

USARK Wake Up Call to Reptile Nation!

7/11/2009

On Wednesday, July 8th the United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK) attended a Senate Subcommittee hearing in the Committee on Environment & Public Works (EPW). It was a joint Subcommittee hearing in front of the Subcommittees on Water & Wildlife and EPW Oversight. The hearing was Co-Chaired by Senator Cardin (D-MD) and Senator Whitehouse (D-RI). It was a topic driven hearing on *'Threats to Native Wildlife'* and focused on Invasive Species and Disease. Senator Cardin took the lead in running the hearing.

The witness list for the Subcommittees included:

Gary Frazer, USFWS; Bill Clay, USDA; Gregory Ruiz, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center; Rebecca Humphries, Michigan Dept of Natural Resources; John Torgan, Save The Bay, Inc. and Jeffery Hill, University of Florida

Senator Nelson (D-FL) made a very dramatic presentation on Burmese Pythons rolling out a 16ft skin to demonstrate the size of some specimens. He characterized the Burmese Python as a dangerous and invasive species that is single handedly poised to destroy Everglades National Park; and spread all over the southern United States if his bill (S373) is not passed in short order. His characterization was inaccurate, exaggerated and sensationalized to fit the media frenzy surrounding the prospect of Burmese Pythons in the Everglades. He did mention that he was only interested in banning the Burmese Python, although the language in S373 still refers to "species python genre". The terminology is biologically inaccurate but could be construed as ALL pythons. Press releases the Senator has issued since the hearing have not indicated any change in language.



Pictured above- Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) making presentation on Pythons.

As predicted, the majority of the hearing was a discussion on a wide variety of invasive species issues ranging from nutria, feral cats and disease, to beetles, mussels and noxious weeds. Many of the committee members had other priorities and half way through the meeting Senator Cardin, as Chair, was the only member left.

In order to provide the best intelligence and analysis to the Reptile Nation, USARK spent the whole day working Capitol Hill. Following the hearing Andrew Wyatt (President USARK), escorted by USARK lobbyists Tom Wolfe and Frank Vitello, took meetings with key political figures regarding HR669, S373 and HR2811. This is a list of the meetings we arranged:

1. Senate EPW Committee Staff
2. Senator Ben Cardin's Office
3. House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans & Wildlife Staff Director
4. Congressman Walter Jones Office
5. Congressman Howard Coble's Office
6. House Judiciary Committee Staff

What we learned is this:

- **Senate Bill 373 "The Python Bill" given momentum by all of the media sensation surrounding the tragic death of a child last week is going to move. It is possible that the language of S373 will be carried by an unrelated Senate spending bill now working through Congress.** Some will pass before the summer legislative break in August. If it makes it out of the Senate then its House 'companion' Bill 2811 will likely pass as well. We are close to securing a meeting with Senator Nelson, hopefully next week, where we will propose that he drop all the species of python from his bill except the Burmese Python. In addition we will ask that he include provisions that will allow the captive bred trade in Burmese Pythons to continue. Senator Nelson wants to stop the importation of Burmese Pythons into the US, but his current proposal will hurt too many of his constituents. It would be the death of legitimate breeders of valuable captive bred animals and destroy the entire industry nationwide. We have been led to believe he may be amenable to the USARK solution. If successful we think it is reasonable to believe Congressman Meek may be convinced to follow suit with HR2811.
- Although derailed HR669 is not completely dead. **A new Senate Bill will soon be introduced using HR669 as a baseline.** It is said that the bill will seek to amend serious problems inherent in HR669 to produce a bill more likely to be passed in the Senate where it will have more powerful support

than HR669 did in the House. **This will be the next 'Big Fight'! This is EXTREMELY DANGEROUS to the Reptile Nation and the Pet Industry!!!**

What can I do to help?

These issues demand a strong and decisive grass roots response from the Reptile Nation. We learned a lot when the Reptile Nation generated almost 50,000 letters along with thousands of phone calls and emails. It will take an integrated sophisticated approach, and a more targeted effort in order to be effective against the Senate version of HR669 and S373. Tomorrow you can expect to receive detailed action steps to fight for your right to own and trade in Herps. **Be ready to take immediate action! We will make sure your effort is directed to get the most effective results possible!**

It is time for the Reptile Nation to pull together as never before to fight this threat to us all. Personal differences must be put aside. Andrew Wyatt called Bill Brant, owner of The Gourmet Rodent and a PIJAC Board Member, to discuss how to pull our communities together and work toward a common goal. As a result Bill wrote a letter and circulated it throughout our community to try and engender a spirit of cooperation... kudos to Bill! Some of you may have already seen this letter. We want to work together with the pet industry to achieve success. It is imperative that we all put our egos aside in order to reach our common goals. USARK would like to extend an "Olive Branch" to PIJAC as we move forward to meet difficult challenges.

USARK has put together the most powerful lobbying effort that our industry and other coalition partners have ever seen. Our advocacy team has put us in a place that we can make our positions clear and have the greatest chance of ultimate success. Our intelligence production and contacts in the halls of Congress are unmatched. With the support of the grass roots army we call the Reptile Nation we have a strong clear voice. Now this political edge is not achieved without cost. This well oiled machine costs us about \$15,000 a month to operate. We NEED the community to step up and join the Reptile Nation as a paid member. We need donations to pay our costs involved with our leadership position. We need to continue to extend our reach by getting more people on our mailing list and building our membership. With your help USARK will continue to spearhead the effort to maintain and trade in Herps. There is Strength in Numbers... Protect Your Rights! We can't do it without you. Please do your part!