



**U.S. DEPARTMENT
OF THE INTERIOR**
INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



DOI Technical Experts in Latin America

DOI-ITAP

Sharing & Learning

Interview with Rosemarie Gnam Chief, Division of Scientific Authority for CITES, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Strengthening CITES in Central America and the Dominican Republic, 2016



REGIONAL CONTEXT: During the last decade, DOI’s International Technical Assistance Program (ITAP) has closely collaborated with the governments of all seven Central American countries plus the Dominican Republic to help improve compliance with CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. With support from the U.S. Department of State, this cooperation has helped to improve legal frameworks, law enforcement, science-based decision-making, environmental outreach and regional coordination to better control the legal trade of these species and help reduce wildlife trafficking. Through this work, the United States has shared lessons learned from 40+ years of CITES work, while building strong partnerships and common regional priorities in preparation for the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP).

DOI-ITAP ASSIGNMENT: Since 2008, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) CITES and law enforcement staff have served as the primary policy and technical experts for this work. Dr. Rosemarie Gnam helped to organize and participated in three workshops with her CITES counterparts, providing technical guidance and helping to reach consensus prior to the region’s participation in the CITES CoP in September 2016 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

What was your role in this institutional strengthening process?

I’ve participated in three events for ITAP. First we organized a meeting with The Region’s CITES authorities, the CITES Secretariat and other technical experts on how to make Non Detriment Findings (NDF), in a workshop in Guatemala. Then we followed up with ITAP to develop a workshop on NDF procedures for shark fin products in El Salvador. Lastly, this summer we supported a meeting for regional cooperation, and I was honored to be invited to present the U.S. species proposals for the 2016 CITES CoP in Johannesburg, South Africa. I think my main role during these workshops has been to identify the best experts that could explain NDF recommendations for management of species; and to increase the understanding of CITES requirements among CITES authorities in this region.

How was your experience during preparation for the assignments?

Working with DOI-ITAP has been an excellent experience. They are a wonderful partner – and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) appreciates partners like them. ITAP and FWS have monthly coordination calls to discuss many of these issues facing the region and the many projects both offices have planned to address them, which is helpful in finding opportunities for synergy and to coordinate and collaborate. I’ve attended many international scientific meetings on behalf of DOI, but the logistical support from ITAP for travel and planning purposes is exemplary.

What do you consider were your main contributions to this process?

I think the most positive thing is just establishing those nurturing relationships that make our foreign counterparts more comfortable with reaching out to the United States on other CITES issues. We want to be supportive and help in any way we can at the 2016 CITES CoP (CoP17). I don't see ourselves as the drivers of this process, but actually as advisors that help countries understand CITES requirements and procedures, which sometimes can be complex. At the CITES CoP, it is often the case that everybody is extremely busy and not much time is allotted for regional discussion and coordination, so, these meetings provide a helpful opportunity for the region to come together to share their proposals and positions. By working together with our neighbors, we can achieve meaningful success at the CITES CoP.

What was the impact of this experience at your professional and personal level?

At the professional level, meeting and working with CITES authorities in other countries, and understanding that we have mutual challenges, has been a wonderful experience. People always think the U.S. has unlimited resources, but we have our resource challenges too. On a personal level I've been so warmly welcomed by the people and governments over Central America, and it's such a beautiful region. All of this would not have been possible without ITAP.

What would you tell someone considering participating in a DOI-ITAP assignment?

We often get position announcements for ITAP assignments and I have always encouraged my staff to apply. There have been several people from FWS involved in the region, particularly in law enforcement and customs training. I think ITAP is an excellent opportunity to use your skills and really do some on-the-ground work, which we often don't get to do in headquarters behind a desk. I can't say enough about how I think it is a good learning opportunity both at a professional and at a personal level. Furthermore, I've also learned so much about how different countries implement CITES regulations and decisions. Technical assistance is not simply a one-way street. The learning was mutual, and it's been a phenomenal experience.



The Red-eyed tree frog, *Agalychnis callidryas*, is one of the many species in Central America that is threatened by wildlife trafficking. As a CITES-listed species, understanding the status of its wild populations, habitat and other factors helps governments ensure that the legal trade of this species does not threaten its survival. (Photo: Open Source)



FWS and DOI-ITAP have trained CITES and other officials on how to establish protocols for decision-making based on scientific data for the export of shark fin products, in order to comply with CITES COP16 2013 resolutions. Artisanal fishermen prepare hammerhead sharks for the legal sale of its parts. (*La Herradura artesanal pier. La Paz, El Salvador, April 2016. Photo: DOI-ITAP.*)

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