

**TITLE 16 - CONSERVATION**  
**CHAPTER 35 - ENDANGERED SPECIES****§ 1540. Penalties and enforcement****(a) Civil penalties**

(1) Any person who knowingly violates, and any person engaged in business as an importer or exporter of fish, wildlife, or plants who violates, any provision of this chapter, or any provision of any permit or certificate issued hereunder, or of any regulation issued in order to implement subsection (a)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E), or (F), (a)(2)(A), (B), (C), or (D), (c), (d) (other than regulation relating to recordkeeping or filing of reports), (f) or (g) of section 1538 of this title, may be assessed a civil penalty by the Secretary of not more than \$25,000 for each violation. Any person who knowingly violates, and any person engaged in business as an importer or exporter of fish, wildlife, or plants who violates, any provision of any other regulation issued under this chapter may be assessed a civil penalty by the Secretary of not more than \$12,000 for each such violation. Any person who otherwise violates any provision of this chapter, or any regulation, permit, or certificate issued hereunder, may be assessed a civil penalty by the Secretary of not more than \$500 for each such violation. No penalty may be assessed under this subsection unless such person is given notice and opportunity for a hearing with respect to such violation. Each violation shall be a separate offense. Any such civil penalty may be remitted or mitigated by the Secretary. Upon any failure to pay a penalty assessed under this subsection, the Secretary may request the Attorney General to institute a civil action in a district court of the United States for any district in which such person is found, resides, or transacts business to collect the penalty and such court shall have jurisdiction to hear and decide any such action. The court shall hear such action on the record made before the Secretary and shall sustain his action if it is supported by substantial evidence on the record considered as a whole.

(2) Hearings held during proceedings for the assessment of civil penalties authorized by paragraph (1) of this subsection shall be conducted in accordance with section 554 of title 5. The Secretary may issue subpoenas for the attendance and testimony of witnesses and the production of relevant papers, books, and documents, and administer oaths. Witnesses summoned shall be paid the same fees and mileage that are paid to witnesses in the courts of the United States. In case of contumacy or refusal to obey a subpoena served upon any person pursuant to this paragraph, the district court of the United States for any district in which such person is found or resides or transacts business, upon application by the United States and after notice to such person, shall have jurisdiction to issue an order requiring such person to appear and give testimony before the Secretary or to appear and produce documents before the Secretary, or both, and any failure to obey such order of the court may be punished by such court as a contempt thereof.

(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, no civil penalty shall be imposed if it can be shown by a preponderance of the evidence that the defendant committed an act based on a good faith belief that he was acting to protect himself or herself, a member of his or her family, or any other individual from bodily harm, from any endangered or threatened species.

**(b) Criminal violations**

(1) Any person who knowingly violates any provision of this chapter, of any permit or certificate issued hereunder, or of any regulation issued in order to implement subsection (a)(1)(A), (B), (C), (D), (E), or (F), (a)(2)(A), (B), (C), or (D), (c), (d) (other than a regulation relating to recordkeeping, or filing of reports), (f), or (g) of section 1538 of this title shall, upon conviction, be fined not more than \$50,000 or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both. Any person who knowingly violates any provision of any other regulation issued under this chapter shall, upon conviction, be fined not more than \$25,000 or imprisoned for not more than six months, or both.

(2) The head of any Federal agency which has issued a lease, license, permit, or other agreement authorizing a person to import or export fish, wildlife, or plants, or to operate a quarantine station

for imported wildlife, or authorizing the use of Federal lands, including grazing of domestic livestock, to any person who is convicted of a criminal violation of this chapter or any regulation, permit, or certificate issued hereunder may immediately modify, suspend, or revoke each lease, license, permit, or other agreement. The Secretary shall also suspend for a period of up to one year, or cancel, any Federal hunting or fishing permits or stamps issued to any person who is convicted of a criminal violation of any provision of this chapter or any regulation, permit, or certificate issued hereunder. The United States shall not be liable for the payments of any compensation, reimbursement, or damages in connection with the modification, suspension, or revocation of any leases, licenses, permits, stamps, or other agreements pursuant to this section.

(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, it shall be a defense to prosecution under this subsection if the defendant committed the offense based on a good faith belief that he was acting to protect himself or herself, a member of his or her family, or any other individual, from bodily harm from any endangered or threatened species.

