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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-964](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Resources, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

International trade in wildlife is a multibillion-dollar industry that, in some cases, has taken species to the brink of extinction. To address the problem, several countries, including the United States, created an international treaty—the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora—that took effect in 1975. The United States also has domestic laws, such as the Endangered Species Act, that protect species. The protections provided by the Convention and domestic laws can differ. For example, in some cases, U.S. laws afford more stringent protections to species than the Convention does; such stricter protections can prevent U.S. interests from participating in trade that is permitted by the Convention. The Convention's member countries meet periodically to discuss implementation of the Convention and are scheduled next to meet in Thailand in October 2004.

In anticipation of this meeting, GAO was asked to report on (1) how implementation of the Convention has changed over the years, (2) U.S. funding and other resources spent on Convention-related activities, and (3) the relationship between the Convention and some domestic laws.

The Department of the Interior and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration generally agreed with the information in the GAO report.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-964](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-964).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry Hill at (202) 512-3841 or [hillbt@gao.gov](mailto:hillbt@gao.gov).

## PROTECTED SPECIES

### International Convention and U.S. Laws Protect Wildlife Differently

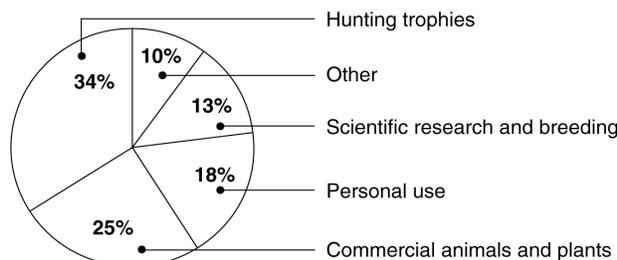
#### What GAO Found

Implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora has become increasingly complex and controversial since its inception. Complexity has increased in part because of the sheer number of member countries (166) and species protected (more than 33,000) and because the criteria for identifying protected species have become more scientific and specific, resulting in heavier data-gathering, permitting, enforcement, and reporting requirements for member countries. Controversy, in turn, has increased because the Convention membership has recently contemplated, and in some cases approved, protection of commercial species such as sharks and Patagonian toothfish (commonly marketed as Chilean seabass)—species that in some cases are already managed under regional fisheries agreements.

Over the 9-year fiscal period 1995 through 2003, the United States spent more than \$50 million on Convention-related activities. As the agency primarily responsible for U.S. implementation of the Convention, the Fish and Wildlife Service spent the largest portion of these funds—about \$37 million over the period. Other agencies have roles as well, including the Department of State, which makes U.S. contributions to help administer the Convention internationally.

The Convention and the Endangered Species Act protect species differently. In some cases, the act prohibits imports that are allowed by the Convention. For example, the act generally prohibits the import of a popular exotic fish, the Asian arowana, although the Convention allows some commercial trade in the species. The Convention establishes mandatory requirements and recognizes countries' rights to establish stricter protections. However, such protections have generated heated debates among affected parties. Those in favor say that the United States should impose stricter protections than the Convention, when needed to protect endangered species or their habitats. Opponents say that U.S. actions should be consistent with the agreements reached by a majority of the Convention's members.

**Intended Uses of Wildlife, 2003, per U.S. Import/Export Permit Applications**



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.