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State plans new restrictions on ownership of wild animals

By [Judy Benson](#) Day Staff Writer

More limits would be placed on the importation and possession of more types of wild animals under revisions to existing regulations proposed by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The DEP has scheduled three forums to hear from the public and interested groups about the proposed changes, the first on Tuesday in Old Lyme. DEP spokesman Dennis Schain said the agency was directed by the state Legislature last year to revamp existing regulations after it agreed to add three animals - orangutang, chimpanzees and gorillas - to the list of banned animals. The addition of those animals followed publicity about the chimpanzee kept in a Stamford home that attacked a friend of its owner, causing serious disfiguring injuries to the woman. The chimp had previously shown aggressive and dangerous behavior.

"Certainly the events focused some attention on the issue of the possession of exotic animals," Schain said.

When the three primates were added, the DEP had sought to have more types of animals it believes are potentially dangerous put on the list.

The new proposal clarifies who can legally import, possess or free particular types of wild animals that can be dangerous to humans, including bears, wildcats, wolves, coyotes, foxes, great apes and poisonous snakes. Only zoos, circuses, public aquariums, laboratories, research facilities and municipal parks would be able to import and keep these animals.

EXOTIC WILDLIFE FORUMS

DEP forums on proposed changes to law governing wildlife possession, importation and liberation:

• OLD LYME

When: March 16

Where: DEP Marine Headquarters, 333 Ferry Road

Time: 7-9 p.m.

• ROCKFALL

When: March 18

Where: Connecticut Forest & Park Association, 16 Meriden Road

Time: 10 a.m.-noon

• DERBY

When: March 24

Where: Kellogg Environmental Center, 500 Hawthorne Ave.

Time: 7-9 p.m.

Written comments should be sent by March 31 to Jenny Dickson, Department of Environmental Protection, 79 Elm St., Hartford CT 06106, or jenny.dickson@ct.gov

Draft of proposed changes can be found at:

www.ct.gov/dep/cwp/view.asp?a=2723&q=325726&depNav_GID=1655&depNav=

Examples of the types of exotic animals sometimes kept as pets that could be banned under the proposed changes are venomous snakes such as cobra and mamba, as well as large reptiles such as alligators and Komodo dragons, Schain said. Under the proposal, individuals would not be allowed to keep any wild animal that threatens human health and safety.

DEP Deputy Commissioner Susan Frechette said DEP wildlife staff routinely receive calls asking they remove an exotic animal purchased as a pet from a home. Last July, the DEP offered owners of exotic pets the chance to surrender them at an amnesty day, and 135 were turned in, she noted.

"In other cases, taxpayer resources must be committed to removing dangerous animals that pose a public safety threat, damage agricultural interests or injure native plants and animals," she said.

The changes would also require that those who want to import or possess a wild animal that is on a regional, national or international endangered or threatened species list and is not dangerous obtain a permit from the DEP.

Alicia Wright, spokeswoman for the Connecticut Humane Society, said the organization is pleased that the DEP is considering placing more limits on the exotic pet ownership. Many exotic pets, she said, require highly specialized care and habitat needs that most people are ill-equipped to provide, and they can exhibit difficult and sometimes dangerous behaviors.

The society advises people to thoroughly research these animals before acquiring them, and most who do realize that they have highly specialized needs and decide against owning them, she said.

After reviewing the input from the forums and written public comment, the DEP will revise the proposed changes and again take public comment. It will also submit the revised changes to the General Assembly's Regulations Review Committee for approval.

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