Importing and Exporting Your Commercial Wildlife Shipment

How do I import or export my commercial wildlife shipment?
Generally, you must import or export your shipment through one of our designated ports, declare your shipment to us on a special form, and receive clearance from us for your shipment.

In most cases, you must be licensed with us and pay user fees for each shipment.

What is wildlife?
Wildlife is any living or dead wild animal, its parts, and products made from it. Wildlife not only includes mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, but also invertebrates such as mollusks, crustaceans, arthropods, insects and coelenterates.

What about animals that are captive-born or bred, or hatched in captivity?
These animals and their parts, products, eggs, and offspring are also wildlife.

How do you define import?
Any wildlife introduced or brought into, or landed on, any place under U.S. jurisdiction is an import.

How do you define export?
Any wildlife that departs, is sent, or shipped from, is carried out of, or is consigned to a carrier from a place under U.S. jurisdiction with a destination outside of the United States is an export.

Does U.S. Customs use the same definitions?
No. Our rules apply to some shipments that Customs does not consider imports or exports.

What if my shipment is in transit through the United States?
Shipments that are in transit through the United States and remain under Customs bond do not have to be declared to us.

Your in-transit shipment, however, must comply with foreign wildlife laws, and live wildlife must be transported humanely.

Be aware that shipments of certain species (such as those listed as endangered or threatened, migratory birds, marine mammals, or injurious species) may not transit the United States.

Is my shipment an import or export if it is placed in a customs bonded warehouse or free trade zone?
Yes. Such shipments would be imports or exports, even though U.S. Customs does not regulate them as such. You and your shipment must meet wildlife requirements.

Are any wildlife species exempt from these requirements?
Certain shellfish and dead fish products that are to be eaten by humans or animals may be exempt if they do not require a permit under 50 CFR 17 (endangered and threatened species) or 50 CFR 23 (species listed under CITES – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species).

Certain domesticated animals are exempt provided they did not originally come from the wild.

Check with us if you think your wildlife may be exempt.

What is a designated port?
We have designated certain ports for importing and exporting wildlife to consolidate shipments at specific locations and provide more efficient service. You may import or export your shipment through any of the following ports: Anchorage, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York/Newark, Portland, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Do I have to use a designated port for all shipments?
No. You can import or export certain shipments at authorized border ports or special ports.

When may I use a border port?
You may import or export your shipment at an authorized border port only if the wildlife itself

originally comes from the United States, Canada, or Mexico and your shipment is being sent from and going to one of these countries.

You may not use a border port for wildlife that originates outside of North America or for species that require a permit under 50 CFR 16, 17, 18, 21, or 23. (These regulations deal with invasive species, endangered and threatened species, bald and golden eagles, migratory birds, and CITES species.)

When may I use a special port?
Special ports are located in Alaska, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. You may use special ports to import wildlife into these places as a final destination.

You may export wildlife that originates in Alaska, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Guam from a special port in that specific state or territory.

You may not use special ports for wildlife that requires a permit under 50 CFR 16, 17, 18, 21, or 23.

See our fact sheet on ports for locations of border and special ports.

May I use any other ports?
Under very limited circumstances, you may be authorized under permit to use a port that does not normally handle wildlife trade.

You must show that using one of our authorized ports would result in substantial deterioration or loss of the wildlife, or would cause an undue economic hardship.

Final approval to use a non-authorized port depends on the availability of inspection services.

When do I declare my shipment for import?
You must file a Declaration for Importation or Exportation of Fish or Wildlife (Form 3-177) with us at an authorized port of entry and receive clearance from us before U.S. Customs releases your shipment.

When do I declare my shipment for export?
You must file Form 3-177 with us at an authorized port and receive clearance from us before your shipment is containerized or physically loaded on a vehicle, aircraft, or vessel, unless authorized otherwise by us.

Are there any exceptions to the declaration requirement?
Yes. There are two exceptions.

Live oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops, and their eggs, larvae, or juvenile forms that are exported for propagation or research related to propagation are exempt from declaration requirements, provided they do not require a permit under 50 CFR 17 (endangered and threatened species) or 23 (CITES-protected species).

You do not have to declare exports of live farm-raised fish eggs or live farm-raised fish unless they require a permit under 50 CFR 17 or 23.

Do I need a license to import or export wildlife?
Yes. Generally anyone engaging in business as an importer or exporter of wildlife must obtain a license from us.

Do I have to pay fees to import or export wildlife?
Yes. You must pay user fees for each shipment imported or exported once you are licensed by us. These fees differ based on the type of port you use. See our fact sheet on user fees.

Are there other wildlife laws I need to know about?
Yes. Many federal laws that protect wildlife have import/export requirements. These laws include the Lacey Act, Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Eagle Protection Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, African Elephant Conservation Act, Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act, and Wild Bird Conservation Act.

You must also ensure that your wildlife shipment complies with state and foreign wildlife laws.

Are there any other agencies I need to contact?
Yes. Other federal agencies involved with the import and export of wildlife may have additional requirements.

These agencies include the U.S. Customs Service; the Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; the U.S. Public Health Service; the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

You should also contact your state fish and wildlife agency about any state requirements or restrictions.

For more information, contact:
Office of Law Enforcement
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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