

# DON'T LET IT LOOSE, IDAHO



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## **DON'T LET IT LOOSE, IDAHO**

Abandoned pets can become an invasive species problem when overwhelmed owners let them loose into nearby waters or woods. Prospective pet owners should make sure they will be able to accommodate all life stages of a pet before buying or adopting it. Releasing plants and animals into the wild may be illegal and can have serious repercussions for natural environments.

## **LETTING IT LOOSE IS NEVER A GOOD OPTION**

Some people believe that when their exotic pets get too difficult to manage, the “humane” thing to do is to release them so they can fend for themselves. The truth is, releasing pets leads to several problems, including:

**CRUELTY** – Most released pets will die; some quickly, possibly after getting hit by a car or being killed by predators, and some slowly die of starvation.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD NUISANCES** -

Abandoned pets often seek shelter and food among humans, which can lead to nuisance problems that end badly for the animal.

**ECOSYSTEM DAMAGE** – A few released exotic pets are successful in the wild, and this can lead to ecological or agricultural disasters. Once established, they can take over their new habitat, reducing native populations and changing the structure of the ecosystem.



## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Invasive species cost the United States over \$135 billion dollars per year. They harm native fish, wildlife and invertebrate populations, reducing biodiversity. They also harm local economies by discouraging recreation by anglers and tourists, decrease property values, and interfere with navigation and water control structures. Some of the most notorious invasive species in the United States were originally sold as pets or plants for water gardens and aquariums.

## EXAMPLES OF EXOTIC PETS

The **red-eared slider**, a type of turtle, is quite adept at colonizing lakes or ponds, and often thrives at the expense of native species.

**Monk parakeets** have successfully colonized some areas to the detriment of native species, agriculture and the utility companies.

**Apple snails** are considered a huge risk in Idaho due to their voracious appetites and amazing reproductive rates.



Monk Parakeet



Apple Snail



Red-Eared Slider



# NEVER LET YOUR PETS LOOSE!

Familiarize yourself with the Idaho Invasive Species Law and Rules (see [www.invasivespecies.idaho.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.idaho.gov)). Do not plant, keep, or transport any species that is prohibited in Idaho. Instead of releasing your plants and animals into the wild or dumping aquariums or water garden debris into rivers, streams, lakes or storm sewers, remember to C.R.A.D.L.E.

## C.R.A.D.L.E.

**CONTACT** the place where you purchased the animal to see if they will take it back.

**RESEARCH** reputable rescue groups for the species and seek their help.

**APPROACH** local science centers, zoos or aquariums to see if they can use the animal for educational purposes.

**DRY** and freeze unwanted aquatic plant material and add it to non-composted trash.

**LEARN** about exotic pets and understand the responsibilities you will be undertaking before you consider buying or adopting one.

**EUTHANIZE** the animal in a humane manner; if all else fails it's far kinder than letting it starve to death in the wild or destroy the homes of native animals and plants.

Pets that become too much for an owner to care for can become a source of invasive species outbreaks across the United States when they are let loose into nearby water or woods.

To prevent this from happening, prospective pet owners should consider the entire lifecycle of a pet before buying or adopting it. And if they still end up with a bully in their aquarium or a 10-foot python with a mammoth appetite, they should be aware that letting plants and animals loose into the wild is not an appropriate solution.

### Can aquatic pets or specimens be a problem even if they are native to the area?

Even if your aquatic pet is known to be native to the local environment, it should still never be released as it may introduce diseases or invasive parasites into the local ecosystem. Also, it is inhumane to release an organism into an environment it is not accustomed to.

### What if I can't find the animal another home?

Euthanizing a pet is never an easy choice. However, if you cannot find anyone to take your pet, you may have to consider humane euthanasia by a qualified veterinarian. You should not release a pet into the wild under any circumstances!



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