

NCPARC PRT Working Group Meeting  
UNC-Greensboro  
April 11, 2006

Attendees: Lori Williams, Jeff Beane, Ed Corey, Shelly Barrier, Steve Price, Dennis Herman, Grover Barfield, Ann Somers, Sarah Cross, Andrew Wyatt, David Cooper, Phil Bradley, Dave Davenport, Daron Barnes, Kendrick Weeks, Keith Farmer, Dave LaPlante, Tanith Tyrr, Carl Person, Rhonda Washington

Meeting began at 1:21 pm.

DD: welcome, opening comments; comments about recent e-mails, purpose of the e-mail list; purpose of PARC list serve; requests of certain members to be taken off the working group and e-mail list; would like to reiterate that the issues before us are difficult and can be contentious; those on the far ends of the spectrum may not be satisfied with the outcomes of this working group; legislation is coming whether we like it or not; also, it is not realistic to expect that no herps will be kept in captivity; those folks on those opposite ends, hopefully, will be able to reach a compromise, along with the group as a whole; any discussions?

DH: one comment...on the Montgomery Co. website, I saw that they have already banned “inherently dangerous” animals in the county; the law looks like it follows the state ruling; if we come up with guidelines, and they are different, which will supercede? County? State?

DB: the more restrictive law will take precedence; often this is the local law; in the absence of a state law, or a law deemed too broad, a local govt. or county may impose their own, more restrictive law

SB: in other words the county law can never be more lenient than a state law already in place that may be more restrictive

Other comments from group.....

DH: is there a mechanism for us to look at what county laws are pending?

Comments and discussion from group....

DB: typically, the more populous counties will be the ones that impose a law like this first

DD: most counties that don't have anything on the books thus far will look to the state (often to act as a scapegoat)...attitude of “let's just do what the state has done or said”; if there is something at the state level already, stakeholder groups can then comment on that and work for accepted regulation

DB: keep in mind it's easier to change a local law than a state law

GB: in Gaston Co, the person responsible for getting their law passed was associated with PETA

More discussion and comments from group...localities will look to the state for guidance....

AW: it's everyone's responsibility, too, to educate those around them....educate the legislature, etc.; who knows how much impact those efforts are having, but we will see in time; stereotypes and biases surrounding reptiles exist and need to be addressed

DD: thankfully, our focus is just on the reptile component of this issue, not mammals, etc.; 4 components that need to be addressed: crocodilians, lizards, constrictors (these 3 could require a permit), the 4<sup>th</sup> is venomous snakes (this one probably needs some kind of license); let's look at the first 3 components first; we need to define these, too; All crocodilians should require a permit, all of them; large lizards are Veranidae and Iguanidae (the "large" lizards only), and for large constrictors (Boaidae, Pythonidae), capable of obtaining a size of 8 feet or longer

DH: are we talking about inherently dangerous animals or just those that shouldn't be kept at all? Many of these we have already mentioned are not dangerous if they are kept properly

Discussion among group about which species, which groups of large lizards that should or should not be included....CP, EC, DH, TT...we should address the health and safety issue, the needs or desires of people to keep them, whether the laws can be enforced anyway....we need to stick with just those classified as "inherently dangerous"...justification for requiring permits for those not inherently dangerous?...more discussion and random comments and questions among group....

KF: would we be better off listing specific species?

CP: weight or size cut-off? What is realistically enforced? We can't expect law enforcement to run around with a scale...

DH: I think we should list specific species, those with the potential to grow to a certain size

More discussion (EC, CP, and TT)...about size and weight requirements and consideration....law enforcement considerations....

DH: we are only talking about requiring permits, not banning them

More comments from group....

CP: with permits, what are we asking people to do?

DD, SC: out of Daron's office

DB: permits are not free, right now there are some that you have to pay for, all are annual; there is a potential for some to be added for specific things; the process can be very simple

DD: the permits can also provide a database for people working on these animals in the state; the other thing it does is make the sale of these species without a permit, more difficult (ex., kid buying a python at a fair, on impulse)

TT: if permits could halt or slow down impulse buys for iguanas, etc., that would be good

DD: so, with permits, a store could not sell any of these species we are talking about without a permit; whether we like it or not, these species will be addressed; people who work with big constrictors should not find the permit system a problem

Comments from group about slowing down impulse buying of herps with the permit system....

