

**Opening Statement
Chairman Raúl M. Grijalva
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands with Subcommittee
on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Joint Oversight Hearing
How to Manage Large Constrictor Snakes and Other Invasive Species
March 23, 2010**

The Subcommittee will now come to order. Thank you.

I want to welcome all of our witnesses to this hearing on how to control constrictor snakes like the huge Burmese python which donated the very impressive hide on display here today.

These pythons are voracious predators that threaten most, if not all, of the wading birds for which the Everglades are famed, as well as many of South Florida's mammals and reptiles.

We will hear today from several witnesses about the endangered birds and mammals that have been found in the stomachs of pythons captured in and around Everglades National Park. Among the animals the pythons eat are federally protected wood storks, as well as creatures as large as full-grown alligators and deer.

These witnesses will present a very disturbing picture of how aggressively these snakes are chowing down on the very native species we are spending large sums to conserve.

Nationally, invasive species cause harm to the economy, human health, and the environment. Damages caused by such species have been generally estimated to cost the American economy over \$120 billion annually.

One weapon we have in this war is the Lacey Act, under which invasive species are placed on the “injurious list” when they are deemed to have caused serious and widespread harm to the economy, environment, or human health. Such a listing bars further importation and interstate trade.

But the process takes too long – on average, it takes the Fish and Wildlife Service four years to list a species as injurious. This slow response means those species can become established in the wild, greatly increasing the cost of control and mitigation and affecting budgets at all levels of government.

There are still many questions about the best way to prevent such species from escaping and making themselves at home in already threatened ecosystems across our country. I hope our witnesses can shed some light on those questions today. I want to thank all of our witnesses, many from Florida, for making the trip to D-C, and I look forward to hearing their testimony.