**(c) District court jurisdiction**

The several district courts of the United States, including the courts enumerated in section 460 of title 28, shall have jurisdiction over any actions arising under this chapter. For the purpose of this chapter, American Samoa shall be included within the judicial district of the District Court of the United States for the District of Hawaii.

**(d) Rewards and certain incidental expenses**

The Secretary or the Secretary of the Treasury shall pay, from sums received as penalties, fines, or forfeitures of property for any violation of this chapter or any regulation issued hereunder

(1) a reward to any person who furnishes information which leads to an arrest, a criminal conviction, civil penalty assessment, or forfeiture of property for any violation of this chapter or any regulation issued hereunder, and

(2) the reasonable and necessary costs incurred by any person in providing temporary care for any fish, wildlife, or plant pending the disposition of any civil or criminal proceeding alleging a violation of this chapter with respect to that fish, wildlife, or plant. The amount of the reward, if any, is to be designated by the Secretary or the Secretary of the Treasury, as appropriate. Any officer or employee of the United States or any State or local government who furnishes information or renders service in the performance of his official duties is ineligible for payment under this subsection. Whenever the balance of sums received under this section and section 3375 (d) of this title, as penalties or fines, or from forfeitures of property, exceed \$500,000, the Secretary of the Treasury shall deposit an amount equal to such excess balance in the cooperative endangered species conservation fund established under section 1535 (i) of this title.

**(e) Enforcement**

(1) The provisions of this chapter and any regulations or permits issued pursuant thereto shall be enforced by the Secretary, the Secretary of the Treasury, or the Secretary of the Department in which the Coast Guard is operating, or all such Secretaries. Each such Secretary may utilize by agreement, with or without reimbursement, the personnel, services, and facilities of any other Federal agency or any State agency for purposes of enforcing this chapter.

(2) The judges of the district courts of the United States and the United States magistrate judges may, within their respective jurisdictions, upon proper oath or affirmation showing probable cause, issue such warrants or other process as may be required for enforcement of this chapter and any regulation issued thereunder.

(3) Any person authorized by the Secretary, the Secretary of the Treasury, or the Secretary of the Department in which the Coast Guard is operating, to enforce this chapter may detain for inspection and inspect any package, crate, or other container, including its contents, and all accompanying documents, upon importation or exportation. Such person may make arrests without a warrant for any violation of this chapter if he has reasonable grounds to believe that the person to be

arrested is committing the violation in his presence or view, and may execute and serve any arrest warrant, search warrant, or other warrant or civil or criminal process issued by any officer or court of competent jurisdiction for enforcement of this chapter. Such person so authorized may search and seize, with or without a warrant, as authorized by law. Any fish, wildlife, property, or item so seized shall be held by any person authorized by the Secretary, the Secretary of the Treasury, or the Secretary of the Department in which the Coast Guard is operating pending disposition of civil or criminal proceedings, or the institution of an action in rem for forfeiture of such fish, wildlife, property, or item pursuant to paragraph (4) of this subsection; except that the Secretary may, in lieu of holding such fish, wildlife, property, or item, permit the owner or consignee to post a bond or other surety satisfactory to the Secretary, but upon forfeiture of any such property to the United States, or the abandonment or waiver of any claim to any such property, it shall be disposed of (other than by sale to the general public) by the Secretary in such a manner, consistent with the purposes of this chapter, as the Secretary shall by regulation prescribe.

(4) (A) All fish or wildlife or plants taken, possessed, sold, purchased, offered for sale or purchase, transported, delivered, received, carried, shipped, exported, or imported contrary to the provisions of this chapter, any regulation made pursuant thereto, or any permit or certificate issued hereunder shall be subject to forfeiture to the United States.

(B) All guns, traps, nets, and other equipment, vessels, vehicles, aircraft, and other means of transportation used to aid the taking, possessing, selling, purchasing, offering for sale or purchase, transporting, delivering, receiving, carrying, shipping, exporting, or importing of any fish or wildlife or plants in violation of this chapter, any regulation made pursuant thereto, or any permit or certificate issued thereunder shall be subject to forfeiture to the United States upon conviction of a criminal violation pursuant to subsection (b)(1) of this section.

