



# Illegal Trafficking of Wildlife and Other Natural Resources

*March 24, 2023*

Fiscal Year 2022 Report to Congress



**Homeland  
Security**

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*

# Message from the Deputy Director and Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director

March 24, 2023

I am pleased to present the following report, “Illegal Trafficking of Wildlife and Other Natural Resources,” prepared by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

This report was compiled pursuant to the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Fiscal Year 2022 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103).



Pursuant to congressional guidelines, this report is provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable Dave Joyce  
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Henry Cuellar  
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Chris Murphy  
Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Katie Britt  
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Inquiries related to this report may be directed to the ICE Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 732-4200.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tae D. Johnson', written over a horizontal line.

Tae D. Johnson  
Deputy Director and  
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

# Executive Summary

This report highlights recent activities and initiatives that DHS has put forth to address wildlife and natural resources trafficking—illegal activities that pose both a conservation and a national security threat to the United States.

Through its engagement with the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking, DHS has taken steps to coordinate further with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Office of Law Enforcement and has worked to implement the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking. Further, DHS has aligned its resources to meaningful activities designed to address and eliminate the threat from these unlawful activities.

DHS remains strongly committed to combating wildlife trafficking, to assisting foreign nations in building capacity to combat wildlife trafficking, and to working with its partners to combat transnational organized crime.



# Illegal Trafficking of Wildlife and Other Natural Resources

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# I. Legislative Requirement

This report was compiled in response to direction in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 117-103), which continues direction in Senate Report 116-125 accompanying the FY 2020 DHS Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-93).

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying P.L. 117-103 states:

*Wildlife Trafficking.*—ICE shall continue its work in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and CBP to improve cooperative efforts to better address wildlife trafficking. Further, ICE is directed to continue to produce the report identified in Public Law [sic] 116-125. The report shall include options for making this information available in a routine and public manner annually.

Senate Report 116-125 accompanying P.L. 116-93 states:

*Wildlife Trafficking.*—As noted in prior reports, the Committee is concerned by the high level of illegal international trade in wildlife and wildlife products. The Committee expects the Department to work in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to improve cooperative efforts to better address wildlife trafficking. The Committee remains frustrated that the Department has failed to produce some specific reports on these activities, as required. Such reports should be provided to the Committee without delay. Further, as outlined in the explanatory statements accompanying Public Laws 114-113, 115-31, 115-141, and 116-6, a similar report shall be provided for fiscal year 2020 not later than 45 days after the end of fiscal year 2020.

## II. Background

Wildlife trafficking has become an international crisis that: threatens security and public health, hinders sustainable economic development, promotes biodiversity loss, and undermines our laws. Moreover, the connections between trafficking in illegal wildlife and natural resources with the financing of groups involved in transnational organized crime pose additional threats to the United States.

Executive Order (EO) 13648, *Combating Wildlife Trafficking*, issued on July 1, 2013, addressed the significant effects of wildlife trafficking on the national interests of the United States. EO 13648 established the Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking (Presidential Task Force), led by the Department of State (DOS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of the Interior (DOI), and included DHS and 13 other federal agencies and offices. The Presidential Task Force created a *National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking* (Strategy), issued February 11, 2014, that included a consideration of issues related to combating trafficking and to curbing consumer demand.

On February 11, 2015, the Presidential Task Force issued the Strategy's implementation plan, which reaffirmed our Nation's commitment to work in partnership with governments, local communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and the private sector to stem the illegal trade in wildlife. DHS continues to work in concert with other agencies to help to implement the key objectives of the Strategy: strengthening enforcement, reducing demand for illegally traded wildlife, and expanding international cooperation.

