



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON
DEC 07 2009

The Honorable Bill Nelson
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Nelson:

Thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 373, to amend Title 18 Section 42, U.S. Code, to include certain python species as injurious animals. The Department of the Interior appreciates the attention you have brought to this important conservation issue.

The threat posed by the Burmese python and other large constrictor snakes is evident. The Burmese python population estimate is now in the thousands—putting at risk a variety of threatened and endangered species and harming the Everglades ecosystem. The Department is working with many partners to address the significant challenges posed by the invasive Burmese python and other large constrictor snakes.

In June 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) received a request from the South Florida Water Management District to list Burmese pythons as an injurious species under the Lacey Act. At the time the petition was submitted, no scientific information had been compiled on Burmese pythons that would enable a rigorous assessment of risk and potential impacts to the Everglades and other ecosystems. As a result, in 2007 the FWS partnered with the National Park Service to provide funds to U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) for a risk assessment of nine large constrictor snake species considered invasive or potentially invasive in the United States.

Of the nine large constrictor snakes assessed by USGS, five were shown to pose a high risk to the health of the ecosystem, including the Burmese python, northern African python, southern African python, yellow anaconda, and boa constrictor. The remaining four large constrictors—the reticulated python, green anaconda, Beni or Bolivian anaconda, and DeSchauensee's anaconda—were shown to pose a medium risk. None of the large constrictors that were assessed was classified as low risk.

As the Department expressed during the December 3, 2009, hearing before the Senate Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Water and Wildlife, we support S. 373, as reported. We also recommend amending the legislation to include all nine species of large constrictor snakes.

Given the significance of the Everglades, its biological diversity and the threat of invasive species, the Department is committed to addressing this concern and restoring the ecosystem. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and we look forward to continuing to work with you to address the threat of large constrictor snakes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Salazar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ken Salazar