

# Battle over a garter snake in Wisconsin

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Wisconsin lawmakers are threatening to remove a snake's protected status unless the state Department of Natural Resources eases regulations on developers.

Butler's Garter Snake would be the first species in the state to be denied protection by legislative fiat, the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel reported. A committee voted 8-4 last week to urge the department to roll back regulations.

The snake has been listed as threatened since 1997, and preserving its habitat has caused headaches for some developers. Some legislators argue that the species, which is almost identical with the Eastern Plains garter snake, is actually quite common.

But wildlife experts say the legislature could be setting a dangerous precedent.

"What is disturbing is that this would be the first delisting of a threatened or endangered species in the country based not on science, but politics and economics," said George Meyer, a former secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and now the executive director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. "Snakes aren't going anywhere."

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