

Here are more letters received. For easier viewing, our comments are written in Times New Roman and in block, while the letters are in plain Arial.

What we need to do here is to discuss the position of the Parks and Wildlife Departments as well as the role and political influence certain elected officials have in all of this.

First, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, following some kind of meeting and leaned on by State Representative Susan King, who we think has strong ties with the roundup, said, 'I look forward to continuing the conversation and helping set the best policies for our region and our state.' We'll be following these proceedings like a hawk to see exactly what these 'best policies' might be.

The state proposal to ban gassing as a way to capture rattlesnakes has been postponed. This is big news for Sweetwater, where dozens of people spoke out last week in opposition to the proposal. If it had passed, Sweetwater's biggest economic event of the year — The Rattlesnake Roundup — could have been in jeopardy.

According to State Representative Susan King's office, the Texas Parks and Wildlife department sent out an e-mail stating it has pulled the snake gassing item for consideration at this week's meetings. According to a phone message and e-mail, Texas Parks and Wildlife have elected to pull the snake gassing item for consideration at the Commission meeting Thursday. There are material changes that TPWD staff have proposed to what was originally proposed in the Texas Register. At a public hearing last week in Sweetwater, more than 200 citizens showed up to participate in a public hearing on the proposed rule. In an e-mail directed to Rep. King and her staff, "As such, it only seems fair to give all interested parties more time to consider and contemplate those changes."

"It is my understanding that an announcement will be made tomorrow by TPWD, along with letting the public now of the intention to hear a revised proposal when the Commission meets in March. For the people of District 71, this is a testament to public participation and citizens having a voice within the process of rule making. I look forward to continuing the conversation and helping set the best policies for our region and our state," stated Rep. King.

Source Sweetwater Reporter.



Susan King

Second, we are finding it increasingly obvious that everyone's afraid to speak out. Fears for personal safety probably not, although it shouldn't be ruled out, it's more likely to be political. If locals were to publicly state anything at all that's deemed to be untoward and they wanted then to say, start up a business, get involved with a youth group, give lectures in local schools, get a job or whatever they might want to do, they will find doors closing all around them.

Some of you may remember this letter we receive just over a year ago.

From: contact details withheld
To: h.pagan_pla@hotmail.co.uk
Sent: 09 December 2012 00:17:28
Subject: Rattlesnake Roundup.

Hello Henry,

Thank you, I did get another mailing from you today.

At <http://gosw.about.com/od/santafenewmexico/p/snake.htm> you can see that the "world's largest rattlesnake roundup" is sponsored by the Jaycees of Sweetwater Texas.

The official roundup website is at <http://www.rattlesnakeroundup.net/main/modules/page/> though at the moment it is "down for service."

The Sweetwater Chamber of Commerce FaceBook page is at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sweetwater-Chamber-of-Commerce/109497105740364> It would be wonderful for the Chamber to hear other opinions about the Roundup. The Roundup is sponsored by the local Jaycees.

The Sweetwater Jaycee Facebook page is at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Sweetwater-Jaycees/122452247811613>

Outside attention is needed. I know of nobody here other than myself with any sympathy for the snakes. Dick Cheney, the former vice president under George Bush, hunts on the ranch around here. These are very powerful people who take care of things their own way. If I personally get involved in this I will destroy the possibility of at least beginning the most modest efforts at environmental education and sensitization here. You have seen how these things develop in the US.

Best wishes.

And third, we need to take a look at what's happening within the various Parks and Wildlife Departments. Let's just go through the letters other bits of information we're finding.

From: contact detai@tpwd.texas.gov>
To: george.ashleycooper@aol.co.uk>
Sent: Sat, 22 Feb 2014 15:12
Subject: Rattlesnake roundups

Mr. Ashley-Cooper,

I received your email and appreciate your interest in Texas wildlife.

Contrary to what some may claim, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) does not sponsor and / or is not involved in rattlesnake roundups. One of the groups involved in one of these events has sent data to our department in the last few years to offer some degree of information regarding the level of collection that occurs at their event, but that data is of little use and the TPWD does not do anything with it. **There is no partnership or involvement between TPWD and any roundup.**

Thank you, again, for your interest in Texas wildlife.

Sincerely,

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

And, as a followup, I sent this news clip below concerning one of their staff members attending an event, comments made and a reply to this is given below that.

"The people who live around here don't like snakes," explained Roy Johnson, a game warden for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. This year's roundup, which draws snakes collected from across West Texas, was not nearly as productive as years past. The record was set in 1982, with 17,986 pounds collected.

But after a yearlong drought and the worst fire season on record, there were simply not as many snakes to gather, Johnson said.

Texas does not keep records of what impact roundups have on snake populations. And there is controversy over how the snakes are collected.

