

Testimony of Congressman Kendrick B. Meek

**Committee on Judiciary, Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland
Security**

**Hearing on H.R. 2811:
A Bill to List Pythons as an Injurious Animal**

November 5, 2009

KENDRICK B. MEEK

Statement

Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security Hearing on

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman for calling this hearing today so that we may put a spotlight on non-native pythons. These snakes are dangerous, not only to the delicate ecosystem in the Everglades, but also to families and communities who are having increasing run-ins with these predators outside of the Everglades.

Along with a number of my Florida colleagues across both sides of the aisle, I have worked tirelessly to protect and restore the Florida Everglades. In May, Senator Nelson and I met with Secretary Salazar in Florida to tour the Everglades and the River of Grass. During this fan boat tour I heard again and again about the danger the establishment of pythons, particularly Burmese pythons, poses on the many endangered and threatened species that call the Everglades home.

These snakes are highly adaptable and strong swimmers. They have no known predator in the US and have even been known to kill Florida gators. Because they have no natural predator, and because they can lay up to 100 eggs at a time after just 18 months, these pythons have been firmly established in the Everglades. The Everglades Python Patrol has captured over 250 pythons this year alone, but with over a million acres of natural habitat and their ability to blend in seamlessly with their surroundings, I know this number represents only a small fraction of the number of pythons likely living in the Everglades at this time. These snakes can grow from anywhere between 6 to 9 feet in their first year and can grow up to 20 feet long by the time they reach full maturity, weighing over 250 lbs.

The threat of these massive snakes is not only to those animals living in the Everglades and other rural areas however. Pythons are also a threat to public safety. More and more of these snakes have been found hundreds of miles away, appearing in the backyards of families, at busy intersections, and outside of local businesses. Shortly after my Everglades tour, an 11 year-old boy in Okeechobee discovered a 17 foot long python in a canal outside his uncle's veterinary clinic. And just last week, a 9½ foot long Burmese Python was found slithering around a Vero Beach neighborhood. The incidences of people coming into contact with these snakes continue to be documented and the numbers continue to rise. Increased contact between humans and these dangerous snakes further increases the likelihood of injury or death to an innocent resident.

And it's not just Burmese Pythons. There have been a number of similar incidences of African Rock Pythons in the community as well. Although not as established in the Everglades as Burmese Pythons, these African Rock Pythons have the same ability to thrive there. In fact, a recent USGS report, which will be discussed later, found 5 snakes, including the two types of African Rock Pythons- Northern and Southern, to be highly invasive.

These snakes are a threat to our children, our pets and our environment, and there is simply no safe way for them to be here. One of the most memorable and devastating incidences occurred last July, when a 2-year old child was asphyxiated by an 8 foot long albino Burmese Python, which was kept as a pet by her parents. And I should make it clear, that this is not just Florida's problem. Burmese pythons can survive in a number of Southern, warm-weather states. Climate maps that I have looked at from the US Geological Survey show that they may be able to live in up to 1/3rd of the US.

We have the opportunity NOW to stop not just the importation and sale of pythons in the US, but to stop the damage they are doing to the delicate ecosystem of the Everglades, and prevent other people from being injured by them. Tracking and capturing the Burmese Pythons in the Everglades is a difficult, if not impossible task, as they have

already established themselves to a point where we may never be rid of them. But it is important that we work to ensure other foreign invasive snakes don't take hold of our ecosystem as well. We can still hope to stop other snakes from being introduced and endangering the environment and the public safety. It is my hope that this bill will move quickly. With the rate that these snakes breed and move around, we simply can't afford to wait.