DH: don't forget that many of these species are federally protected, too, so federal laws would have to be followed, too

KF: what criteria would determine who gets a permit?

TT: too costly and inefficient to require inspections? Minimum husbandry requirements?

DB: comments about the existing licenses and permits; example: propagation license for game birds...number of individuals, where they came from, etc., the permit covers eggs, live birds, selling of birds/eggs, etc.; with propagation permits, there are no inspections, but law enforcement could visit the facility and want to see the permit

KF: what about requiring the seller to have copies of buyers' permits?

DH: that is a good example of that license that could cover what we are talking about here

AW: keeping the mechanism consistent with licenses already in place would be good to do

DH: also, permitted people could provide a repository for unwanted animals

DB: also, the permits/licenses require an annual permit, research results, etc.; in the next year or so, the permitting system will be online

Comments about venomous snakes....permits vs. licenses....

CP: it seems like a fair system; how can anyone argue with it?

DH: does each yearly permit cover changes or additions to the animals a person has?  
What if they want to add an animal or two during the year after the permit was issued?

DB: with the bird permits, for example, once the permit is given, numbers don't matter; we could certainly make it more restrictive and include numbers of animals; also the permits are to an individual person, usually at an individual address (could be a facility with several employees)

DD: it would be easier for us to include all large constrictor species in the permit system...and not include size/weight restrictions

SC: why should we separate the inherently dangerous animals from ones we would want a permit for anyway? (ex. Burmese python)

Comments....all of this sounds reasonable...entry level permits....ranking in complexity depending on the species...we should handle venomous snakes differently (DD)  
....agreement from group

DD: if we separate venomous, I don't see the need for the others to require a license, a step above a permit...I also don't think we need to worry about numbers, just identify the species...build the permit around the species

DB: you could also look at the possibility of breaking out someone classified as a seller; breeding large numbers, etc....this person may be under some other permit or license

Comments about discouraging impulse buying....differences in types of licenses....permit to breed certain species? Permits for multiple species? Yes, (way it is now for birds, etc.)

Burmese, rock, green anaconda, reticulated python, scrub python....the 5 species we agree upon already...

DD: what about boas?

Nobody agrees with adding boas....different class of animals...maybe add boas and iguanas and others together....this is more of an animal welfare issue not an inherently dangerous animal issue

EC: how are we defining "dangerous?"

CP: legislature considers it "life-threatening"

DH: in GA, they also consider what is dangerous to pets, livestock, etc., not just people

DD: we should stipulate that distinction in our recommendations; “dangerous” is the term already out there...we’ll just define it as we want to...we just want to address the potential across the board, including small children and infants

Comments about not wanting to bring up the salmonella issue with regards to children and reptiles...

GB: in LA now, legislature is happening right now...list of target species to be banned or regulated...herpetologists there are having a tough fight there

DD: again, that is why we are doing this in NC; we are trying to be proactive instead of reactive, like what the folks in LA are dealing with now; we just want something in place that is agreeable for the majority of the public, not everyone but the majority; we are not trying to prevent people from having these animals who are responsible and legal and permitted

DH: I think we should leave it as “inherently dangerous to people” not mention children or infants or any age class

DD: are we set on the 5 species we have talked about?

Group comments.....

KF: who is responsible for making sure people have permits who want to buy these animals? The seller?

DD, DB, and group...yes, it is the seller’s responsibility to make sure the buyer has a permit

DD: the turtle rule sets the precedence of needing to see the buyer’s permit before a sale can be made

TT: I don’t see the need to enforce numbers of animals if they can keep them properly

DB: I see the difference for breeders...

CP: I think that is going too far...anyone with more than a couple of snakes will most likely be a breeder and seller...why clean that many cages otherwise?

KF: I think you should have to have a copy of the buyer’s permit

DD: so, are we satisfied with what we have come up with for large constrictors?