Johnson and others at the roundup said the most effective way to collect snakes is to gas them out of their burrows. The gas is usually the fumes of unleaded gasoline pumped through a sprayer.

"It's not the gas, it's just the smell of it," said Mike Glass, a senior member of the Jaycees. "Actually shooting gas down in there is a big no-no."

The problem is snakes are very sensitive to even a small exposure to gas as a liquid, and too much can kill them in their dens. The snakes that do come out often die soon after. **TPWD is considering a rule to ban gassing.**

Source Sweetwater Reporter.

From: contact deta@tpwd.texas.gov
To: cates.1980@aol.co.uk
Sent: Wed, 26 Feb 2014 13:59
Subject: RE: rattlesnake roundup.

Dear Mr. Piller,

There are a couple of things that one must first understand to fully grasp what's happening. First, the media coverage is quite biased in reporting on this issue and reporters in the towns of Sweetwater and Abilene, Texas, have been (unfortunately) presenting this issue with little fact checking and with a lot of "spin" such that one side of the issue is presented more favourably than the other. Granted, other reporters in other parts of the state (and world) have also presented "one sided" stories angled to the "other side" of the issue. In doing this, reporters have been grabbing quotes (that may be accurate statements) and using them in ways that seem to support "one side" of the issue or another. This is the case with the game warden's quotes. It is a true statement that many people in that part of our state do not like rattlesnakes. It is also a true statement that one of the "most effective" ways to gather up a bunch of snakes is to gas them out of their burrows. This warden made "true statements", but the reporter used them to imply "support" for the practice, which the game warden never offered. However, the use of the phrase "most effective" is up for debate. If by "most effective" one means "the fastest way to get a lot of snakes into a bag", then it's a true statement. If by "most effective" one means the best way to collect snakes that is selective, doesn't damage the environment, or kill other species, then gassing is absolutely not the "most effective". Gassing snakes is equivalent to fishing with dynamite. Using dynamite is a fast way to scoop up a lot of fish, but no one denies that the practice is non-selective and highly damaging to the ecosystem. Therefore, the practice is prohibited.

I believe without a doubt that the science demonstrates that gassing is a non-selective, environmentally damaging means of collection that harms other species and opens my state to federal species listing vulnerabilities. Based on the science and all of the conservation reasons I have laid out in many presentations across my state, I have recommended to my Commission that gassing be prohibited. I have been in the media a great deal expressing this. Yet even I would say that the warden's statements are accurate. However, the reporter used them to insinuate "support" for the practice, which the warden never offered. So the first thing that one must understand to accurately grasp what is happening here is this "media bias" and how reporters use quotes to serve a particular interest.

The second thing that one must understand is that our wardens must attend many events as part of their job and that their presence at an event does not imply agency support/sponsorship/involvement, etc. with the event. They are often at events as "police officers". They are not biologists. So, for a person to hear that our wardens are at an event and make the jump in logic to, therefore, assume our agency sponsors such an event or is even a partner in an event is an error in logic. Those two things are not tied together.

I completely understand Mr. Ashley-Cooper's negative reaction to gassing snakes and he is not at all alone in his dislike of this practice. There are many individuals who share his perspective. Science has demonstrated that the practice is deserving of negative reaction for the damage it does. This is why my agency has proposed the prohibition on the practice. There are many who also feel it is not "sporting". These individuals may not take issue with a person harvesting a snake, but they can see that the practice of gassing is not biologically sound.

I hope that I have been able to shed some light on the issue and what is happening in our state right now. Please let me know if you have other questions.

Finally, Mr. Piller, you appear interested in this issue. My agency will soon publish the revised proposal to prohibit gassing and we will open a web link to receive public comment to allow individuals to register their support for the prohibition or opposition to the prohibition. Would you like for me to inform you when that public comment period is open and send you the link so you and your colleagues can register your opinion? If so, please let me know and I'll add you to my list of people to contact. Don't worry, I won't use your email address for any other purpose.

Take care.

Sincerely,

Tx Parks and Wildlife Dept

In reading this explanation, I have to say I accept much of what is said, although I would have to add any roles as 'police officers' at events like these can hardly be more than a formality, a bit like the duty vet in an abattoir. Also the line, 'there are simply not as many snakes to gather,' nothing at all to do with the '17,986 pounds collected in 1982,' and the unknown quantities thereafter, I don't suppose.

It's what comes next from other Parks and Wildlife officials I find more disturbing, ie. these replies from Nevada's officials. In order to explain, Mr. Pagan was on a fishing trip in order to see the answers he would get. And he wasn't shall we say disappointed although perhaps on second thoughts he should've been.