Effective July 6, 2016, the Rule for the African Elephant, promulgated under section 4(d) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, was revised to increase protection for African elephants in response to the rise in poaching driven by the illegal trade in ivory. The African elephant was listed as "threatened" under the ESA effective on June 11, 1978, and, at the same time, a rule was promulgated under section 4(d) of the ESA to regulate import and use of specimens of the species in the United States. This final rule allows U.S. authorities to regulate trade in African elephant ivory and to ensure better that the U.S. ivory market is not contributing to the poaching of elephants in Africa, while still allowing activities that do not contribute to poaching and illegal trade, such as well-managed sport hunting.

On February 9, 2017, EO 13773, *Enforcing Federal Law with Respect to Transnational Criminal Organizations and Preventing International Trafficking*, was issued. The order addressed the substantial threat to the safety of the United States and its citizens posed by transnational criminal organizations (TCO). EO 13773 seeks to strengthen federal law enforcement efforts to combat TCOs and subsidiary organizations engaged in illicit activities, such as "the illegal smuggling and trafficking of humans, drugs or other substances, wildlife and weapons," which threaten public safety and national security. It was significant that EO 13773 specifically recognized wildlife trafficking, which includes timber trafficking, as one of the illicit activities by TCOs that the United States must work to combat.

### III. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), along with the DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans, leads DHS's participation on the Presidential Task Force. ICE HSI was involved actively in building the Strategy's implementation plan and in identifying existing resources and expertise capable of executing the plan's enforcement and investigative fundamentals. ICE HSI works to disrupt and dismantle TCOs involved in wildlife trafficking using its domestic and international resources, expertise, and authorities. ICE HSI personnel are engaged actively with other U.S. Government agencies and NGOs to promote HSI's role both domestically and abroad, including capacity-building as it relates to illegal trafficking of wildlife and natural resources. These entities include, but are not limited to, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), DOS Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, World Customs Organization, International Police Organization (INTERPOL), and various NGOs and academic institutions.

HSI is the largest investigative arm of DHS and is a vital U.S. asset in combating criminal organizations illegally exploiting America's travel, trade, financial, and immigration systems. HSI's workforce includes special agents, analysts, auditors, and support staff. HSI employees are assigned to cities throughout the United States and to offices around the world. HSI's international workforce is DHS's largest investigative presence abroad, with 86 foreign offices in 55 countries, giving HSI one of the largest footprints in U.S. law enforcement abroad.

ICE HSI, CBP, APHIS, FWS, NOAA, and other agencies have joined forces by way of CBP's Import Safety Commercial Targeting and Analysis Center (CTAC), CBP's Civil Enforcement Division, and CBP's National Targeting Center (NTC) to enhance mutual U.S. Government efforts to combat illegal imports of smuggled wildlife, timber, and illicit products of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and seafood fraud. CTAC and CBP's Civil Enforcement Division bring together key federal agencies that regulate imports into the United States, as well as law enforcement agencies like HSI, with authority to enforce import violations. CBP provides systems and targeting training, along with operational targeting support, through NTC. ICE HSI has assigned personnel to both CTAC and NTC. Furthermore, since December 2013, ICE HSI has maintained the NTC – Investigations, which is situated within CBP's NTC, to enhance its shared border security mission. ICE HSI's collaborative presence at NTC supports the border security continuum, from CBP interdictions and HSI investigations, to the joint exploitation of intelligence.

The DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) continues to support and fund a wildlife contraband-focused project coordinated by the Texas A&M University-based DHS S&T Center of Excellence for Cross-Border Threat Screening and Supply Chain Defense and conducted by the University of Washington – Seattle's Center for Conservation Biology. The aim of this collaborative program is to develop and test innovative, nonintrusive canine inspection technologies to detect contraband in shipping containers throughout global supply chains. The ICE HSI Global Trade Division, Commercial Fraud Unit, has served as the "DHS Champion"

from the inception of this pilot project, which aims to advance high-throughput methods for authorities to search containers during transit and to identify containers transporting contraband without breaking the tamper-evident security seals. A nonintrusive detection process such as this could provide law enforcement with a better probability of success in conducting controlled deliveries of identified containerized contraband, especially when criminals surveil these containers.

