

PIJAC Interviews U.S. Fish and Wildlife

On Jan. 31, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued via the *Federal Register* (Vol. 73, No. 21, Pg. 5784) a Notice of Inquiry (NOI) for economical and biological information regarding constrictors of the genera *Boa*, *Python* and *Eunectes*. Many interpreted this request for information as a USFWS proposal that would classify these snakes as injurious wildlife, which could then lead to a ban on their importation and interstate transportation.

Alarmed reptile enthusiasts took immediate action, and letters flew fast and furious. Marshall Meyers, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council's executive vice president and general counsel, shifted into high gear to address the situation and met with both reptile industry people and senior USFWS officials.

In the wake of the immediate, strong reaction by the reptile community, Meyers interviewed USFWS staff, and PIJAC and the USFWS provided *REPTILES* with the following Q&A so concerned readers can better understand the situation. — Russ Case

Q: Marshall Meyers: What was the motivation for the Federal Register notice?

A: USFWS: The recent NOI is our first step in better understanding the issue of potential environmental impacts of released pet snakes. We're hoping that this Q&A will help people to better understand what the recent notice *is*, and what it *is not*. In August 2006, the Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned by South Florida Water Management District to list the Burmese python (*Python molurus bivittatus*) as an injurious wildlife species. Scientific information is required in an injurious wildlife evaluation, and we wanted to look at these three constrictor snake genera (*Boa*, *Python*, *Eunectes*) to see if there were other similar species that might pose an environmental risk. We kept the notice broad so we wouldn't exclude a species that could impact native species and perhaps be of concern.

Q: What is the most valuable information

for your effort?

A: We are hoping for biological information, such as potential range, diet, longevity, size of species at maturity, reproduction, differences between captive-bred animals and wild animals, etc. We are also looking for information on existing programs to reduce the potential for pet snakes to be released into the wild. Responses need not be limited to the questions listed in the NOI.

Q: Why are you also requesting economic information?

A: We currently have little information about the value of domestic trade in these species, and it is our responsibility as part of this process to gather a range of information on the species of interest. This includes economic data.

Q: What do you plan to do with this information?

A: We will use this information to help understand the potential risks and develop outreach



Burmese pythons in the Everglades contributed to the South Florida Water Management District petitioning the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list *Python molurus bivittatus* as an injurious wildlife species. Always remember — it is crucial to *never release pets into the wild*.

to prevent the release of unwanted pets. If well-documented impacts to wildlife and the environment are identified, we may use this information to initiate an injurious wildlife evaluation on one or more species, a process that would invite public review and comment. We may also use the information to work with states that are interested in permitting systems.

Q: How can PIJAC, other groups and the USFWS work closer together on this issue?

A: We don't want to see pet snakes released into the wild. We previously worked closely with PIJAC to develop an outreach campaign called

Habitattitude™, which focuses on preventing the release of unwanted aquatic pets and plants. We are currently expanding this campaign to include reptile and amphibian pets.

Q: Is there anything else that you want snake enthusiasts to know?

A: Just as a better scientific understanding of the needs of reptiles has allowed us to be more responsible caretakers of our pets, a better understanding of the potential impacts of these pets in the wild allows us a fuller appreciation of the environmental consequences in releasing our unwanted pets into the wild.

Please visit www.regulations.gov to submit your comments and data. Also, it is important to keep in mind that despite the central website name, this NOI is *not* a proposed regulation.