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- [About » »](#)
- [News & Action » »](#)
- [Intro to Invasive Species » »](#)
- [Call to Action](#)
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Senator Gillibrand Announces Bill to Prevent Future Invasive Species

Monday, June 10, 2013

PROPOSED LEGISLATION WOULD STRENGTHEN PROTECTIONS AGAINST INVASIVE ANIMAL SPECIES

Senator Gillibrand introduces bill to prevent the import of harmful non-native fish and wildlife

WASHINGTON (June, 7, 2013)—Acting in the interest of the nation’s environment and economy, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) took a major step forward today to stop the import of invasive, non-native animals by introducing “The Invasive Fish and Wildlife Prevention Act of 2013.” This bill will allow the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to prevent new, harmful fish and wildlife from being imported into the country and to more quickly act to prevent the spread of those that are already here. This Senate bill is a companion bill of H.R. 996, which was introduced by Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) earlier this year.

The current U.S. law governing the import of animals is more than a century old, and has proven to be ineffective in protecting the country from the influx of thousands of non-native fish and wildlife species being imported into the country, hundreds of which are already known to be invasive or present disease risk. Recent invasions by imported animal species such as the Burmese python, Asian carp, northern snakehead, and red lionfish are together costing federal, state, and local governments tens of millions of dollars annually in efforts to control them. These costs could have been avoided if authorities had considered their risks beforehand and restricted their importation.

“The current injurious species listing process is a regulatory dinosaur that, in most cases, only closes the proverbial barn door after invasive species have escaped and become established,” said Peter Jenkins, spokesperson for the National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species. “We applaud Senator Gillibrand for introducing this proposed legislation, which will allow the federal government to proactively prevent future invasions of fish and wildlife that can cause permanent harm to the environment, spread disease, and cost millions of dollars to control.”

As a leading import market, the United States receives hundreds of millions of live, non-native animals each year for use in aquaculture or for sale by the pet and aquarium trades and other businesses. For years, the federal government

has come under sharp criticism for allowing the import of invasive animal species that cause extensive damage to ecosystems, are a cost burden to taxpayers, and present safety or health threats.

“This bill is a 21st century solution that improves oversight for the trade of live animals by updating a law enacted 113 years ago,” said Jennifer Caddick, spokesperson for Great Lakes United. “It provides a significant boost to national efforts to prevent future invasions and protects our environment, wildlife, and economy,”

The proposed legislation will create a new screening system to proactively review live animals proposed for import to the United States and to restrict those that pose serious risks before they are imported, while also immediately giving the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service greater flexibility and authority to make science-based decisions to prohibit or restrict live animals already in trade. The current law regulating animal imports does not require that animals being imported first be screened for invasiveness, for diseases they might carry, or for the risks they pose to human or wildlife health.

“Senator Gillibrand and Representative Slaughter have created a critical opportunity for Congress to close the loophole that has allowed harmful invasive species to alter U.S. ecosystems and push out native species,” said Bentley Johnson, legislative representative for the National Wildlife Federation. “Enacting these bills would be one of the most significant policy advances in animal import oversight by the federal government.”

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For a fact sheet on the economic impact of imported invasive species and diseases:
www.glu.org/en/system/files/Factsheet_necis_economics_final.pdf

Established in 2003, the National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species (NECIS) is a national network of 18 major conservation and environmental organizations that provides a united expert and scientific voice on invasive species policy. Its leaders include scientists, lawyers, activists, and advocates with many years of experience on invasives policy. For more information, please visit www.necis.net.

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