



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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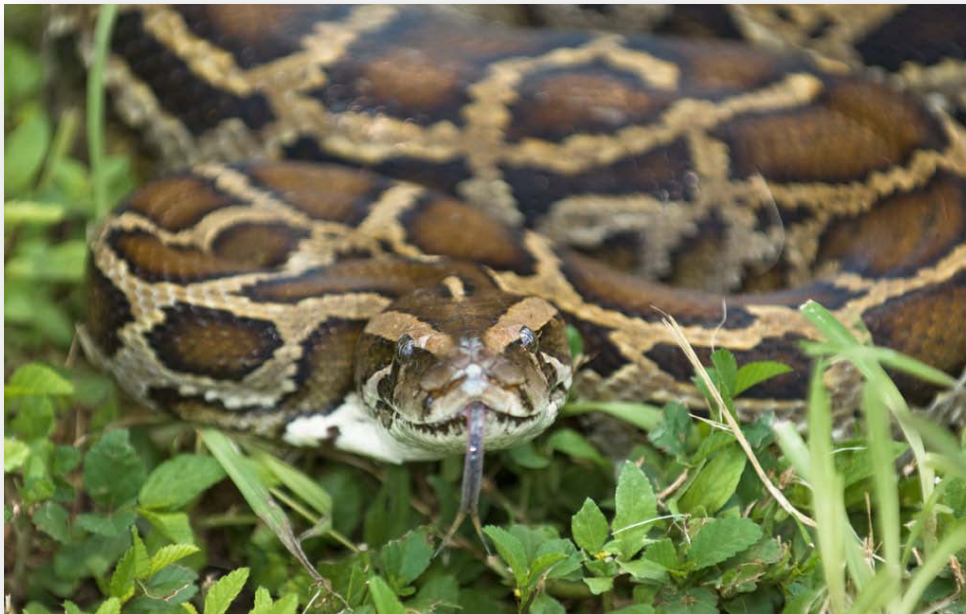
South Florida Water Management District

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Pythons Persist in Everglades Through Freezes and Water Shortage *SFWMD field crews track six pythons within the last week over a widespread area*



(Click on the picture for a larger version.)

West Palm Beach, FL — As part of the ongoing effort to protect native wildlife from invasive species, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) has removed six pythons in the last week in areas where they have not previously been found, including areas deep in the heart of the Everglades and north of Alligator Alley.

“The prolonged cold temperatures over recent winters and the declining water levels of the dry season apparently have not hindered the population of pythons invading the area,” said SFWMD Director of Vegetation and Land Management Dan Thayer. “The invasive Australian melaleuca tree survives a variety of conditions throughout the Everglades. In this way, Burmese pythons are the melaleuca of the reptile world. They appear to prosper regardless of extreme conditions, whether it’s cold, wet, dry, or hot.”

The discovery of dead pythons following the record-low freezes of 2009-2010 gave scientists an indication that the snakes may not survive in the weather extremes for which South Florida is known. That view was not supported this year as a gritty population of pythons has continued to breed.

So far this year, 26 pythons have been captured in joint efforts between the District and partner agencies. The latest python discoveries come just a few weeks before the height of python mating season when their numbers are expected to increase. While most catches are the Burmese python, the Northern African python has also emerged as a growing threat in the last year.

The District manages more than 674,000 acres of land and one of the missions of the agency is to maintain and restore the natural habitat. The Burmese python, which can grow to 6 to 8 feet in their first year of life, is a top predator that is known to prey upon more than 20 native Florida species – notably, the white tailed deer, the American alligator, bobcat and numerous wading birds common to the Everglades. The rapidly breeding pythons also threaten Florida's investment in restoring the Everglades.

The python was likely introduced to the Everglades by accidental or intentional releases by pet owners. In July 2010, with support from the District, the State of Florida banned new ownership of Burmese pythons and six other giant constrictors as pets.

Since 2000, the District, Everglades National Park and other partner agencies, have removed 1,360 Burmese pythons from the Everglades. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Burmese python population estimates range from 5,000 to more than 100,000 in the Everglades.

"Almost nothing stops them. It tells us they're tough and rugged," said Thayer. "The survival of an invasive species often depends on its ability to endure extremes. The Burmese python is overcoming a wide range of conditions in Florida, including extreme colds and a water shortage."

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About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.