

# Fla. governor approves plan to capture, kill Burmese pythons

July 16 2009, By Curtis Morgan

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By next week, the first of a select squad of python hunters will be ready to roll.

Florida Gov. Charlie Crist on Wednesday approved plans to begin capturing and killing Burmese python that have invaded the Everglades.

The governor called the program, similar to one used for "nuisance" alligators on state lands, important for protecting wildlife and the public.

"We've all seen that there's been a significant rise in the python population," Crist said. "That's of concern."

Scientists believe the snakes, likely offspring of pets released by owners or freed from cages or shops by Hurricane Andrew, primarily pose a threat to native species.

It won't be an open season on constrictors. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission will issue a limited number of permits starting Friday. The program, run with the South Florida Water Management District, will focus on state marshes south of Lake Okeechobee.

Trappers, whom the FWC said would be confined to volunteer experts, will euthanize the captured snakes. They also will provide scientific data from weight to gut contents. Trappers would be able to sell the meat and skin, which has commercial value for shoes and other items.

FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto said the program would run through the winter, then be reviewed to determine if it was effective.

Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., also has called for an controlled hunt in Everglades National Park -- one run by "deputized" agents and volunteers. The National Park Service is working on its own plan.

Some scientists doubt hunting can control an estimated 100,000-plus snakes that can move freely in the vast wilds of South [Florida](#).

Barreto said efforts will need to include federal land to work. He also still hopes to establish a python bounty, which he called a "cost-effective" solution.

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