# MEMORANDUM

**To:** Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

**From:** Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Habitat and Species Conservation

**Date:** December 5, 2017

**Subject:** Staff Report - Nonnative Fish and Wildlife Update

---

**Purpose:**
Staff will provide an update on the progress, expansion and challenges of the Nonnative Fish and Wildlife efforts. The presentation will highlight pythons, lionfish, and Argentine black and white tegus.

**Summary:**
The recognition of the problems and impacts of invasive wildlife have increased significantly in Florida over the last decade. During this period, FWC has significantly increased management efforts and provided and realigned both personnel and fiscal resources to address the impacts that our constituents are frequently experiencing. Three species that have emerged as management priorities are the Burmese python, lionfish, and Argentine black and white tegu.

One of the most challenging high priority invasive species continues to be the Burmese python. Efforts to address this species have included two highly successful Python Challenge events to raise public awareness, using permitted volunteers and responders to remove pythons, training members of the public in safe capture, and allowing hunting of pythons on Wildlife Management areas. Recent increases in funds have provided FWC the opportunity to develop the Python Removal Contractor Program and initiate a new year-round citizen science incentive program called Python Pickup. Staff are also identifying regulatory gaps or challenges at the state and federal level. Future success will require continued work with our partners towards a unified management approach to python control.

Like pythons, the presence of invasive lionfish is a concern to many of our constituents. First reported off the coast of southeastern Florida in 1985, lionfish have spread throughout coastal Florida waters, most recently into the northern Gulf of Mexico. Over the last few years, programs have been developed to encourage and incentivize lionfish removal, increase public awareness, and promote consumption and develop a commercial market. FWC has developed programs such as Reef Rangers, the Lionfish Challenge and a 2016 pilot program in the panhandle to help increase public involvement in control efforts. FWC also supports lionfish tournaments, and have held 3 statewide Lionfish Removal Awareness Day events. Current new efforts include continued support of innovative methods to increase lionfish removal.

A more recent invader is the Argentine black and white tegu, a species of large lizard. Tegus are now established and reproducing in parts of Miami-Dade County and in eastern Hillsborough County, and have been documented to adversely impact native fish and wildlife. Staff are working with partners to contain and hopefully eradicate tegus where they are currently established through coordinated removal efforts. Resources for tegu removal and management research by all agencies in FY 16/17 was estimated at over $820K. Expenditures across all agencies will likely top $1M for FY 17/18. As tegus continue to be reported elsewhere in Florida, most likely from the release by pet owners, staff are challenged to respond in a timely effective manner to prevent additional established populations.

There are many other species that are causing impacts and staff focus on those where the investment of efforts is likely to result in conservation gains and resolution of citizen concerns. Recent focused actions include efforts to eradicate Northern African pythons, removal of Nile monitors, and working with communities to help remove green iguanas. Our ongoing, successful Pet Amnesty program is also an important element as it provides citizens who may illegally or legally have exotic wildlife as a pet an alternative to releasing them to the wild. Working with many partners, including the South Florida Water Management District, the U.S. Department of Interior, and the University of Florida is crucial to addressing nonnative fish and wildlife populations.

**Staff Recommendation:**
This presentation is for informational purposes and any direction that the Commission may provide.

**Staff Contact and/or Presenter:**
Kristen Sommers, Leader, Wildlife Impact Management Section