

## Press Release

### Klein, Hastings Express Concerns Over Rise in Invasive Pythons in the Everglades

*September 5, 2007*

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representatives Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) and Ron Klein (D-Boca Raton) sent a letter today to the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) expressing concern over the sharp rise of wild Burmese pythons in and around the Everglades National Park. The Burmese python is an exotic constrictor species that has been found breeding in increasing numbers in natural areas of Southern Florida. More than 350 of the South Asian snakes have been found invading the park since 2002, with others appearing along Florida's west coast and farther north in Florida. Invasive species such as this python have the potential to adversely affect Everglades restoration efforts and all of the ecosystem's inhabitants.

"The increasing presence of the Burmese pythons in the Everglades and surrounding areas engenders a very real, expensive, and dangerous problem for Florida and the entire nation. The pythons directly threaten the endangered species and plants of this unique ecosystem, and importantly, the people visiting and living in the Everglades and surrounding communities. The Federal government must act immediately and appropriately to address this escalating danger," said Representative Hastings.

"When I was elected, I promised to make Everglades restoration a top priority. Thus far, Congress has come through by authorizing billions of dollars for various projects in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. But preserving the indigenous species of the Everglades is also a critical component of Everglades restoration. That's why we must address the Burmese python population. Recent reports show that the population appears to be growing in the Everglades, putting in jeopardy a wide variety of natural species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must act now and list the Burmese python as an injurious species so that federal and state efforts to control the Everglades python population can have an impact," said Representative Klein.

The letter sent by Representatives Hastings and Klein urges the USFWS to immediately consider adding the pythons to a list of "injurious species" under the Lacey Act, prohibiting the importation of the pythons into the country as well as interstate transportation. The letter also recommends the creation of a task force to evaluate the USFWS' injurious listing process to reduce backlogs and expedite the process.

A copy of the letter follows.

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September 5, 2007

Mr. H. Dale Hall, Director  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Mailstop 3238 MIB

Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Hall:

We write to express our support for the Burmese python injurious animal petition submitted to your office on June 23, 2006 under the Lacey Act (42 U.S.C. §18). As you know, the Lacey Act's injurious wildlife provision serves as the primary regulatory safeguard from invasive animal species introductions in the United States. Given the well-documented increases in wild Burmese python sightings in and around the Florida Everglades and the recent discovery of the federally-endangered Key Largo wood rat in the stomach of a Burmese python, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) should take immediate action and fast track the injurious wildlife review of this harmful invasive species.

State and federal agencies, including the USFWS, have been rushing to develop and implement python control programs in Florida before this species becomes more widespread. Unfortunately, Burmese pythons continue to be legally imported in astonishing numbers. Since 2000, over 67,000 Burmese pythons have been imported into the United States. Restricting importation of the Burmese python will not in itself remove the established python population in Florida. Nevertheless, if we are to successfully control this emerging threat, all segments of the introduction pathway, particularly importation should be addressed.

We also strongly encourage you to begin an internal review of the USFWS' injurious animal listing process. According to a recent analysis of the USFWS' regulatory program, the average time between initiation and final actions of listing reviews has increased from less than one year during the mid-1900s to over four years in the last decade.

We recognize that substantial resources are required to properly complete these reviews and are well aware of the financial limitations under which the USFWS regulatory branch finds itself. However, the Lacey Act cannot be effective if regulatory reviews are not completed in a timely fashion. To this end, we respectfully request that a task force be formed to review the USFWS' injurious listing process and promptly make recommendations to ensure that the Lacey Act is implemented commensurate with the contemporary challenges we face with invasive species.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to your expeditious response.

Sincerely,

s/ Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress

s/ Ron Klein  
Member of Congress



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