

*Alabama Department of*  
Conservation & Natural Resources  
**PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Conservationists Release Indigo Snakes to Re-establish Alabama Population of Threatened Species**

Alabama conservationists are one step closer to re-establishing a population of the Threatened Eastern indigo snake with the release of 18 juveniles into the wild today. The snakes were released on the Conecuh National Forest, which contains longleaf pine habitat suitable for the snake's survival and potential expansion.

The release is just one part of a multi-year project and the beginning of what Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries (WFF) biologists hope will be a new start for the snake's survival in the state. Historically, the Eastern indigo snake lived throughout Florida, the coastal plain of southern Georgia, extreme south Alabama and extreme southeast Mississippi. Today the indigo snake survives in peninsular Florida and southeast Georgia, and persists in the Florida panhandle in low numbers. In all likelihood, it has been extirpated from Alabama and Mississippi. In 1978 it was listed as "Threatened" by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Endangered Species Act.

Some may wonder why an increase in this snake's population is beneficial for the environment. According to Alabama Natural Heritage Program Zoologist Jim Godwin, a healthy population of Eastern indigo snakes in a longleaf pine forest setting is an indication of an ecologically functional forest. "The loss of this snake from Alabama and other areas is the loss of a significant part of the biodiversity of the forest. To return the Eastern indigo snake to the south Alabama landscape is to restore a piece of the natural history of the state," he said.

Several different state, federal and private organizations have contributed to the project that makes the release possible. Five years ago, nongame wildlife biologists with WFF began research on the Eastern indigo snake. After two years of field surveys, no evidence of indigo snakes was found in Alabama. In 2007, the project was expanded by WFF through a contract with Auburn University to start an Indigo snake reintroduction project. This was made possible by a grant through the State Wildlife Grants Program and private contributions from Project Orianna. The State Wildlife Grants Program was established by Congress as a funding source to identify and focus management on species in greatest need of conservation. This program is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

WFF Division Director Corky Pugh says this project puts emphasis on a part of the division the public might not know about. "Most people associate the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries with hunting and fishing related activities," he said. "However, our Division is responsible for all wildlife resources."

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Project Oriante is a wildlife conservation organization dedicated to the range-wide conservation of the Eastern indigo snake and its habitats. The Kaplan family founded the organization when the daughter (Oriante) developed a fondness for the Eastern indigo snake and wanted to help. Project Oriante uses a comprehensive approach to conserving the Eastern indigo snake including captive breeding, reintroduction, land protection, management and restoration, inventory, monitoring and research programs.

“We are fully dedicated to the restoration of eastern indigo snake populations in Alabama,” said Chris Jenkins, executive director of Project Oriante. “We envision a landscape in south Alabama where indigo snakes hunt the longleaf pine forests for rattlesnakes and rodents and people appreciate these resources that allow them to maintain their cultural connection to the land and their rural way of life.”

The 18 snakes released today were bred in captivity from wild-caught snakes from Georgia through the cooperation of Georgia Department of Natural Resources and Fort Stewart. The snakes were raised at Auburn University and the Atlanta Zoo during their early life stages.

Each captive-raised snake with this project has been implanted with a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT tag) for permanent identification as well as a radio transmitter to track them and assess their survivorship. Auburn University will be monitoring the snakes to track their movements and survival.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources promotes wise stewardship, management and enjoyment of Alabama’s natural resources through five divisions: Marine Police, Marine Resources, State Lands, State Parks, and Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. To learn more about ADCNR, visit [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com).

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**Alabama Natural Heritage Program Zoologist Jim Godwin and Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Non-game Biologist Mark Sasser release an Eastern indigo snake into the wild.**

**A partnership of state, federal and private organizations is working together to re-establish a population of Eastern indigo snakes in Alabama.**