(5) All provisions of law relating to the seizure, forfeiture, and condemnation of a vessel for violation of the customs laws, the disposition of such vessel or the proceeds from the sale thereof, and the remission or mitigation of such forfeiture, shall apply to the seizures and forfeitures incurred, or alleged to have been incurred, under the provisions of this chapter, insofar as such provisions of law are applicable and not inconsistent with the provisions of this chapter; except that all powers, rights, and duties conferred or imposed by the customs laws upon any officer or employee of the Treasury Department shall, for the purposes of this chapter, be exercised or performed by the Secretary or by such persons as he may designate.

(6) The Attorney General of the United States may seek to enjoin any person who is alleged to be in violation of any provision of this chapter or regulation issued under authority thereof.

**(f) Regulations**

The Secretary, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of the Department in which the Coast Guard is operating, are authorized to promulgate such regulations as may be appropriate to enforce this chapter, and charge reasonable fees for expenses to the Government connected with permits or certificates authorized by this chapter including processing applications and reasonable inspections, and with the transfer, board, handling, or storage of fish or wildlife or plants and evidentiary items seized and forfeited under this chapter. All such fees collected pursuant to this subsection shall be deposited in the Treasury to the credit of the appropriation which is current and chargeable for the cost of furnishing the services. Appropriated funds may be expended pending reimbursement from parties in interest.

**(g) Citizen suits**

(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection any person may commence a civil suit on his own behalf—

(A) to enjoin any person, including the United States and any other governmental instrumentality or agency (to the extent permitted by the eleventh amendment to the Constitution), who is alleged to be in violation of any provision of this chapter or regulation issued under the authority thereof; or

**(B)** to compel the Secretary to apply, pursuant to section 1535 (g)(2)(B)(ii) of this title, the prohibitions set forth in or authorized pursuant to section 1533 (d) or 1538 (a)(1)(B) of this title with respect to the taking of any resident endangered species or threatened species within any State; or

**(C)** against the Secretary where there is alleged a failure of the Secretary to perform any act or duty under section 1533 of this title which is not discretionary with the Secretary.

The district courts shall have jurisdiction, without regard to the amount in controversy or the citizenship of the parties, to enforce any such provision or regulation, or to order the Secretary to perform such act or duty, as the case may be. In any civil suit commenced under subparagraph (B) the district court shall compel the Secretary to apply the prohibition sought if the court finds that the allegation that an emergency exists is supported by substantial evidence.

- (2)**
- (A)** No action may be commenced under subparagraph (1)(A) of this section—
- (i)** prior to sixty days after written notice of the violation has been given to the Secretary, and to any alleged violator of any such provision or regulation;
  - (ii)** if the Secretary has commenced action to impose a penalty pursuant to subsection (a) of this section; or
  - (iii)** if the United States has commenced and is diligently prosecuting a criminal action in a court of the United States or a State to redress a violation of any such provision or regulation.
- (B)** No action may be commenced under subparagraph (1)(B) of this section—
- (i)** prior to sixty days after written notice has been given to the Secretary setting forth the reasons why an emergency is thought to exist with respect to an endangered species or a threatened species in the State concerned; or
  - (ii)** if the Secretary has commenced and is diligently prosecuting action under section 1535 (g)(2)(B)(ii) of this title to determine whether any such emergency exists.
- (C)** No action may be commenced under subparagraph (1)(C) of this section prior to sixty days after written notice has been given to the Secretary; except that such action may be brought immediately after such notification in the case of an action under this section respecting an emergency posing a significant risk to the well-being of any species of fish or wildlife or plants.
- (3)**
- (A)** Any suit under this subsection may be brought in the judicial district in which the violation occurs.
- (B)** In any such suit under this subsection in which the United States is not a party, the Attorney General, at the request of the Secretary, may intervene on behalf of the United States as a matter of right.
- (4)** The court, in issuing any final order in any suit brought pursuant to paragraph (1) of this subsection, may award costs of litigation (including reasonable attorney and expert witness fees) to any party, whenever the court determines such award is appropriate.
- (5)** The injunctive relief provided by this subsection shall not restrict any right which any person (or class of persons) may have under any statute or common law to seek enforcement of any standard or limitation or to seek any other relief (including relief against the Secretary or a State agency).

