

S. 1153: The Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act

New screening procedures will close the loophole that allowed harmful invasive species like **Asian carp**, **Burmese pythons**, and **nutria** to enter the country

This bill, if enacted, would advance our nation's laws on non-native animals from the 19th Century to the 21st Century by dramatically strengthening the ability to make rapid, science-based decisions on whether a non-native species is harmful or not.

Background

The Lacey Act, the current law governing animal imports, gives the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) limited power to declare species "injurious" and prohibit their importation to the United States. This approach, adopted 114 years ago, is excruciatingly slow – the average listing time is about four years, and only about 40 animal groups have been listed. S. 1153 gives FWS the tools to first assess the potential risks associated with a species proposed for import before deciding whether to allow or prohibit its trade into the country. Strengthening this process can stop introductions of scientifically-identified non-native species that pose high risk to the economy, the environment, human health or native wildlife, which can save taxpayers hundreds of millions a year in damages and control costs.

Consequences of a Poorly Regulated International Trade

- As a leading import market, the U.S. receives hundreds of millions of freely imported live animals every year. Many of these escape or are released into the wild where they may flourish and cause serious environmental, health, and economic problems.
- For fiscal years 2010 and 2011, the federal budget allocated approximately \$120 million to control the Asian carp. Tens of millions more dollars are spent to control invaders such as nutria and two python species established in Florida.
- The total U.S. cost attributed to invasive animals and associated animal diseases is estimated to be as much as \$35 billion per year.
- Exotic animals bring with them diseases such as Newcastle's disease, heartwater, and monkeypox.
- The U.S. spends less than \$500,000 annually to prevent harmful invasions, employing fewer than three full-time employees in its "injurious species" listing program.

Red lionfish, from the Indo-Pacific and introduced to the Atlantic Ocean as aquarium escapees, have formed large populations from Florida to as far north as New York. They have now invaded the Gulf of Mexico along the coasts of Florida and Louisiana down to Mexico. These venomous fish are aggressive predators of shrimp and other native commercial species such as snapper and grouper.



Asian carp, at first confined to southeastern waterways and aquaculture ponds they were imported to clean, are now thriving in the Mississippi River basin, with only an electric barrier to keep these giant fish out of the Great Lakes, where their damaging spread is likely to be unstoppable. The federal government spent in 2010 alone \$79 million trying to prevent their invasion of the Great Lakes.²



Burmese pythons, imported from Southeast Asia as pets and then illegally released in the wild, are reproducing and thriving in the Everglades and other south Florida wetlands. Estimated at 30,000 in number, the snake is considered both a threat to the restoration of the Everglades and to human safety, with the state working to control and eradicate the population.¹



Nutria, rat-like, semi-aquatic rodents imported to Louisiana in 1930 for their valuable fur, thrived and reproduced in massive numbers, and are now destroying aquatic vegetation, overrunning and eroding wetlands, and pushing out native animals. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries estimates that 20,300 acres of wetlands are impacted by nutria, and the control program will cost the state a total of \$65.7 million dollars. Nutria also are causing problems in Oregon, Washington, Virginia and Maryland.⁵





S. 1153 will provide clear direction to the Fish and Wildlife Service to **perform more risk assessments, cut through the bureaucratic delays and consider more species**, so the taxpayers get a **better return on their investment**.

The Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act's benefits:

- **For the environment, the public, land owners, and natural resource users and managers:** S. 1153 provides the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with the authority to prevent invasions using modern scientific approaches and directs the Service to expedite its decisions to label injurious species. It providgives the Service limited "emergency" authority, in close cooperation with States and other agencies, that is needed to block harmful imported animals, and wildlife livestock pathogens, ~~as well as invasive plants~~ that cause ecological and economic damage.
- **For taxpayers:** The costs of risk analyses for potentially injurious species now are entirely borne by America's taxpayers. S. 1153 creates a limited user fee for live animal importers to defray costs of monitoring the trade, and to complete risk analyses more rapidly. In addition, the long-term expected net benefits of risk screenings range are very positive for the nation economically, based on recent economic analysis. from \$54,000 to \$141,000 per species assessed, while the cost of these screenings range from a mere \$1,200 to \$12,000 per species.
- **For zoos, aquaria, and research institutions:** S. 1153 creates a new category of "Injurious II" species that are not suited as private pets, but can be held by qualified zoos, aquaria, and research facilities without the need for a Federal permit.
- **For States:** This bill requires the Fish and Wildlife Service to consult with States and recognize their actions when making risk determinations. It also creates a trust fund in which fees and revenues from the animal import trade are collected, with a quarter allocated given to States for them to improve monitoring and risk analyses efforts.
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