During the month of October 2021, ICE HSI, CBP, FWS, APHIS, the U.S. Forest Service, NOAA, and INTERPOL National Crime Bureau Washington, District of Columbia, coordinated their collective participation in the INTERPOL and World Customs Organization-sponsored Operation Thunder 2021. This month-long police and customs crossborder operation involved 118 countries and resulted in large seizures of protected wildlife and forestry specimens and products, triggering arrests and investigations worldwide. Although results still are being reported, Operation Thunder 2021 so far has seen more than 1,000 seizures and the identification of some 300 suspects, triggering a series of worldwide arrests and investigations linked to illegal trading, processing, exporting, and importing Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)-listed wildlife and forestry products. Further arrests and prosecutions are foreseen globally as investigations continue to unfold.

On October 5, 2021, based on information provided by ICE HSI Hong Kong, CBP officers at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) inspected a suspicious shipment labeled “frozen fish” and discovered totoaba fish bladders in two of the 10 boxes contained within the shipment. The shipment targeted by HSI Hong Kong is linked to a transnational network responsible for smuggling totoaba bladders and shark fins from Mexico via the U.S. to Hong Kong, China, and other destinations in Asia. The shipment originated from Mexico and was set to transit the United States, Japan, and Taiwan, with a final destination of Bangkok, Thailand. *Totoaba macdonaldi*, commonly known as “totoaba fish,” are an endangered species protected by CITES.

The dried bladders of the totoaba fish are thought to have medicinal benefits when ingested and are highly sought after in mainland China for use in traditional Chinese medicine. The totoaba fish are found exclusively in the Sea of Cortez in Baja, Mexico, and are poached using gillnets that also kill as bycatch the critically endangered vaquita, a small porpoise also only found in the Sea of Cortez.

On October 13, 2021, a Texas man was sentenced in federal district court in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for knowingly and willfully making a materially false, fictitious, and fraudulent statement and representation to federal agents during a joint criminal investigation of international trafficking of primates into the United States by FWS and HSI. The defendant previously had pled guilty to the charge and was sentenced to serve a 3-year term of probation, with a special condition of home confinement for a period of 3 months. The defendant also was ordered by the U.S. District Court judge to pay a criminal fine in the amount of \$5,000. In connection with his guilty plea, the defendant admitted to agents that he was involved in the procurement and importation into the United States of long-tailed macaques from Southeast Asia.

On October 26, 2021, a Louisiana husband and wife were sentenced after previously pleading guilty to violating the Lacey Act and illegally selling Louisiana box turtles. Both defendants were sentenced by the federal judge in the Eastern District of Louisiana to serve a 1-year probation. Federal investigators initiated an undercover investigation after receiving information from a confidential informant that these defendants illegally captured and sold common box turtles, a protected species, shipping them to New Jersey. In July 2017, an undercover HSI special agent arranged to purchase turtles from the defendants for approximately \$700 in a retail shopping plaza parking lot. After making the exchange, other agents assisted in the arrest of the married couple. This joint criminal investigation was conducted by ICE HSI, FWS, and the U.S. Postal Inspections Service.

On October 28, 2021, HSI Bangkok graduated 16 Royal Thai Police officers from the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers' elite federal law enforcement program, International Task Force Agent Training. Following the successful graduation of these officers, the Thailand Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit (TCIU) became operational. For nearly 2 years, HSI Bangkok had been working closely with the Royal Thai Police to establish the TCIU.

TCIUs enhance a host country's ability to investigate and prosecute individuals involved in transnational criminal activity that threatens the stability and national security of the region and poses a continuing threat to the homeland security of the United States. TCIUs are composed of foreign law enforcement officials and prosecutors who undergo strict vetting to ensure better that shared information and operational activities are not compromised. TCIUs facilitate information exchange and rapid bilateral investigation of all manner of transnational crime including wildlife trafficking, money laundering, and many of the other 400 violations of law within HSI's investigative purview. Partnering with these TCIUs enables HSI to promote direct action via information sharing and investigative leads while respecting the sovereignty of the host country and cultivating international partnerships. The Thailand TCIU is the 14<sup>th</sup> HSI TCIU globally and the second TCIU in Asia.

