

2. The petition misinterprets recent DNA data as constituting conclusive evidence of hybrid origin of the red wolf.

The DNA studies referenced in the petition support the hypothesis of past hybridizations between the three *Canis* species and that the extent of hybridization between wolves and coyotes in the southeastern United States was extensive. However, the data do not provide evidence of any continuing coyote influence on nuclear DNA in red wolves, and selective captive breeding provides a likely scenario for the possible elimination of such coyote nuclear DNA from existing red wolves. The data do not provide conclusive evidence of the hybrid origin of red wolves or any evidence of phenotypic, morphological, or behavioral traits of coyotes persisting in red wolves.

3. The best scientific and commercial data available support the continued listing of the red wolf.

The Service is required to use the best scientific and commercial data available when making a decision regarding listing or delisting. As discussed above, the scientific data supporting hybridization in red wolves came from a few related studies. These studies suggest past hybridization, but provide no support for continuing hybridization in the existing red wolf populations. The remainder of the relevant scientific data shows that historic and current red wolves lack coyote, gray wolf, or hybrid phenotypic and morphological traits. Dowling *et al.* (1992) and Cronin (1993) specifically address the fact that all available data must be applied to the question and that molecular characters are only one piece of the puzzle and are no more valid than other types of scientific evidence, including morphology, behavior, ecology, ontogeny, and paleontology.

References Cited

A complete list of all references cited herein, as well as others, is available upon request from the Red Wolf Recovery Coordinator (see ADDRESSES section).

Author. The primary author of this document is V. Gary Henry, Red Wolf Recovery Coordinator (see ADDRESSES section).

Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: August 28, 1997.

Jamie Rappaport Clark,

Director, Fish and Wildlife Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Fish and Wildlife Service

50 CFR Part 17

Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants: Reopening of Comment Period on Status Review for Cheetah in Namibia

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of status review; reopening of comment period.

SUMMARY: The Service gives notice that the comment period on the status review of the Cheetah in Namibia, as initiated in response to a petition to reclassify the species in that country from endangered to threatened, will be reopened.

DATES: Comments and information may be submitted through February 1, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Comments, information, and questions should be submitted to the Chief, Office of Scientific Authority; Room 750, 4401 North Fairfax Drive;

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Arlington, Virginia 22203 (Fax number 703-358-2276). The petition finding, supporting data, and comments will be available for public inspection, by appointment, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, at this address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Dr. Charles W. Dane, Chief, Office of Scientific Authority, at the above address (phone 703-358-1708).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In the **Federal Register** of March 19, 1996 (61 FR 11181), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announced the 90-day finding that a petition to reclassify the cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) in Namibia from endangered to threatened had presented substantial information indicating that the requested action may be warranted. A status review was initiated, with the original comment period ending July 17, 1996. Subsequently, the Service received two new documents that may have major relevance to this issue: a management plan for the cheetah prepared by the Government of Namibia and a final report on a cheetah workshop held by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). In order to consider this new information and any comments thereon, the Service has decided to reopen the comment period until February 1, 1998, and will provide copies of the indicated documents upon request. All comments and information will be considered in making a final decision on whether the requested action is warranted, and will be included in the administrative record.

Authority: Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: November 19, 1997.

Jamie Rappaport Clark,

Director, Fish and Wildlife Service.

[FR Doc. 97-31970 Filed 12-8-97; 8:45 am]

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