

Fact Sheet

Questions About the Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act (H.R. 669)

Why is this bill needed?

The Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act (H.R. 669) is designed to prevent the introduction and establishment in the United States of nonnative wildlife species that harm the economy, the environment, human health, or other animals. Once species are established, methods used to remove the animals are costly, ineffective, and inhumane. The current process to declare species "injurious," which prevents importation and interstate commerce, typically takes years and occurs only after significant damage has been done and costs incurred. H.R. 669 takes a proactive approach to prevent these introductions in the first place. It would require lists be developed -- based on scientific information with public input -- of those species allowed and those that, because of potential risk, are prohibited from import and interstate commerce.

Will pets be taken away and possibly killed?

No. Existing animals would be grandfathered. Once the evaluation process is set up, which should take three years, any decision to restrict trade of a species would apply going forward.

Will all exotic species be banned?

No. H.R. 669 does not ban any species *per se*. It establishes a science-based process to evaluate species for their likelihood to harm the economy, the environment, public health, or other animals. The evaluation process will identify and prohibit trade in species judged to be a serious risk. Species found to be safe will be approved for trade. Further, the bill requires that this process be transparent and that stakeholder input be considered in decision-making. The process would not take effect for several years.

What about domesticated animals?

The evaluation process applies to wild animals -- domesticated animals are exempt. The bill lists a number of domesticated species that are specifically exempt from the screening process, such as cats, dogs, rabbits, goldfish, and horses. It also gives the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service authority to add species to the list.

What about hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, and ferrets?

The Humane Society of the United States will recommend that domesticated hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, and ferrets be added to the list of animals that are specifically exempt from the evaluation process in the bill. Similarly, we will recommend adding some species of domesticated birds and fish. Even if the bill passed as written, we would expect domesticated species to be exempted by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The bill applies to nonnative wild animals.

Will the pet industry be shut down?

No. Much of the pet industry will not be affected by the bill. Domesticated animals will not have to go through the screening process, and nonnative wildlife species that do not pose risks will be approved for import and trade. In addition, no restrictions will be implemented until the evaluation process is in place, which is expected to take three years.

Isn't this just a problem for Florida?

No. Invasive species are a nationwide problem, as are the potential risks to public health and safety and animal welfare. Florida has plenty of examples of what can go wrong, such as the Burmese pythons in the Everglades, which are eating endangered species and upsetting the balance of the



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2100 L Street, NW Washington, DC 20037

† 202.452.1100 f 202.778.6132 humanesociety.org

ecosystem. The U.S. Geological Survey has found that about one-third of the United States has a climate similar to the native lands for these snakes, so the problem could spread if the trade continues unabated.

What are the disease risks of imported species?

Imported animals can bring dangerous diseases with them. In 2003, dozens of people contracted monkeypox -- the first outbreak of this potentially fatal disease ever in the United States. Cases were reported in Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, and Ohio. The disease came from infected African rodents who were imported for the exotic pet trade and housed next to prairie dogs. The prairie dogs were then sold as pets, and they transmitted the virus to people. Evaluating animal species before they are imported can prevent disease outbreaks, protect our natural resources, and spare the animals the suffering of the exotic pet trade.

How can we afford to regulate animal imports, it's too expensive?

There will be costs to regulate the trade in exotic animals, but the cost of not acting is even greater. One Florida county reportedly spent \$110,000 over two years, and another spends \$120,000 annually, to remove nonnative iguanas for example. Cash-strapped governments do not have funds to devote to these efforts. Moreover, once established, eliminating exotic species may be impossible and inhumane.