General agreement from group...also discussion about native species, those listed as special concern, those require a permit...once you cross over into exotic species, there is no regulation at all right now, unless it is a federally protected species (DB and others)

Discussion about crocodilians...no regulations in place right now...goal of stopping impulse buying...discussion about having tiers or classes of animals...class A, class B, etc...comments about enclosure requirements, minimum requirements...need for inspection of facilities (TT, CP)

JB: WRC's role in regulating exotic species? Did the legislature give WRC authority? How does the WRC suddenly have authority over non-natives?

DB: when these laws are passed, some agency will get assigned jurisdiction; either WRC or Dept. of Ag would get the jurisdiction; we have rules in place already (ex. Clawed frog rule); also D of Ag does not have enforcement capability, but the WRC does

DH: if the legislature would have passed the bill last year, WRC would have been granted jurisdiction at that time; someone would have authority

DB: right now, realistically, nobody has authority over exotics; bits and pieces of rules in place, with certain agencies in charge; but no overall authority or sweeping rules in place

JB: how is it that game birds are regulated and some are not native?

DB: the birds are just lumped as "game birds"

DD: historically, the WRC has been charged with protecting natives only and some in WRC may not be enthusiastic about what we are proposing

Discussion about liaison between the public and enforcement...partnerships with PARC and enforcement, etc.....

TT: requiring mandatory vet inspection of facility or endorsement? Vet sign off to help enforcement?

AW: you need a vet, but are they going to be able to go out and make site inspections?

DD: also, the number of vets who would have the expertise to do this is very small; they should be involved in the process however

CP: a checklist could be developed so the officer could just go down the list and check off requirements of the facility; we have a vested interest in this process ourselves because many of us want to keep these animals

Break: 2:50-3:00 pm

DD: one thing to add...did we decide about annual reporting requirements with these constrictors? (Yes, from group)

SC: to revisit the turtle rule, I made the changes we discussed last time, and they will be posted on the website; we are waiting on clarification of “wholesale” and “retail” which could have different implications; an update of the interpretation of the rule will be posted, too

AW: also, one more thing; Senator Basnight’s office has said that if we come up with proposals on this inherently dangerous animal bill, he will make the state person available for writing up our recommendations into a form to be introduced as a bill, maybe even the Senator would sponsor it?

CP: comments about being proactive...a “preemptive strike” may be the best way to protect our interests, so I’m in favor of being proactive

DD: Senator Basnight is the one who got the original turtle bill passed; he will be one of the key people involved

GB: one footnote on the LA situation...they had a law, but it was too vague...

Comments about how regulation, although not always wanted, can be a good thing....

SC: did we finish large lizards?

DD: we decided to table that until we deal with “inherently dangerous”...we said we wanted to separate large lizards from being lumped with the 5 inherently dangerous species; the main deal with the large lizards is welfare, responsible husbandry, etc.; so, we should move on to venomous snakes to be lumped with the inherently dangerous group; what does venomous include? Elapidae, Viperidae, Atractaspidae, Colubridae (genera: Boiga, Dispholidus, Rhabdophis, Psammophis, Conophis, and Thelotornis (“twig” snakes...), Hydrophiidae, Helodermatidae

AW: what about enforcement?

DD: we need to liaison with LE to help in this process; the expertise is not there at this level of detail with these species

CP: what do we mean by “licensed”?

DD: we are suggesting a license for these venomous snakes instead of a permit; also, the question of anti-venom will come up; all who are licensed should participate; an anti-venom bank housed centrally, all licensees will participate; without depleting the museum’s supply; museum has limited hours anyway;

EC: what about Duke or UNC hospitals? Aren’t bite victims taken there?

DH: no, Wake Med would be the facility, centrally located

DD: this is a costly proposition as well, and it will have to be on-going, limited shelf-life  
most doctors think

TT: anti-venom itself is not FDA approved anyway

KF: the problem not addressed with anti-venom, since it has no FDA approval, it has to go before an institutional board with representation; not an impossible process, but cumbersome

DH: it depends on the snake bite, for the quantity, which could determine which substance is used in treatment

Discussions on how anti-venom banks work that are established.....we might have to have another institution other than a hospital to be a place to have and hold and administer the anti-venom....

