



FACT SHEET: Listing the African Lion as Endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act

African Lion Listing Petition

On March 1, 2011, a coalition of wildlife protection and conservation organizations — Born Free USA and Born Free Foundation, Defenders of Wildlife, The Fund for Animals, Humane Society International and The Humane Society of the United States and the International Fund for Animal Welfare — petitioned the Secretary of the Interior to list the African lion (*Panthera leo leo*) as an endangered subspecies pursuant to the United States Endangered Species Act (ESA).


Why Does the African Lion Warrant an Endangered Listing?

The African lion is in danger of extinction throughout a significant portion of its range and therefore meets the statutory criteria to be listed as endangered under the ESA. Fewer than 40,000 African lions exist today. The population has decreased by at least 48.5 percent over

the past 22 years. Furthermore, the African lion now occupies only 22 percent of its historic range. Although the African lion continues to exist in 27 countries, most populations are too small and isolated from other populations to be viable.

Threats to African Lion Survival

Until very recently, conservation of the African lion was not identified as a matter of significant concern. The subspecies was considered abundant, healthy and wide-ranging. Most lion populations were not closely monitored and, as a consequence, their steady decline over the last few decades was overlooked. Therefore, adequate conservation measures to address the primary threats to the species—retaliatory killings resulting from human-lion conflict, habitat and prey loss, disease, and unsustainable off-take for international trade in lion and lion parts—were and continue to be lacking.



*Lions are in trouble.
They have disappeared from three
quarters of their historical range.
Their wild population has plummeted
by nearly 50% in the past three decades.*



Listing the African lion as endangered would be an essential step to reversing the current decline of this iconic species.

International Trade in African Lions

Of all these threats, the one that directly involves the United States and its citizens, and that can therefore be specifically addressed by an endangered listing under the ESA, is over-utilization for commercial or recreational purposes.

The United States is the world's largest importer of African lion parts, for hunting trophies and for commercial purposes. Between 1999 and 2008, 7,090 lion specimens, reported as being from a wild source, were traded internationally for recreational trophy hunting purposes, representing a minimum of 5,663 lions. Most of these specimens were imported to the United States: 4,139 specimens, representing a minimum of 3,600 lions (64 percent of the total).

Despite the significant and continuing population and range declines that this subspecies has suffered, the number of lion trophies imported to the United States is increasing: imports in 2008 were larger than any other year in the decade studied and more than twice the number in 1999. Over that decade, the United States imported lion specimens from at least twelve African countries where lion off-take was unsustainable.

Similarly, but on a smaller scale, from 1999 to 2008, 2,715 lion specimens, reported as being from a wild source, the equivalent of at least 1,043 lions, were traded internationally for commercial purposes. Of this trade, the United States imported 1,700 lion of the specimens (63 percent of the total), the equivalent of at least 362 lions (35 percent of the total). The most common lion specimens traded for commercial purposes were claws, trophies, skins, live animals, skulls and bodies.

There is Hope: Protection through an Endangered Listing

Listing the African lion as endangered would significantly benefit the iconic animal by generally prohibiting the importation to the United States of African lions and their parts, unless it serves a conservation purpose. Such a listing would be an essential step to reversing the current decline of the species. Moreover, such a listing would heighten awareness of the importance of African lion conservation among foreign governments, conservation organizations, and the general public. Africa's lions need all the help they can get in order to ensure their long-term survival.