
Our Environ- ment

Eight Crocodile Species Proposed for Endangered List

Eight crocodile species found in more than 40 countries around the world have been proposed for treatment as endangered species because they look like other crocodile species that are, in fact, listed as endangered.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 allows a "similarity of appearance" treatment if law enforcement problems result from look-alike animals.

The eight species being proposed occur in Central and South America, China, and South and Southeast Asia. The force of American law does not, of course, extend to these foreign countries. American citizens, however, are forbidden under the law to trade or traffic in these animals, their parts or their products. None may be imported or exported to or from the United States.

The species are: the common caiman, brown caiman, dwarf caiman, smooth-fronted caiman, American crocodile (other than the Florida population which is already listed as endangered), Johnston's crocodile, New Guinea crocodile, and the saltwater crocodile.

This initiative is being taken by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service largely because of law enforcement problems caused by the inability to identify crocodile products at American ports of entry. The proposed eight species so closely resemble the eight species that are already listed that inspectors have substantial difficulty differentiating between the endangered species and the

look-alike species, especially in the case of products made from their hides.

The differentiating characteristics of crocodilians are minute and often depend on the size and shape of the scales, their color, or the presence of follicle glands which are not readily apparent in processed hides. The color of most hides imported into the United States has been changed by preservation processes and tanning. Further, many products such as wallets, belts, and handbags have been dyed red, green, or brown, making it virtually impossible to positively identify the exact species.

Most Alligators off Endangered List

A significant wildlife conservation accomplishment was recognized recently when most of the nation's alligator populations were removed from the U.S. endangered species list. The alligator was removed from the endangered category and placed in the threatened category in all of Florida, and the coastal portions of Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Texas. About 75 percent of the U.S. alligator population inhabits this area. The animal remains classed as endangered in all of Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, and North Carolina, as well as inland areas of South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.

An earlier action in 1975 had removed alligator populations in Louisiana's Vermilion, Cameron, and Calcasieu Parishes from the endangered list. The new rule will allow state and federal wildlife agency employees to capture and remove nuisance alligators. It also permits employees to kill nuisance animals if there is no place to relocate them. Twenty years ago the alligator was headed toward extinction. Improved management programs have brought it back.

Lake Erie May Never Be "Clean"

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says that efforts to halt the algae growth caused by phosphorus pollution

in the Great Lakes may be effective by 1985, but western Lake Erie will never be as "clean" as the other lakes, according to the Wildlife Management Institute.

Increases in the nutrient phosphorus, largely from human sources, going into Lake Erie have accelerated the natural process of eutrophication. If unchecked, this process could cause a lake to literally grow itself to death, becoming clogged with algae until decomposition of organic matter removed oxygen from the water and fish and other fauna could not survive.

According to research, there is a physical limitation to water quality improvement in the Great Lakes. Western Lake Erie, a small basin that collects water and phosphorus from a large area of land, has a calculated natural phosphorus concentration 50 percent higher than the next highest lake. This suggests that total removal of cultural wastes could never bring western Lake Erie to the levels possible in the other Great Lakes.

Spotted Owl Appears in Good Numbers

Bureau of Land Management biologists have located 193 nesting pairs of spotted owls in western Oregon, and only about 63 percent of the owl's habitat on BLM lands has been inventoried, the Wildlife Management Institute reports.

A total of 325 pairs have been found on all lands in western Oregon. That number probably will increase as the count progresses. It should exceed 400, which the Oregon Endangered Species Task Force Group has recommended as necessary to ensure the owl's survival. That group, made up of scientists from the Forest Service, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Oregon State University, believes that the existence of 400 pairs of the diminutive owls would make official listings as an endangered species unnecessary and would allow the bird's removal from the state's threatened species list. BLM's Oregon nongame biologist, Bill Neitro, says the critical elements for the spotted owl are nesting sites in decadent trees and small rodents for food.



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