AS: question about the state's role in administering anti-venom....state won't do contracts with an institution or anti-venom bank....risk of liability?

Agreement and comments....state could be held liable if not careful....what is the rate of anti-venom treatments in NC per year? Far less bites in captivity than in wild, 1 out of 10 copperhead bites, for example

EC: is this a license per snake or per person or household? License per species?

DB: permits are usually to an individual at a particular address.

TT: the anti-venom bank idea is a good idea but one that is really hard to do, it's costly, etc.

DD: if we pass a license that you have to have, and someone gets bitten and dies anyway, the state will revisit this issue very quickly

TT: I don't think that showing you have an approved source of anti-venom from somewhere is bad; among keepers; in cooperation with other facilities, etc.; the keeper just has to show that they have access to approved source of anti-venom; any documentation could be sent in with the license application

CP: even with the venom bank in Florida, many keepers get together and store their own supplies anyway

DL: There needs to be some training with how to administer anti-venom, etc.

Group agreement that keepers should be able to foot the bill for anti-venom...if they have the money to keep these expensive snakes, they should be able to supply anti-venom.....

DD: what we are talking about is whether we should institutionalize anti-venom or just make it in the permit/license process

TT: I just don't think we could make that happen, enforce it, regulate it, do it in general; it would be a full-time job; maybe we could visit this topic down the road

AS: that makes sense; standardized form down the road? To show and account for access to anti-venom

PB: let's say all this passes, is there no grandfather clause for those who don't comply? Don't get the license? Don't show proof of having anti-venom access? These people will go underground?

TT: I believe some people will go underground....I would be willing to draft guidelines, simple, easy steps to reach compliance

PB: what about all the animals that will be unwanted after all this?

TT: I have networks in Florida, all over the country, all over the world...if it has fangs, I'll find it a home

Agreement from group for Tanith to draft the document with the simple guidelines for keepers of venomous snakes....to document access and sources of anti-venom

Discussion of what "native" species are "native" to NC and thus already regulated....sub-species counts too....if the genus and species is on the list, any sub-species is also protected (SC, DB)

DD: we will probably have to address natives in the future.....

DH: cottonmouth and copperhead...natives seen as inherently dangerous....

DD: those will be covered in this license....another thing to think about....a challenge...there will be people who apply for a venomous permit who Daron denies...so, is there a way for people to reapply and be in compliance? We'll have to think about this...

TT: I think we need specific criteria in which to judge whether applicants can get a permit....age limit....documented experience, etc.

DD: that's what we need to think about next time

CP: apprenticeship or mentorship experiences? Who actually did this? Nobody here. There were no laws in the past about any of this.

AW: the criteria need to be objective not subjective...very specific....

DB: comments about apprenticeships, etc. (falconry guild as an example); we might make this a requirement to mentor or apprentice under an expert before the applicant can get a permit (if we have a beginner who wants to get into the practice of keeping venomous snakes, etc.)...bringing people into the program and get them experience, start them at a certain level, let them demonstrate knowledge and expertise and then permit them

CP: we don't want to prevent someone from getting a permit just because they may be in a remote location or cut off from a keeper network

More discussion and comments from group about apprenticeships and mentorships and the permitting system...

DD: before the next meeting, we need to think about the framework for all of these questions

DH: require documentation and references from applicants?

Yes! From group.....

SC: for next time....what about the people who already are established keepers? Not new keepers?

Group.....those people would have to be grandfathered in....

GB: what about having a committee to review applications? NCPARC should take the lead and come up with a committee to work with Daron to go over applications and share some of the work load with checking references, etc.

Discussion about objectivity and simplicity with this process....

DH: I would ask how many times the person has been snake-bitten....a good indication of how responsible the person is

CP: in Florida, if you have been bitten X amount of times, they will prevent you from being a keeper anymore

DD: we need to hash out the specifics for the next meeting....something specific, something implementable, something we can help LE with, partnerships, etc....next meeting...June 28, Wednesday, 1 pm.

Adjournment: 4:05 pm