

Florida bill would ban pythons as pets

September 23 2009, By David Fleshler

You wouldn't be able to buy a Burmese python as a pet anymore in Florida, under a bill drafted by a state senator who said the state should shut off the source of "dangerous reptiles" that have colonized the Everglades.

State Sen. Eleanor Sobel said she decided to introduce the bill because the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission was moving too slowly to stop the problem, using python hunts that generate publicity but capture too few snakes to make a difference.

"We need to stop it at the source," she said. "These reptiles are not meant to be pets."

The bill also would ban the sale or private ownership of reticulated pythons, African rock pythons, amethystine or scrub pythons, anacondas and Nile monitor lizards.

The proposal would go far beyond current law, which allows anyone to own a python as long as the snake is registered and implanted with a microchip. The bill would grandfather in current owners, to prevent the mass dumping of pythons.

Burmese pythons have established a breeding population in [Everglades National Park](#), where they consume wading birds, raccoons and other native wildlife. Authorities also are concerned about recent discoveries of African rock pythons in western Miami-Dade County.

Tom Crutchfield, a reptile dealer in Homestead, Fla., at first said, "I'll have to call you back. I'm holding a king cobra."

Later he said he doubted a ban on pythons would make much difference, since few people want them anymore.

"Twenty years ago, people liked big snakes," he said. "In the last few years, very few people want Burmese or retics. They're trouble to keep; they're trouble to feed. But if somebody's licensed, they should be able to keep them. The only thing this does is take more of our rights away."

Laurie Macdonald, Florida program director for Defenders of Wildlife, praised the proposal.

"We're really glad some action is being taken to prevent Florida from being further harmed by exotic wildlife," she said.

Pat Behnke, spokeswoman for the [Florida](#) Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, did not comment directly on Sobel's bill but said licensing requirements imposed on ownership of Burmese pythons and the other reptiles on Sobel's list had resulted in a "considerable reduction" in demand. She said the commission's staff was working on [python](#) proposals that would be presented in December.

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