On November 3, 2021, two foreign nationals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were arrested near Seattle, Washington, and were indicted by a federal grand jury for conspiracy, money laundering, smuggling, and Lacey Act violations for trafficking elephant ivory and white rhinoceros' horns from the DRC to Seattle. The indictment alleges that the defendants worked with a middleman to smuggle four packages into the United States. In August and September 2020, the defendants sent three shipments containing a total of about 49 pounds of ivory by air freight to Seattle. In May 2021, they sent another package with approximately five pounds of rhinoceros' horns. At the same time, the defendants conspired to conduct large transactions via ocean freight, offering the buyer more than two tons of elephant ivory, one ton of pangolin scales, and multiple intact rhinoceros' horns. On November 2, 2021, they arrived in Washington State to negotiate the details of such a deal and were arrested in Edmonds, Washington.

The arrests and indictment are part of "Operation Congo Kuluna," an international operation conducted between HSI Seattle, the Government of the DRC, and the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa, DRC. Though the investigation is ongoing, immediately after the arrests, the task force in DRC acted on information provided by HSI Seattle to seize 2,067 pounds of ivory and 75 pounds of pangolin scales in Kinshasa worth approximately \$3.5 million, all contraband related to wildlife

trafficking. The two defendants in Seattle pled guilty on June 27, 2022. They also were required to proffer and cooperate with HSI further as part of their plea deal. The two provided more details on the wildlife trafficking network in DRC with which they were affiliated and other related information of investigative value. HSI Seattle conducted the investigation, and CBP Seattle and the Seattle Police Department assisted in arresting the defendants.

In February 2022, HSI Phnom Penh participated in a wildlife trafficking event sponsored by the Wildlife Conservation Society in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and at an International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Bureau-sponsored wildlife trafficking training event in April 2022 in Da Nang, Vietnam. In both instances, HSI presented a case study of wildlife trafficking through Cambodia and HSI's investigative capabilities.

On February 14, 2022, a federal judge sentenced a Mexican national to 8 months of time served, followed by 2 years of supervised release. The defendant also was ordered to pay \$3,000 in restitution after pleading guilty to smuggling 27 totoaba fish bladders into the United States from Mexico. CBP apprehended the defendant in June 2021, as he entered the United States from Mexico at the Otay Mesa Port of Entry. During a vehicle inspection, a CBP officer noticed two white shopping bags on the van's floor and determined that 27 dried totoaba fish bladders were concealed in the bags and in the rear overhead compartment of the van. CBP notified HSI and FWS agents, who interviewed the defendant and confirmed he did not possess any paperwork or license to allow him to import or export any fish or wildlife. The estimated black-market value for the bladders in his possession was approximately \$270,000. HSI and FWS conducted the investigation with extensive assistance from CBP.

From March 15-19, May 30-June 3, and August 2-6, 2022, HSI subject matter experts gathered in Mombasa, Kenya; Arusha, Tanzania; and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where they provided blocks of instruction on investigative techniques and methodologies at weeklong workshops entitled "Reducing Maritime Trafficking of Wildlife between Africa and Asia." These multi-agency, regional capacity-building workshops were sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, and the Grace Farms Foundation, which is partnered with the ICE HSI-led National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center under a memorandum of understanding addressing wildlife trafficking and forced labor. The Lusaka Agreement Task Force hosted the workshops, which brought participants from multiple law enforcement agencies from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, whose mandates focus on combating crossborder wildlife crime. These three workshops also focused on constructing financial investigations and asset recovery to combat wildlife crime and to dismantle wildlife crime syndicates better. Additional instruction was provided on various investigative skillsets such as interviewing, document exploitation, developing confidential informants, and conducting controlled deliveries. Attendees also participated in practical exercises to solidify retention of the investigative skills learned during the workshop.

