

Near Chicago, thieves hauled away 20 walnut trees from the Cook County Forest Preserve without detection.

A Pope County, Illinois, farmer discovered walnut stumps left behind in place of his trees, which were appraised at \$1,300 per 1,000 board feet.

An Indiana farmer, awakened in the darkness of early morning by his watchdog, found a truckload of his trees, chopped and ready for hauling as the night's work of rustlers. The trees, worth \$10,000, were cut a few nights before but thieves couldn't haul them due to thickening mud around their tires.

These people are a new breed of professional criminal, tree rustlers, now illegally harvesting over \$2 million in black walnuts annually in Illinois and Indiana alone. And they seem nearly impossible to catch.

A top quality trunk, measuring about 18 inches in diameter with few, if any, notches or marks commands up to \$1,900 per 1,000 board feet. A trunk may be worth \$4,000.

### **\$80,000 for 18 Walnut Trees**

At a recent sale in Ohio 18 black walnut trees, including one the hardwood industry considered the most perfect and valuable black walnut tree in the nation, brought \$80,000. When the bidding was over, the new owner of "the perfect tree" put its value alone at \$30,000. The tree, called the Bicentennial Tree by its new owner, was between 180 and 200 years old. It measured 57 feet to its first limb and was more than 130 feet tall. Its diameter was 38.4 inches at 4.5 feet above the ground, and its circumference at that height was 10.5 feet.

The big tree will be cut for a yield of approximately 2,000 board feet of walnut. That is enough to cover about 700 livingroom or bedroom suites.

### **Cactus Rustling in Southwest**

Sophisticated rustlers in the nation's Southwest are today going after cacti

rather than cattle. Giant saguaro cactus, especially, are highly prized for landscaping purposes. A large crested specimen can bring as much as \$1,000. A small potted rainbow cactus sells for \$25. Efforts to stop the illegal traffic — some plants are shipped as far away as Japan — are hamstrung in most instances by weak laws and insufficient enforcement.

Arizona recently acted to change all this, however, when it strengthened its laws to require that all individuals either possessing, taking, or transporting native plants from the protected groups (including members of the cactus family) must obtain special permits issued by the state commission of agriculture and horticulture. The permits specify which species of protected native plants may be taken, the area from which they may be taken and the manner in which the plants may be taken. Individuals failing to obtain such permits are in violation of the law and subject to arrest. Other Southwestern states are expected to follow suit.

In the meantime, reports the National Wildlife Foundation, thousands of cacti continue to be rustled annually. The long term environmental impact of illegally removing the stately saguaro cactus and other varieties from their natural setting could be serious.

### **Critical Habitat Proposed for Houston Toad**

Critical habitat has been proposed for the Houston toad, a small and endangered brown frog inhabiting central Texas. Critical habitat designation means that all agencies of the federal government must ensure that none of their actions impinge on the needs of an endangered species.

The Houston toad is among the rarest and most critically endangered amphibians in the United States and has been officially listed as endangered since 1970. Much of the hope for the survival and recovery of this species depends upon the maintenance of suitable, undisturbed habitat. For several years, the Fish and Wildlife Service has recognized the plight of this species and has provided funds for a survey of the remaining populations.

In late 1976, the service received the results of an extensive survey of suitable habitat of central Texas and its resident Houston toads. Four major areas, one in Burleson, one in Bastrop, and two in Harris Counties, were found to contain this secretive, shy species. These areas contain the last remaining habitat and breeding sites for the species; therefore, the Fish and Wildlife Service has decided to propose these areas as critical habitat under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

The main threat facing the Houston toad is from agricultural and urban expansion, particularly in suburban Houston (Harris County) where two of the major "toad habitats" occur. By declaring critical habitat for all populations, it is hoped that the survival of this unique species will be ensured.

### **Eastern Timber Wolf Proposed for Threatened List in Minnesota**

The eastern timber wolf of Minnesota, a subspecies of the gray wolf, is being proposed for reclassification from the endangered species category to that of a threatened species. This move reflects an increase in numbers, extension of the animal's range in northern Minnesota, and the fact that it is no longer in danger of extinction in that part of its range.

"Endangered" means that a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. "Threatened" means that a species is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a portion of its range.

Numerous attacks on domestic animals have been reported recently in Minnesota as the wolf has extended its range. The reclassification to threatened will allow a limited killing of wolves, when necessary, by authorized state or federal agents, according to the proposal. The wolf population in Minnesota is estimated at about 1,200.

In other states in the "lower 48" outside of Minnesota the gray wolf would continue to be listed as endangered. In Alaska this species is not listed because its population is numerous and healthy in the wild, numbering an estimated 10,000.





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