**(h) Coordination with other laws**

The Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary shall provide for appropriate coordination of the administration of this chapter with the administration of the animal quarantine laws (as defined in section 136a (f) of title 21) and section 306<sup>1</sup> of the Tariff Act of 1930 (19 U.S.C. 1306). Nothing in this chapter or any amendment made by this chapter shall be construed as superseding or limiting in any manner the functions of the Secretary of Agriculture under any other law relating to prohibited or

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restricted importations or possession of animals and other articles and no proceeding or determination under this chapter shall preclude any proceeding or be considered determinative of any issue of fact or law in any proceeding under any Act administered by the Secretary of Agriculture. Nothing in this chapter shall be construed as superseding or limiting in any manner the functions and responsibilities of the Secretary of the Treasury under the Tariff Act of 1930 [19 U.S.C. 1202 et seq.], including, without limitation, section 527 of that Act (19 U.S.C. 1527), relating to the importation of wildlife taken, killed, possessed, or exported to the United States in violation of the laws or regulations of a foreign country.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> See References in Text note below.

(Pub. L. 93–205, § 11, Dec. 28, 1973, 87 Stat. 897; Pub. L. 94–359, § 4, July 12, 1976, 90 Stat. 913; Pub. L. 95–632, §§ 6–8, Nov. 10, 1978, 92 Stat. 3761, 3762; Pub. L. 97–79, § 9(e), Nov. 16, 1981, 95 Stat. 1079; Pub. L. 97–304, §§ 7, 9 (c), Oct. 13, 1982, 96 Stat. 1425, 1427; Pub. L. 98–327, § 4, June 25, 1984, 98 Stat. 271; Pub. L. 100–478, title I, § 1007, Oct. 7, 1988, 102 Stat. 2309; Pub. L. 101–650, title III, § 321, Dec. 1, 1990, 104 Stat. 5117; Pub. L. 107–171, title X, § 10418(b)(3), May 13, 2002, 116 Stat. 508.)

### References in Text

This chapter, referred to in subsecs. (a)(1), (3), (b)–(f), (g)(1)(A), and (h), was in the original “this Act”, meaning Pub. L. 93–205, Dec. 28, 1973, 81 Stat. 884, known as the “Endangered Species Act of 1973”, which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 1531 of this title and Tables.

The amendments made by this chapter, referred to in subsec. (h), refer to the amendments made by Pub. L. 93–205, which amended sections 460k–1, 460l–9, 668dd, 715i, 715s, 1362, 1371, 1372, and 1402 of this title and section 136 of Title 7, Agriculture, and repealed sections 668aa to 668cc–6 of this title.

The Tariff Act of 1930, referred to in subsec. (h), is act June 17, 1930, ch. 497, 46 Stat. 590, which is classified generally to chapter 4 (§ 1202 et seq.) of Title 19, Customs Duties. Section 306 of the Act was repealed by Pub. L. 107–171, title X, § 10418(a)(5), May 13, 2002, 116 Stat. 507. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see section 1654 of Title 19 and Tables.

### Amendments

2002—Subsec. (h). Pub. L. 107–171 substituted “animal quarantine laws (as defined in section 136a (f) of title 21)” for “animal quarantine laws (21 U.S.C. 101–105, 111–135b, and 612–614)”.

1988—Subsec. (a)(1). Pub. L. 100–478, § 1007(a), substituted “\$25,000” for “\$10,000” and “\$12,000” for “\$5,000”.

Subsec. (b)(1). Pub. L. 100–478, § 1007(b), substituted “\$50,000” for “\$20,000” and “\$25,000” for “\$10,000”.

Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 100–478, § 1007(c), inserted at end “Whenever the balance of sums received under this section and section 3375 (d) of this title, as penalties or fines, or from forfeitures of property, exceed \$500,000, the Secretary of the Treasury shall deposit an amount equal to such excess balance in the cooperative endangered species conservation fund established under section 1535 (i) of this title.”

1984—Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 98–327, in first sentence, substituted a comma for “a reward” after “shall pay”, inserted “(1) a reward” before “to any person”, and added cl. (2).

