

Court Orders Trump Administration to Release Public Records on Wildlife Imports

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A federal court in Arizona has ordered the Trump administration to release public records about how much wildlife is being imported into the United States, including live animals for the pet trade and dead animals destined for clothing and biomedical research.

The court found the data, which includes the species' names, quantity imported, and importing and exporting companies' names, must be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act.

The ruling stems from a 2016 FOIA request filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, followed by litigation after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refused to provide all the data.

"The United States is a huge hub for the wildlife trade, including trade in imperiled animals and plants," said Tanya Sanerib, a senior attorney with the Center's international program. "The public has every right to know what wildlife is coming across our borders. Given the enormous threats from wildlife trafficking, we're glad to know these records will see the light of day."

The United States imports millions of wildlife and plant parts each year from around the globe. Imported products include: birds, fish and turtles destined for the pet trade; python-skin boots and fur coats for the fashion industry; corals, orchids and shells used for home décor; lions and other animals killed as hunting trophies; and primates destined for medical research.

For decades the Fish and Wildlife Service has tracked wildlife import and export data and freely provided that data to conservation groups and the public. Beginning in 2016, however, the agency refused to release data from certain companies. Without the data, the public cannot track or evaluate whether U.S. trade is endangering wildlife at home or abroad and thus seek protections for those animals domestically or internationally.

The new court order directs the Service to release the disputed wildlife data within 14 days, finding the release of this basic import information would not disadvantage importing companies competitively.

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