



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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3 December 2009

The Honorable Frank R. Lautenberg
Water and Wildlife Subcommittee
324 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Lautenberg:

The Wildlife Society appreciates the Subcommittee's attention to S.373, legislation that would amend Title 18 of the U.S. Code to include constrictor snakes within the *Python* genus as injurious animals. Constrictor snakes, such as the Burmese Python, are not native to the U.S. and pose countless risks to native wildlife and ecosystems if they become established here. We would like to take this opportunity to express our support for S. 373 and present our recommendations for expanding its coverage.

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational association of nearly 9,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve wildlife professionals—the scientists, technicians, and practitioners actively working to study, manage, and conserve native and desired non-native wildlife and their habitats worldwide.

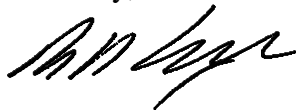
A recent report released by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), "Giant Constrictors: Biological and Management Profiles and an Establishment Risk Assessment for Nine Large Species of Pythons, Anacondas, and the Boa Constrictor," outlines the risks posed by these species to the stability of native ecosystems, and the potential threats to human safety. The nine constrictor species in the *Python*, *Eunectes*, and *Boa* genera examined by the study are dietary and habitat generalists, tolerant of urbanization, grow rapidly, produce many offspring, and can potentially carry diseases and parasites that affect native reptiles and other native wildlife.

All nine of the species examined by the study present a medium or high ecological risk and pose the threat of becoming established in the U.S. Their adaptability, lack of natural predators, and tolerance of a wide range of environmental conditions, are valid predictors for giant constrictor species becoming invasive in the U.S. Whether any reactionary control method would be successful in eliminating established giant constrictor snakes in the U.S. is unknown. Giant constrictors like the Burmese Python and the Yellow Anaconda are well-camouflaged and difficult to detect and trap. The report draws upon examples of past unsuccessful eradication attempts of the Brown Treesnake in Guam, the Boa Constrictor on Cozumel Island in Mexico, and others, to demonstrate the difficulties experienced in previous control measures.

We encourage the swift markup and passage of S. 373. While we commend its sponsors for introducing this much-needed initiative, The Wildlife Society is concerned that the legislation will only address a fraction of injurious constrictor snake species. Therefore, we recommend that S. 373 also include the nine species of constrictor snakes included in the USGS study: Indian or Burmese Python (*Python molurus*), Northern African Python (*Python sebae*), Southern African Python (*Python natalensis*), Reticulated Python (*Python reticulatus*), Boa Constrictor (*Boa constrictor*), Green Anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*), Yellow Anaconda (*Eunectes notaeus*), Beni or Bolivian Anaconda (*Eunectes beniensis*), and De Schauensee's Anaconda (*Eunectes deschauenseei*). Such action will help to effectively mitigate the potential impacts these species have on native wildlife if their importation remains unregulated. According to USGS, the pet trade is the only plausible mechanism of establishment of these species, and so it is crucial to impose stricter regulations on the industry. Proactive regulation of the importation of non-native species is vital to maintaining the integrity of our ecosystems.

Thank you for considering the views of wildlife professionals. We have attached our position statement on invasive plants and animals to this letter. Please feel free to contact Laura Bies (301-897-9770 ext. 308 or laura@wildlife.org) if you have any questions, or to let us know if we can be of any more assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Leopold', written in a cursive style.

Bruce Leopold, President