



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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TESTIMONY OF THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY FOR THE RECORD OF THE 23 MARCH 2010 HEARING OF THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEES ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS, AND WILDLIFE AND NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS ON “HOW TO MANAGE LARGE CONSTRICTOR SNAKES AND OTHER INVASIVE SPECIES.”

The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony for the joint oversight hearing on “How to Manage Large Constrictor Snakes and Other Invasive Species” held on 23 March 2010. The Wildlife Society represents over 9,100 professional wildlife biologists and managers dedicated to sound 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.

Concerns about effects of invasive plant and animal species and their costs to society are rising. These effects include negative impacts on biological diversity (especially species at risk), productivity, environmental integrity, and wildlife and human health, as well as significant negative economic effects. According to the U.S. Congressional Office of Technical Assessment, a mere 79 out of hundreds of these harmful invasive species caused an estimated \$97 billion in losses in the U.S. from 1901 to 1991. Affected industries include agriculture, forestry, ranching, fisheries, and tourism.

With annual imports estimated at more than 203 million fish, 6.4 million reptiles and amphibians, 260,000 birds, and 90,000 mammals, clearly there is a high probability of many instances of negative effects. Indeed, the scientific and popular literature shows a large variety of consequences from purposeful and accidental introductions, indicating growing concern and recognition of the problem.

Prevention is clearly our strongest tool in managing invasives species. It is much more cost effective than later control and management, especially given the few tools available for direct control and limited success in these efforts. When purposeful introductions are being considered in the future, the beginning assumption should be that the risk is great unless proven otherwise; well-designed and extensive quantitative analyses of the risks and uncertainties should be required.

Scientists now have the ability to screen species for their potential harm, so that those most likely to be harmful can be prohibited, whereas others, determined to likely be benign, can be moved in commerce. In fact, several other countries have had success with such systems. Furthermore, a system in which a party wishing to import a species pays for the evaluation makes sense. For a

full treatment of The Wildlife Society's stance on invasive species, please see the attached position statement.

As a scientific society, TWS supports the United States Geological Survey report "Giant Constrictors: Biological and Management Profiles and an Establishment Risk Assessment for Nine Large Species of Pythons, Anacondas, and the Boa Constrictor." Earlier this year, 16 scientists sent a letter of support to the House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security validating the transparency and scientific integrity of the USGS report (see attached).

Twenty experts associated with U.S. and international universities, agencies and organizations reviewed the USGS report; eighteen of the 20 reviewers were independent of the USGS. The report is unbiased and was not developed to support a predetermined policy; it was written with the intention of informing future U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service management strategies. The report was requested by the agencies and specifically aimed to collect information on the risks of giant constrictor snakes on ecosystems, wildlife, and human safety. Therefore, TWS believes that the findings of the report have undergone sufficient scientific scrutiny and provide a valid basis for management decisions regarding invasive constrictors in native ecosystems.

Invasive constrictor species pose a unique threat to native wildlife because of their large body size, large clutch size, short time to maturation, and long life span. While the recent cold snap in the southeastern United States may have caused significant mortalities in the constrictor population, the life-history traits of these snakes will allow even a severely reduced population to rebound rapidly. These constrictors are generalist predators capable of surviving on a wide range of prey species. Because there is no North American snake species of comparable size, prey animals have not evolved defenses against this novel predator.

The Wildlife Society supports the hunting community and understands the important role hunters play in wildlife conservation. Everglades National Park has designated 30 authorized agents specifically trained to eliminate invasive constrictors; untrained hunters licensed to take snakes in Big Cypress National Preserve using firearms have proven less effective than authorized agents. Constrictors are well camouflaged by their markings and their ability to conceal themselves in water or vegetation, necessitating time-consuming and dedicated searching. Although large, constrictors have relatively small heads, making a fatal gunshot difficult to achieve. These factors limit the success of traditional hunting measures and require the focused efforts of authorized agents for removal of constrictors from the Everglades.

Thank you for considering the views of wildlife professionals. Please feel free to contact Laura Bies, Director of Government Affairs, at (301) 897-9770 x308 if you need further information or have any questions.