



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi
Statement as Prepared for Delivery
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 511, to amend title 18, United States Code, to prohibit
the importation of various injurious species of constrictor snakes.
November 29, 2012

Good morning. Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Sablan for convening this hearing. As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I am familiar with this legislation as the Committee voted in February to favorably report it to the full House. As a cosponsor, I hope that this Committee will now follow suit, so that the biodiversity and natural ecosystems in South Florida; my district, Puerto Rico; and the other areas of the United States that are vulnerable to invasion by constrictor snakes are adequately protected.

This bill would add nine species of giant constrictor snakes to the list of animals currently prohibited from importation and interstate shipment in the United States, including Puerto Rico. Of these nine species, five have already appeared in the wild in Puerto Rico.

The Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources reports that Burmese pythons, reticulated pythons, African rock pythons, yellow anacondas, and boa constrictors have been collected in municipalities

throughout Puerto Rico, and that boa constrictors have even begun to breed on the Island. While the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has already prohibited the importation and interstate movement of three of these five species, the remaining two are not prohibited by either rule or statute.

Why is this important? There are eight endangered bird species and eight endangered reptile species native to Puerto Rico, including the Puerto Rican parrot and coquí frog, that are directly threatened by the presence in Puerto Rico of large constrictor snakes. The federal government and the government of Puerto Rico are partners in recovering endangered Puerto Rican parrots in El Yunque National Forest and the Río Abajo Forest, and have spent close to \$20 million over the past decade on this partnership. These snakes pose a direct threat to this investment.

As a tropical island, Puerto Rico is particularly susceptible to biological invasions, especially by highly adaptive generalist predators like constrictor snakes, which pose a threat to the environment, economy, and public safety. We have already witnessed the consequences of inaction at the federal level in Florida, and we must take affirmative steps to mitigate the risks there and in other vulnerable areas.

Therefore, I have two questions for our witnesses today.

First, can you explain more fully how this bill would protect Puerto Rico in particular?

Second, apart from this bill, what other actions can government be taking at the federal, state and local levels to prevent large constrictor snakes from becoming established in the wild in Puerto Rico and other vulnerable jurisdictions?