



Rattlesnakes for Pets in Utah?

By Deeanna Croasmun,
The Wendover Times

Currently it is illegal for people to collect and possess rattlesnakes for personal use in Utah. But, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is currently considering a proposal to change Administrative Rule 657-53: Amphibian and Reptile Collection, Importation, Transportation and Possession to allow people to obtain certificate of registrations (CORs) to collect and possess two species of rattlesnakes in Utah - the Great Basin Rattlesnake and the Midget Faded Rattlesnake. The proposal includes very specific requirements that a COR holder must follow to be allowed to possess these two species of rattlesnakes. Regulations address issues such as numbers of snakes allowed, collecting, handling, transporting, housing, equipment, first aid kits, and emergency procedures. The proposal also spec-

ifies that a person cannot get a COR to possess Great Basin Rattlesnakes or Midget Faded Rattlesnakes unless the person is 21 years old and has at least three years experience handling and caring for venomous or non-venomous snakes.

According to Krissy Wilson, DWR native species specialist, the division is aware of many people that are already holding rattlesnakes. They would like to be able to regulate the situation so they can try to keep it safe for the public and for the snakes. Besides the health, safety, and welfare of the public, the division is concerned about the health, safety, and welfare of the snakes.

The proposal is available online at:

http://wildlife.utah.gov/public_meetings/info/2010-02-03.pdf. DWR is discussing these new rules at its series of regional public meetings held throughout Utah from Feb. 9th-17th.

Wilson said, "Now is the time for people to come forward and voice their opinions on all sides of the issue. The division is open to what the public thinks, and we really want public input, including ideas on how to ensure safety if people are allowed to collect and possess rattlesnakes legally."

In a KSL story last week, James Dix, who has a COR to keep rattlesnakes for educational use and runs Reptile Rescue, expressed his concerns about poisonous snakes getting loose.

According to Wilson, Dix goes out on hundreds of calls a year to remove snakes that are causing problems for people, and he doesn't want to see more problems.

KSL reported Dix as saying "If you get bit in a main artery, you could be dead in a matter of minutes."

In an email sent to DWR, Zuzano Kukol, president of REXANO, Responsible Exotic Animal Ownership, based in Henderson, Nevada, supported Utah's proposal to legalize keeping a limited number of venomous snakes. Kukol feels it is better to have it legal and out in the open, rather than having illegal animals and not knowing where.

According to REXANO (www.rexano.org), captive keeping of wild and exotic animals presents an extremely low fatality rate to humans. With 16 fatalities from captive

venomous snakes in the U.S. from 1990 to 2009 (with seven of these listed as occurring in religious ceremonies), REXANO's statistics show the lifetime odds of being killed by a captive venomous snake are 1 in 4,769,635. See http://www.rexano.org/Statistics/venomous_captive_snake_fatality.pdf for complete statistical information on U.S. fatalities from captive wild and exotic venomous snakes.

Rexano's conclusion after examining available data is "All fatalities happened to the owners, friends, church goers and handlers themselves who voluntarily accepted the potential risk associated with keeping and handling venomous snakes. No uninvolved member of the public was killed by a captive venomous snake in the USA at least since 1990. Captive keeping of venomous snakes might be a slight voluntarily accepted hobby/occupational/religious hazard, but it is NOT a public safety issue."

This week, Mike Crawford, the Mayor of Wendover, Utah, said, "If people know what they are doing, they're careful, and properly set up to keep a venomous snake, I don't see a problem with it."

Pictured above is a Great Basin Rattlesnake that was photographed near Wendover last year. The Great Basin Rattlesnake is the species of rattlesnake that is commonly found in this region.