

By Mr. NELSON, of Florida:

S. 373. A bill to amend title 18, United States Code, to include constrictor snakes of the species *Python* genera as an injurious animal; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss exotic pythons and the devastating impact they are having on wildlife in my home state. To combat this deadly nonnative nuisance, I am also filing a bill that will ban the interstate commerce and importation of these snakes.

Pythons were first discovered in the Everglades in the mid-1990s, and now have a rapidly-growing breeding population within the boundary of Everglades National Park. They impact almost seventy endangered species living in the Everglades and threaten to upset the natural balance that we are spending billions of dollars to restore. When I toured the Everglades with Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman *Barbara Boxer*, we witnessed firsthand the damage pythons are causing, and the efforts researchers are making to eradicate them from the wild.

These snakes were brought to Florida to be sold as pets, and were introduced into the wild by owners who could no longer handle them. They eat animals ranging from songbirds to white ibises, as well as endangered and threatened species such as the Key Largo woodrat. Pythons can grow to be 23 feet long and weigh up to 200 pounds, and there is currently no effective way of eradicating them in the wild.

They can consume animals many times their size, and recently, researchers also found cougar parts in the stomachs of captured pythons. This development could signal a new threat to the endangered Florida panther, which we have been working so hard to save.

Python populations have also been discovered in Big Cypress National Preserve to the north, Miami's water management areas to the northeast, Key Largo to the southeast, and many state parks, municipalities, and public and private lands in the region.

Because climate range projections from the U.S. Geological Survey show that pythons may soon expand their range to include much of the southern third of the United States, getting their populations under control is even more pressing.

In the last year, the State of Florida has taken some actions to address the problems created by owners who release their pythons into the wild, and I applaud these efforts. The State now requires owners of animals they call "Reptiles of Concern"--a category that includes two species besides pythons--not only to obtain permits for their animals, but also to implant a tracking microchip in larger pythons.

I believe federal action is also needed. That is why today I am introducing a bill that would amend the Lacey Act to ban the importation and interstate commerce of the python. This step is needed to reduce the number of pythons released into the wild by pet owners who don't understand the responsibility caring for a python entails. In 2007, preeminent environmentalist and former assistant secretary of the Interior Nathaniel Reed wrote, "The dramatic increase in the number of snakes in the Park and Big Cypress call into question why it has taken so long for the Service to utilize its powers under the Lacey Act to prevent importation of the snake into an ecosystem where escapees and rejects have built a sustainable population."

If we do not take action now, we will let python populations in Florida continue to grow and further ravage the already-fragile Everglades, as well as risk letting them spread throughout the Southern portion of the United States.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the *Record*.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the *Record*, as follows:

S. 373

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. IMPORTATION OR SHIPMENT OF INJURIOUS SPECIES.

Section 42(a)(1) of title 18, United States Code, is amended in the first sentence by inserting " ; of the constrictor snake of the species Python genera" after "polymorpha".