

TOP 10 NOMINATION FORM

2020 Topic: Illegal wildlife (plants and animals) trafficking and unsustainable trade

Species must meet these qualifications:

- Must be native U.S. species or international species with significant U.S. demand
- Must be experiencing substantial decline (do not have to be threatened/endangered listed)
- Must be directly or indirectly impacted
 - Direct: exploited as trophies, pets, medicines, etc.
 - Indirect: impacted by imported exotics or imported disease vectors (e.g., chytrid)

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Nominated Species (Pinto Abalone, *Haliotis kamtschatkana*):

Question 1: Threat to the Species

How is the species and/or its habitat threatened by illegal wildlife trafficking and/or unsustainable trade? Note the extent of the threat and whether it is direct or indirect. Include references to relevant scientific studies. Does the species face any associated political threats?

Abalone populations worldwide have been heavily overfished, some to critical levels. The pinto abalone is found from the tidal waters of Southeast Alaska to the coasts of Baja California, though its population is largest in Alaska, Canada, and Washington. The species is classified as “Endangered” on the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* but, unlike the critically endangered black abalone, is not protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act despite the efforts of CBD and others to list the species (in 2014, NOAA determined that listing was “not warranted”).¹ The primary threat to the species is uncontrolled harvest and poaching for domestic and international trade in abalone meat and shells.² Wild abalone can fetch as much as \$500 per kilo in Asian markets. Harvest limits and other measures have not helped the species, which is too easy to take in large amounts along the wild, unpopulated Pacific Northwest coasts. Local subsistence harvest figures suggest that the pinto abalone population has declined by about 98 percent in local waters.³ Data suggest that there are now too few pinto abalone in many locations for reproduction to occur successfully.⁴ Climate change, ocean

¹ CBD Petition: https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/species/invertebrates/pinto_abalone/pdfs/Pinto%20Abalone_final.pdf

² McDougall, P. T., Ploss, J. & Tuthill, J. 2006. *Haliotis kamtschatkana*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2006: e.T61743A12552981. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2006.RLTS.T61743A12552981.en>. Downloaded on 12 May 2020.

³ Bowers, F. R., K. P. Hebert, and R. Chadwick. 2012. Staff Comments on Regulatory Proposals for Southeast Alaska and Yakutat Dungeness Crab, King Crab, Tanner Crab, Shrimp and Miscellaneous Shellfish for the Board of Fisheries Meeting, January 15-20, 2012. Pages 126–130.

⁴ Bouma, J. V. 2007. Early life history dynamics of pinto abalone (*Haliotis kamtschatkana*) and implications for recovery in the San Juan archipelago, Washington state. University of Washington.

acidification and pollution from oil and gas and other development activities also threaten the species. The species is not listed on the CITES Appendices, though it meets the criteria for inclusion on Appendix I because it is threatened with extinction and negatively impacted by international trade.

Question 2: Role of the Species

What is the ecological and/or scientific importance of the species? Note if it is a keystone species and describe its role in its environment. Include references to relevant scientific studies.

Pinto abalone are an important food source for, among other species, the highly endangered California sea otter.⁵ They also serve a vital housekeeping role in the rocky reefs and coastlines where they live, clearing large areas of micro-algae and other organizations and making room for the kelp forests that sustain so many other species to grow.⁶

Question 3: Message

What is the most important message about this species for decision-makers and the public?

The demise of the pinto abalone is an example of how a failure to follow the science and protect a species in need can lead to further decline and negative impacts on the whole ecosystem. It also highlights how unsustainable harvest and trade at a commercial scale can have serious negative consequences for local communities and indigenous peoples and their ability to utilize ocean resources.

Final Selections

If my nomination is selected for inclusion in the report, I would like the first draft of the species profile for the report to be written by (choose one):

- You (ESC), and then my NGO will edit the profile and approve the final draft.
- Me (my NGO). I understand that I (and other participating writers) will need to adhere to ESC's writing guidelines.

Deadline: May 8, 2020

Send to: top10@endangered.org

⁵ Watson, J. 2000. The effects of sea otters (*Enhydra lutris*) on abalone (*Haliotis* spp.) populations. In: A. Campbell (ed). *Workshop on Rebuilding Abalone Stocks in British Columbia*. Can. Spec. Publ. Fish. Aqua. Sci. 130: 123–132.

⁶ <https://medium.com/gaia-wwu/reef-roombas-why-the-endangered-pinto-abalone-is-a-vital-ecosystem-engineer-abb17f2bb3a8>