1982—Subsecs. (a)(1), (b)(1). Pub. L. 97–304, § 9(c), substituted “(a)(2)(A), (B), (C), or (D)” for “(a)(2)(A), (B), or (C)”.

Subsec. (e)(6). Pub. L. 97–304, § 7(1), added par. (6).

Subsec. (g)(1)(B). Pub. L. 97–304, § 7(2)(A)(i), substituted “any State; or” for “any State.”.

Subsec. (g)(1)(C). Pub. L. 97–304, § 7(2)(A)(ii), added subpar. (C).

Subsec. (g)(1). Pub. L. 97–304, § 7(2)(A)(iii), inserted “or to order the Secretary to perform such act or duty,” after “any such provision or regulation,” in provisions following subpar. (C).

Subsec. (g)(2)(C). Pub. L. 97–304, § 7(2)(B), added subpar. (C).

1981—Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 97–79 substituted “The Secretary or the Secretary of the Treasury shall pay a reward from sums received as penalties, fines, or forfeitures of property for any violation of this chapter or any regulation

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issued hereunder to any person who furnishes information which leads to an arrest, a criminal conviction, civil penalty assessment, or forfeiture of property for any violation of this chapter or any regulation issued hereunder” for “Upon the recommendation of the Secretary, the Secretary of the Treasury is authorized to pay an amount equal to one-half of the civil penalty or fine paid, but not to exceed \$2,500, to any person who furnishes information which leads to a finding of civil violation or a conviction of a criminal violation of any provision of this chapter or any regulation or permit issued thereunder” and inserted provision that the amount of the reward, if any, be designated by the Secretary or the Secretary of the Treasury, as appropriate.

1978—Subsec. (a)(1). Pub. L. 95–632, § 6(1), (2), substituted “and any person engaged in business as an importer or exporter of fish, wildlife, or plants who violates” for “or who knowingly commits an act in the course of a commercial activity which violates” in two places and “\$500” for “\$1,000”.

Subsec. (a)(3). Pub. L. 95–632, § 7, added par. (3).

Subsec. (b)(1). Pub. L. 95–632, § 6(3), substituted “knowingly” for “willfully commits an act which” in two places.

Subsec. (b)(2). Pub. L. 95–632, § 6(4), inserted “a person to import or export fish, wildlife, or plants, or to operate a quarantine station for imported wildlife, or authorizing” after “authorizing”.

Subsec. (b)(3). Pub. L. 95–632, § 8, added par. (3).

1976—Subsec. (e)(3). Pub. L. 94–359 inserted “make arrests without a warrant for any violation of this chapter if he has reasonable grounds to believe that the person to be arrested is committing the violation in his presence or view, and may” after “Such person may” and “, but upon forfeiture of any such property to the United States, or the abandonment or waiver of any claim to any such property, it shall be disposed of (other than by sale to the general public) by the Secretary in such a manner, consistent with the purposes of this chapter, as the Secretary shall by regulation prescribe,” after “other surety satisfactory to the Secretary”.

### **Change of Name**

“United States magistrate judges” substituted for “United States magistrates” in subsec. (e)(2) pursuant to section 321 of Pub. L. 101–650, set out as a note under section 631 of Title 28, Judiciary and Judicial Procedure.

### **Effective Date of 1981 Amendment**

Section 9(f) of Pub. L. 97–79 provided that: “The amendment specified in subsection 9(e) of this Act [amending this section] shall take effect beginning in fiscal year 1983.”

### **Transfer of Functions**

For transfer of authorities, functions, personnel, and assets of the Coast Guard, including the authorities and functions of the Secretary of Transportation relating thereto, to the Department of Homeland Security, and for treatment of related references, see sections 468 (b), 551 (d), 552 (d), and 557 of Title 6, Domestic Security, and the Department of Homeland Security Reorganization Plan of November 25, 2002, as modified, set out as a note under section 542 of Title 6.

For transfer of functions of the Secretary of Agriculture relating to agricultural import and entry inspection activities under this section to the Secretary of Homeland Security, and for treatment of related references, see sections 231, 551 (d), 552 (d), and 557 of Title 6, Domestic Security, and the Department of Homeland Security Reorganization Plan of November 25, 2002, as modified, set out as a note under section 542 of Title 6.