On March 24, 2022, an Oxnard, California, man was charged in a superseding indictment, which alleges that he illegally imported into the United States more than 1,700 reptiles, including 60 reptiles found concealed in his luggage in February 2022, while attempting to cross at the United States-Mexico border crossing in February 2022. The man was charged with one count of conspiracy, 9 counts of smuggling goods into the United States, and two counts of wildlife

trafficking. His sister, also of Oxnard, was charged also in the indictment with conspiracy. This indictment stemmed from a joint HSI and FWS investigation of this wildlife smuggling operation. According to the indictment, from January 2016 to February 2022, the defendants' siblings and their co-conspirators used social media to buy and negotiate the terms of sale and delivery of wildlife in the United States. The defendants allegedly advertised for sale on social media the animals smuggled from Mexico into the United States, posting photos and video that depicted the animals being collected from the wild. The animals—which included Yucatan box turtles, Mexican box turtles, baby crocodiles, and Mexican beaded lizards—allegedly were imported into the United States from Mexico and Hong Kong without obtaining permits required by CITES. The sister allegedly assisted in the illegal wildlife smuggling business, particularly during two extended periods when her brother was incarcerated in the United States.

From April 26 to April 29, 2022, HSI Nairobi provided virtual training to the TCIU on Illegal Logging and Forest Crimes investigations through the International Law Enforcement Academy in Gaborone, Botswana. This course provided an assessment of specific regional enforcement needs to combat illegal logging and timber trafficking associated with illegal trade. Topics included wood identification, international cooperation, corruption and money laundering, and investigative techniques including the importance and methods of compiling and documenting accurate information related to timber trafficking crimes and associated trade. This course involved multiple countries and helped the TCIU to recognize the importance of information sharing and communication between participant countries, law enforcement agencies, and prosecutorial entities. The course also seeks to build and strengthen regional capacity to understand and enforce laws concerning illegal logging and forest crimes. This training will strengthen further the past successes the TCIU previously had with seizure of illegal forest products being smuggled through land borders and at the port of Mombasa in Kenya.

On April 27, 2022, HSI Newark conducted a joint enforcement operation with the FWS, executing four arrest warrants in furtherance of Operation Broken Glass. On April 29, 2022, a major seafood distributor and eight of its employees and associate, were indicted for smuggling, Lacey Act violations, and conspiracy to violate the ESA, stemming from their trafficking in large volumes of highly endangered eels. This seafood company is the largest importer and wholesale distributor of eel meat in the United States. The joint HSI and FWS Office of Law Enforcement investigation was designed to detect, investigate, prosecute, and deter those engaged in the illegal trafficking of juvenile American eels, or glass eels, as well as European glass eels, from China to the United States without required CITES permits. The indictment alleges that the defendants unlawfully conspired to smuggle large quantities of live baby European eels out of Europe to their eel-rearing factory in China. After rearing the baby eels to maturity, the defendants' Chinese facility then would slaughter and process the eels for shipping to the United States, to be sold as sushi products. Over a 4-year period, the indictment alleges, the defendants imported approximately 138 ocean containers full of eel meat into the United States, with a market value exceeding \$160 million.

On May 23, 2022, a DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans senior policy analyst for Transnational Organized Crime and the HSI Assistant Director for the Global Trade Division participated in the annual Presidential Task Force Principals Meeting. This executive level meeting was chaired by DOS and co-chaired by DOI and DOJ. The agenda covered priority

topics such as the nexus of corruption and wildlife trafficking, potential opportunities to collaborate with the People’s Republic of China law enforcement to disrupt wildlife trafficking, initiatives for international coordination with foreign partners, and enhancing interagency engagement with the intelligence community regarding the combating of wildlife trafficking.