From: mmccusker@ndow.org)
To: h.pagan_pla3@hotmail.co.uk)
Sent: 26 December 2012 21:20:07
Subject: Rattlesnake Permits

Dear Henry,

We have a Noncommercial Collection limit of 2 unprotected rattlesnakes of each species per year. This is for the "hobbyist" snake collector. There is no fee to do this type of collecting. There is also a Commercial Collection permit offered from our agency which comes with a price tag of \$250. This allows the holder of the permit to collect above the hobby limit. A person still cannot possess above the hobby limits with this permit, but it does allow for the sale of the snakes. We also have a Commercial Possession of Live Wildlife Permit which costs \$500. This would allow for someone to possess many snakes for commercial type purposes such as dog training etc. It all would depend on what you intended to do with the snakes after you captured them. All of these permits with instructions can be found on our website at ndow.org. Look under the "Licenses and Laws" tab and then click on "Licenses and Special Permits". Scroll down to view all of the different permits. I hope this has answered your question. If you have additional questions or need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you, Mike McCusker Game Warden Lieutenant

Nevada Department of Wildlife
1100 Valley Road
Reno, Nevada 89512 (775)688-1884

From: h.pagan_pla3@hotmail.co.uk
To: mmccusker@ndow.org
Sent: 02 January 2013 10:28:21
Subject: Rattlesnake Permits roundups

Hi Mike,

Sorry for not getting back sooner, I've been away for the break. I actually wanted them for supplying the roundup events; perhaps you could advise on the appropriate permits that might be required. I look forward to hearing from you.

yours sincerely.

Henry

From: mmccusker@ndow.org
To: h.pagan_pla3@hotmail.co.uk
Sent: 02 January 2013 19:40:39
Subject: Rattlesnake Permits roundups

Henry,

Assuming you will be collecting them yourself from the wild and then selling/bartering/donating them for the roundup? If that is the case, you will first need to acquire a Commercial Collection of Unprotected Wildlife Permit. The application and instructions can be found on our website, ndow.org as explained below in the earlier email. It comes with a permit fee of \$250. There are numerous "Special Conditions" that go along with this concerning who, what, when, where and how. You can contact Julie Meadows who handles these permits for us if you have specific questions. She will be the one handling the permit anyway. She can be contacted either by email at jmeadows@ndow.org or her phone (775) 688-1512.

Thank you,

Mike McCusker

Game Warden Lieutenant

Nevada Department of Wildlife

1100 Valley Road

Reno, Nevada 89512

(775)688-1884

From: JMEADOWS@ndow.org
To: h.pagan_pla3@hotmail.co.uk
Date: Thu, 3 Jan 2013 08:19:02 -0800
Subject: RE: permits.

Henry

To assure you are going to receive the correct form, I would need to know what do you plan on doing with the rattlesnakes you want to catch?

Julie Meadows, Program Officer I, Nevada Department of Wildlife License Office

4600 Kietzke Ln Ste D135
Reno Nevada 89502

Phone: (775) 688-1512

Fax: (775) 688-1509

Email: jmeadows@ndow.org

From: h.pagan_pla3@hotmail.co.uk
To: jmeadows@ndow.org
Sent: 04 January 2013 10:12:39
Subject: Rattlesnake Permits roundups

Hi Julie,

It would be mainly to supply the roundup events. I'm hoping to get over there some time in the next month. Here's hoping you can help.

Yours sincerely.

Henry

From: JMEADOWS@ndow.org
To: h.pagan_pla3@hotmail.co.uk
Sent: 04 January 2013 17:25:28
Subject: Rattlesnake Permits roundups

You can download the application needed on our website. Here is the link <http://www.ndow.org/law/licenses/>

You may want to look at the Commercial Collection of Unprotected Wildlife or Commercial Possession for your need. If both fall under what you plan on doing, you will need both applications. Just be aware, it may take up to 4 to 6 weeks for approval.

Julie Meadows, Program Officer I, Nevada Department of Wildlife License Office

4600 Kietzke Ln Ste D135

Reno Nevada 89502

Phone: (775) 688-1512

Fax: (775) 688-1509

Email: jmeadows@ndow.org

And so there we have it. For the price of \$500 you can pretty well catch as many snakes as you like, do with them what you will and no further questions asked. Just so long as you have the permit.

From: District71.King@house.state.tx.us
To: contact details withheld
Sent: Monday, 24 February 2014, 16:43
Subject: Thank You for Contacting The Office of State Representative Susan L. King

Dear Mr White,

Thank you for your email. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission decided in January to postpone consideration of the rule to ban the gassing of rattlesnakes. Representative King had officially written the Commission opposing the rule and was pleased to see that the rule was pulled down.

Texas Parks and Wildlife has indicated that they may revise the rule and bring the issue back up at their May 2014 Commission meeting but at this time the Commission has not revised or offered a new rule.

Please feel free to contact the Capitol office if you have any additional questions or need more information.

