

Saiga Fact Sheet

Scientific Name: *Saiga tatarica*; *Saiga borealis* (Mongolia)

Common Name: Saiga Antelope

IUCN Status: Near Threatened (global); Endangered (Mongolian subspecies)

Parties at CITES CoP20 Should Reject Proposal 3

WCS strongly urges Parties to reject CoP20 Proposal 3, which proposes to lift the zero-export-quota for wild Saiga tatarica specimens from Kazakhstan. Reopening international commercial horn trade would increase demand, drive poaching, undermine enforcement, and endanger smaller and recovering populations across all range states.



Distribution and Habitat

- Range States: Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Russia, Uzbekistan.
- Kazakhstan Population: Recovered from 39,000 (2005) to >3.9 million today.
- Mongolia Population: Saiga tatarica borealis now >25,000, but still Endangered.
- Habitat: Open steppe, grassland, and semi-desert ecosystems.
- Behavior: Highly migratory, forming large seasonal herds.

Biology and Ecology

- Size: 20-23 kg; males larger than females.
- Life Span: 6–10 years.
- Diet: Grasses and steppe vegetation.
- Calving: Short gestation; high twinning rate is key to population recovery.
- Adaptations: Large nose helps regulate temperature and filter dust.

Threats

- **Trade & Demand:** High demand for saiga horn in traditional Asian medicine continues to fuel poaching. Reopening trade would increase demand and illegal killing.
- **Enforcement Challenges:** No reliable traceability or stockpile management systems. Legal trade would enable laundering of illegal horns.
- **Ecological Risks:** Disease outbreaks, extreme weather events, as well as habitat loss and fragmentation, all threaten populations.

Conservation Status & Trends

Kazakhstan's population recovery is a conservation success driven by government leadership, enforcement, and long-term NGO support. Smaller populations—especially in Mongolia—remain fragile and under pressure from poaching, disease, and environmental change.

WCS Research

- **Trade Dynamics Research:** Innovative methods to assess local trade pressures.
- **Anti-Trafficking:** Strengthening cross-border cooperation.
- **Stockpile Management:** Advocating for transparency and enforcement.
- **Community Conservation:** Supporting local engagement and protection.
- **Scientific Monitoring:** Long-term studies on populations and threats.

Global Context & CITES

The saiga's recovery remains fragile. International horn trade would jeopardize progress. It is premature to allow large-scale commercial trade. WCS urges all CITES Parties to maintain the zero-export quota and strengthen monitoring and enforcement.