On June 9, 2022, the HSI Global Trade Division provided a subject matter expert to participate in roundtable discussions held during the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime-hosted “Private Sector Dialogue on Disruption of Financial Crimes Related to Forestry Crimes” forum, offered in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Programme Against Money Laundering and the Law Enforcement Assistance Programme. HSI shared relevant information concerning the ongoing investigative needs for combating forestry crimes, various investigative methods and technologies used to detect forestry crimes and related financial crimes, and crossborder and interagency coordination requirements for successful investigations and prosecutions of forestry crimes and related financial crimes.

On June 11, 2022, a commercial vehicle driver attempted to enter the United States at the Otay Mesa Import Facility near San Diego, California. The driver and sole occupant of a commercial vehicle was referred to secondary inspection by CBP officers, where 94 totoaba fish bladders were discovered within the vehicle concealed inside polystyrene foam coolers. The driver was arrested, but federal prosecution was declined by the Assistant United States Attorney in San Diego, California. HSI San Ysidro special agents, along with FWS Office of Law Enforcement agents and the CBP San Diego Field Office Intelligence Division Trade, have initiated an investigation into the driver and others related to the unlawful importation of totoaba bladders. The 94 totoaba bladders valued at \$1.4 million, a cell phone, and \$1,306 were seized by CBP officials.

From August 2 through August 5, 2022, HSI provided subject matter expertise in support of the International Law Enforcement Academy course of study on “Illegal Logging and Forest Crimes” in Bangkok, Thailand, organized and moderated by DOJ’s Environment and Natural Resources Division. The participants included police, customs, wildlife, and forest enforcement officers and prosecuting attorneys and judges from Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Instructors from DOJ, HSI, U.S. Forest Service, Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers, and FWS provided blocks of instruction on topics ranging from global timber and wildlife markets and trends, targeting and investigative planning, forest-level investigative tools, and interagency coordination to financial investigations, international coordination and controlled deliveries, and forensics and wood identification.

## IV. U.S. Customs and Border Protection

DHS strengthens CBP's targeting programs and detection capabilities through extensive partnerships and collaborations with other federal agencies and industry stakeholders. CBP enforces laws on behalf of numerous federal agencies and works closely with DHS partners, as well as with other federal agencies such as APHIS, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, and the Food and Drug Administration. CBP also collaborates with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and multiple agencies within DOI, such as FWS.

The CBP Officer and the CBP Agriculture Specialist (CBPAS) are two distinct positions in CBP's Office of Field Operations. The CBPAS is a series 0401 position that enforces APHIS regulations at ports of entry.

CBPASs have the authority to enforce a wide range of USDA regulations and policies. Specifically, they enforce numerous regulations under the Code of Federal Regulations with the regulatory authority contained in the Animal Health Protection Act, ESA, the Homeland Security Act of 2002, and the Plant Protection Act. CBPASs are involved in inspection, intelligence, targeting, analysis, examination, and law enforcement activities related to imported agricultural commodities and all types of conveyances at ports of entry. As part of their authority, CBPASs are authorized to inspect and clear passengers, baggage, cargo, mail, foreign regulated garbage, and conveyances for agriculture-related articles.

CBPAS are trained to take action based on the guidance and policies outlined in 10 different APHIS manuals, as well as in other documents and job aides. The authority of a CBPAS derives from the memorandum of agreement between DHS and USDA.

Following the creation of DHS under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Congress passed legislation to transfer the agriculture import and entry functions from USDA to DHS (Title 6 of the U.S.C. § 231). The transfer includes the functions related to agricultural import and entry inspection activities under the animal and plant protection laws specified below; however, the transfer does not include any quarantine activities carried out under these laws.