Thank you sir,

Bryan

Bryan W. Law, M.T.S. | Chief of Staff | Representative Susan L. King | House District 71

bryan.law@house.state.tx.us | 512-463-0718

And now for some further letters:

From: jpg@outdoorsites.net
To: george.ashleycooper@aol.co.uk
Sent: Sat, 22 Feb 2014 16:15
Subject: RE: 'Rattlesnake Roundup.'

No problem George. Are you a vegetarian? We have a huge population of rattlesnakes in Texas. The snakes that are harvested and eaten are not putting a dent in the population. Western Diamondback Rattlesnakes are not endangered. What's the difference between eating filet mignon and rattlesnake. If you are a vegetarian, you obviously have a problem, but that is still no reason to try and make me a vegetarian.

Why don't you focus on something like fox hunting where they don't even eat the animal? At least we like to eat what we kill.

JP

We're certainly not so sure that Western Diamondbacks are not as under serious threat as you seem to be; and yes, I am a veggie. That aside, it's the absolute hatred and humiliation they're on the receiving end of; snake venom has nothing on the venom they have levied against them. That fox-hunting argument that so often comes up. Not everyone in England hunts foxes, any more than all Americans kill snakes. Far fewer than 1% of the total population in the UK. goes on a hunt in fact.

From: desperado-1969@hotmail.com
To: george.ashleycooper@aol.co.uk
Sent: Sat, 22 Feb 2014 16:30
Subject: Rattlesnake Roundup

hey george.....you have nothing more in your 'miserable' life to do than worry about whats going on in Texas???? Why dont you come on out to the roundup and get down on your hands and knees and show the rattlesnakes some compassion i'm sure they will appreciate the time you spend with them.....you need to pull your head from 'Down Under' your ass! Have a Blessed day

True to our word, we print all letters.

From: dcannady@wtoc.com
To: trajan11@hotmail.co.uk
Subject: Re: Rattlesnakes.
Date: Mon, 24 Feb 2014 13:32:58 +0000

If this is in reference to an event in Claxton, Georgia, it is no longer a 'roundup'.

A few years ago, they stopped any hunting and collecting of rattlesnakes. The snakes that are displayed at the Wildlife Festival are brought by government wildlife agencies or preservation groups. Instructor speak to the crowds about different species and their habitats and reasons NOT to kill all snakes on sight.

Those snakes also leave the festival ALIVE and they go to the next educational event. In addition, groups bring various birds of prey for similar presentations.

This event has evolved from how it started 40 plus years ago - away to collect the venom to make anti-dote for snake bites.

Your concerns are valid, and this event recognized them a few years ago.

If there are still 'roundups' in Georgia, they are geographically out of our region and we have no affiliation with them.

Best regards,
Dal Cannady
WTOC-TV

Have been onto the webpages and it seems they are running a non-kill, educational event. We have no argument with these and have remove details. It's all the question of sorting out the wheat from the chaff and determining who up front and who isn't (see the next letter).

From: dir@alamogordo.com
To: trajan11@hotmail.co.uk
Subject: RE: Rattlesnakes.
Date: Mon, 24 Feb 2014 09:57:39 -0700

Sir,

The Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce is not and never has been involved with this event. The City of Alamogordo also does not have any connection either to this event.

Please read links below: In order to do this, highlight, copy and paste them onto wordpad, and then you can view them.

<http://www.apnm.org/apnm/RattlesnakeRoundup.pdf>

<http://www.rattlesnakerecipe.us/roundup.htm>

Late April Alamogordo Rattlesnake Roundup
Alamogordo, New Mexico
New Mexico Department of Fish and Game
P.O. Box 25112
Santa Fe, NM 87504 Strictly for profit by Promoter Tom Moore using rented Otero Co.
Fairground space.
Otero County Fairgrounds
401 Fairgrounds Rd.
Alamogordo, NM 88310

Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 2828
Alamogordo, NM 88311-2828

From: nuwuviculturalcenter@gmail.com
To: h.pagan.pla3@aol.co.uk
Sent: Mon, 24 Feb 2014 16:49
Subject: venom

Dear Sir,

I received your email regarding the gathering of rattlesnakes in Texas. I didn't have time to watch much but saw that they are extracting the venom for use as serum. As far as wholesale slaughter of the animals, our tribe is vehemently opposed to that for a number of reasons, including upsetting the balance of nature and that they play important roles in our mythology.

Thank you for your concern.

Dr. Cravath

Jay Cravath, PhD, Cultural Director, Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, 760.858.1115

Hi Jay,

I suggest you watch further!!! I'm certainly glad your tribe opposes this wholesale slaughter by the way.

Yours sincerely.

Concluding: We print any letters here from all sides of both arguments. So long as it's relevant to subject matters, and provided it's not obscene, we will print it. If you disagree with anything that's said, please write in. This is a public arena so please feel free to have your say.