

The archaic and cumbersome permitting process that currently exists will be the catalyst that disincentives continued conservation of these three species on the ranches of the EWA's members. The ranchers across the state of Texas and the rest of the United States have already avoided breeding new antelope and are selling off existing stocks that are difficult and expensive to feed and care for.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a tremendous responsibility which encompasses not only the enforcement of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 but something that is much more important than any regulation or law and that is the care, welfare, and future existence of any threatened or endangered species. The very law that was enacted to save threatened and endangered species will actually be the cause of their demise in the case of these three antelope. The Exotic Wildlife Association knows there are many avenues of approach and legal remedies to this dilemma in which the FWS now finds itself that will eliminate or streamline the current process and still fulfill the order of the court. To go down the path of the past, leaving in place those ridiculous and cumbersome permitting practices that should have been replaced years ago will only seal the death warrant and end one of the greatest success stories in modern day animal husbandry for these three species not to mention the millions of dollars it will cost the FWS to enforce and carry out the current permitting process.

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Avoid the rhetoric of the animal rights activists who contribute less than one cent of every dollar to the welfare of any animal and would have the FWS and anyone else who would listen, believe that these animals are nearly extinct in this country. Look at the success story of these three species. It has not been more governmental regulations that have kept these animals from becoming extinct and no, it is not the animal rights activists, spewing their lies and pseudo-concern for these animals that have caused these three species' populations to literally explode over the last six years. It is the hard working rancher, who loves and cares for these animals on a daily basis. Who feeds and takes care of them during the good times as well as the bad. The bottom line is these animals exist today in the vast numbers they do, not from anything other than private ownership and the ability to trade and manage the species with very little restrictions.

We are at a crossroad in the future of the three species. The FWS has many remedies at its disposal other than business as usual. On behalf of the Exotic Wildlife Association, its board of directors and membership, we encourage the FWS to consider all avenues and remedies and the effects it will have on these three antelope species and their future.

Yours truly,



Charly Seale
Executive Director