



# The U.S. Plant Rescue Center Program

## How Did the Program Develop?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established the Plant Rescue Center (PRC) Program in 1978 to care for plants confiscated by the U.S. Government due to noncompliance with the import/export requirements of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Management Authority (OMA) enlisted botanical gardens, arboretums, zoological parks, and research institutions in the United States to volunteer as PRCs. Currently, 62 institutions in 25 States (plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) cooperate as PRCs.

## What Are the Criteria for Selection?

An institution interested in establishing a PRC should apply to OMA for approval. There are five basic requirements:

- 1) The PRC must be a public botanical garden, arboretum, zoological park, or research institution. It must be a government or a privately funded nonprofit entity.
- 2) At their own expense, cooperators must be able to transfer confiscated plants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) port office to the PRC.
- 3) The USDA maintains each confiscated plant shipment as a unit. The PRC must accept and maintain the unit for 30 days in the event that the country of export/reexport requests its return.
- 4) The PRC may incorporate the confiscated plants into its own collection if the country of export/reexport does not request their return within 30 days.
- 5) After the PRC incorporates the confiscated plants into its collection, it may display, propagate, or otherwise use

them for purposes consistent with CITES. They remain U.S. property and the PRC may not trade, sell, or otherwise dispose of them. However, propagules of these plants, which become the property of the PRC, may be traded, sold, or disposed of through other means.

Upon confirmation that the requirements have been met, OMA provides the institution formal notification of acceptance and informs it of the following:

- 1) Prior to assigning a confiscated plant shipment, OMA will contact the PRC to identify available plants and ascertain the PRC's interest in receiving them. No plants will be sent to a PRC without its approval.
- 2) Plant shipments usually will be sent by USDA plant inspection officials. There will usually be no need for the PRC to make any arrangements other than to accept and maintain a shipment when it arrives. Occasionally, the PRC may be asked to transfer the shipment, at its own expense, from the plant inspection station to the PRC.
- 3) Unless otherwise agreed to in advance, plant shipments will be sent under U.S. Government franked mailing labels.
- 4) The USDA will provide any quarantine or phytosanitary treatment necessary before plants are sent to the PRC.
- 5) The PRC must notify OMA by letter when the plants arrive and maintain the plant shipment as a unit for 30 days.
- 6) After 30 days, the PRC may display, propagate, or use the plants for other purposes consistent with CITES.
- 7) Should the country of export/reexport ask for the return of the plants, that country is responsible for the air freight of the shipment. The PRC would only

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deliver the package to the nearest airline, as advised by OMA.

### **What Factors Determine which PRCs Receive which Plants?**

Several factors determine where confiscated plants are sent. The port at which the plants were seized, distance to an appropriate PRC, weather/season/climate, and expertise of the PRCs are all factored into OMA's determination. Plants held in Hawaii or Puerto Rico usually are assigned to local PRCs rather than to PRCs on the mainland. OMA usually does not assign plants to PRCs in the northern United States during winter months to avoid freezing while in transit. OMA also considers the expertise and limitations of PRCs. Several have expressed interest only in certain taxa. Others only want shipments containing small quantities of plants. Keeping in mind all of these considerations, OMA tries to assign plants in such a way that each of the PRCs receive at least some each year.

### **What is the PRC Assignment Procedure?**

1) A CITES plant shipment imported into the United States must be inspected by a USDA plant inspector at the port of import. If the inspector finds that the import does not comply with CITES, the shipment usually is confiscated.

2) Upon confiscation, the plant inspector contacts the appropriate USDA official in Washington, D.C., who then contacts OMA. The plant inspector provides data on the quantity of plants, common or scientific names, country of export/reexport, name and address of the importer (and foreign exporter, if available), and USDA shipment control number.

**International Affairs**  
**Office of Management Authority**  
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 700  
Arlington, VA 22203  
703/358/2095  
703/358-2281 fax  
r9ia\_oma@fws.gov  
international.fws.gov

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)

3) OMA reviews the list of recent assignments and selects a candidate PRC to receive the shipment.

4) OMA contacts the PRC and confirms its interest/ability to receive the shipment, then advises Washington USDA of the PRC selected.

5) Washington USDA contacts the USDA plant inspector, who then packages the specimens for air or surface shipping and sends them, at U.S. Government expense (in most cases), to the PRC. Only rarely will PRC officials be asked to pay shipping charges or pick up specimens at the USDA port office themselves.

6) OMA prepares correspondence to the PRC and the USDA confirming the details of the assignment. OMA also prepares correspondence to notify appropriate officials in the country of export/reexport and inquire about their interest in the return of the shipment.

7) After 30 days, if the country of export/reexport has not claimed the shipment, it becomes part of the PRC's collection.

### **Returned Plant Shipments**

Confiscated plant shipments are available for return to the country of export/reexport provided that an appropriate official in that country notifies OMA within 30 days and arranges to cover return shipping costs. Several countries have requested that plants be returned and they usually are shipped via a national airline, at no cost to the countries. OMA issues a CITES Reexport Certificate for shipments to be returned.

### **What Are Some Recent Statistics?**

During 1998, the USDA confiscated 373 plant shipments in violation of CITES. These shipments contained a total of 4,857 plants (3,419 orchids, 715 cacti, 477 cyclamens, 89 cycads, 70 euphorbias, and 87 other species) and an additional 328 plant seeds. Of these 373 shipments, 369 containing 4,620 plants and 328 seeds were assigned to PRCs; 3 containing 213 plants were returned to their countries of export/reexport; and 1 containing 24 plants died at the USDA port prior to assignment to a PRC.