- The act commonly known as the Virus-Serum-Toxin Act (the eighth paragraph under the heading "Bureau of Animal Industry" in the Act of March 4, 1913; 21 U.S.C. § 151 et seq.).
- Section 1 of the Act of August 31, 1922 (commonly known as the Honeybee Act; 7 U.S.C. § 281).
- Title III of the Federal Seed Act (7 U.S.C. § 1581 et seq.).
- The Plant Protection Act (7 U.S.C. § 7701 et seq.).
- The Animal Health Protection Act (subtitle E of title X of P.L. 107-171; 7 U.S.C. § 8301 et seq.).
- The Lacey Act Amendments of 1981 (authorities related to plant-based articles, not animal; 16 U.S.C. § 3371 et seq.).
- Section 11 of the ESA (16 U.S.C. § 1540).

When encountering regulated and/or prohibited FWS products during CBP inspections, CBP personnel typically hold and detain these items for further FWS review and regulatory decision. On occasion, CBP staff may opt to perform joint operations with FWS. For example, from September 21, 2020 – January 31, 2021, Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison’s National Agriculture Cargo Targeting Unit, in collaboration with FWS, conducted Trade Special Operation Mitten Catcher. Trade Special Operation Mitten Catcher was designed to intercept international shipments of undeclared live mitten crabs (*Eriocheir sinensis*) in the express courier environment. Importation of live mitten crabs is illegal by the Lacey Act, and it is also illegal to transport or possess them in the states of California, Washington, and Oregon. The operation successfully resulted in the interception of 35 shipments of live mitten crabs across various ports of entry.

On April 20, 2022, CBP published on its website a fact sheet for the United States Mexico-Canada Agreement environmental provisions aimed at monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. On October 5, 2021, LAX CBP Officers and FWS seized two boxes of totoaba fish bladders weighing 10.24 kilograms, valued at \$491,520. Days prior, CTAC reviewed the Mexican in-bond shipment that was headed to Otay Mesa, in transit through LAX for its final destination of Bangkok, Thailand. The consignee was linked to previous totoaba shipments from a known totoaba smuggler. The shipment made it through to LAX and went on its way to the destination. CTAC contacted LAX to recall the shipment to the United States. Throughout the weekend, CTAC, CBP’s Office of International Affairs, LAX, and HSI diligently worked to monitor this shipment to enable CBP’s interception of the shipment.

On September 14, 2022, a commercial vehicle driver attempted to enter the United States at the Otay Mesa Import Facility near San Diego, California. The driver and sole occupant of a commercial vehicle was referred to secondary inspection by CBP officers where 320 totoaba fish bladders were discovered within the vehicle concealed inside polystyrene foam coolers. ICE HSI San Ysidro agents and CBP San Diego Field Office Intelligence Division Trade have initiated an investigation into the driver and others related to the unlawful importation of totoaba bladders. A cell phone and the 320 totoaba bladders valued at \$4.8 million were seized by CBP officials, making this among the largest CBP seizures of this endangered fish species.

## V. Conclusion

DHS remains steadfast in its commitment to combat wildlife trafficking and the illegal trading of natural resources. Through its collaboration with interagency partners, DHS will continue to work and build on the Strategy's three objectives: strengthening enforcement; reducing demand for illegally traded wildlife; and building international cooperation, commitment, and public-private partnerships.

## Appendix: List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
CBPAS	U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agriculture Specialist
CED	Civil Enforcement Division
CITES	Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CTAC	Commercial Targeting and Analysis Center
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DOI	U.S. Department of Interior
DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
DOS	U.S. Department of State
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EO	Executive Order
ESA	Endangered Species Act of 1973
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
FY	Fiscal Year
HSI	Homeland Security Investigations
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
INTERPOL	International Police Organization
LAX	Los Angeles International Airport
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NTC	National Targeting Center
Presidential Task Force	Presidential Task Force on Wildlife Trafficking
S&T	Science and Technology Division
Strategy	National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking
TCO	Transnational Criminal Organization
TCIU	Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit
U.S.C.	United States Code
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture