

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners
From: Melissa Tucker, Director, Habitat and Species Conservation
Date: February 25, 2021
Subject: Invasive Reptiles - Final Rules

Purpose: Obtain approval for final rules to enhance nonnative species regulations.

Why: The affected high-risk, invasive reptiles are a threat to Florida's ecology, economy and human health and safety.

Top Points:

1. Proposed rules will eliminate commercial breeding and pet ownership of these high-risk reptiles to protect Florida's environment and economy.
2. Proposed rules will place these high-risk reptiles on the Prohibited species list, limiting possession to permitted facilities engaged in educational exhibition, research, or eradication or control activities.
3. Final rule language includes provisions to lessen the impact to regulated entities.

Affected Parties: Owners of tegus and green iguanas, retail pet stores, reptile industry, nuisance wildlife trappers, exhibitors, citizens, land managers and municipalities of Florida adversely affected by or concerned about invasive wildlife.

Summary:

Burmese pythons, reticulated pythons, scrub pythons, Northern African pythons, Southern African Pythons, amethystine pythons, green anacondas, Nile monitor lizards, tegus (all species) and green iguanas are a threat to Florida's ecology, economy and human health and safety. Because of these threats, enhanced regulations are necessary. Regulation of high-risk nonnative fish and wildlife is used in conjunction with ongoing field work and other management strategies to minimize adverse impacts of invasive species and to prevent additional introduction in the wild. The proposed final rules move high-risk invasive reptiles currently on the Conditional list, green iguanas and all species of tegus to the Prohibited species list. Final rule language expands possession allowances for the purposes of eradication and control, allows for current tegu and green iguana pet owners to keep their pet with a no-cost permit, allows for some limited continued commercial sales of tegus and green iguanas, and provides reporting and biosecurity measures to prevent escape of these species.

Staff received extensive feedback on these contentious rule proposals. Stakeholders were either highly in support or highly against the proposed regulations. The proposed final rules include several changes to the original draft rule to lessen the impact to the regulated public while still addressing the high risk these species pose to Florida.

Staff Recommendation: Approval of the final rule language as presented, and to file a Notice of Change for the amended rule language.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Kristen Sommers, Leader, Wildlife Impact Management Section

Affected Rules: 68-5, F.A.C.