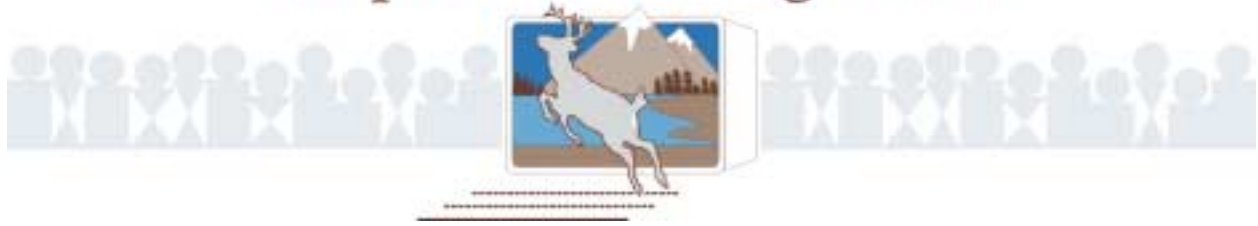


# Responsive Management



## **Attitudes Toward the Use and Possession of Live Wildlife in Arizona:**

### **Focus Group Findings**

**Conducted for the Arizona Game and Fish Department**

**June 2002**

**Conducted by Responsive Management**

(540) 432-1888 • 130 Franklin Street Harrisonburg, VA 22801 • FAX (540) 432-1892  
[www.responsivemanagement.com](http://www.responsivemanagement.com)

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## **Focus Group Findings**

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### **Responsive Management National Office**

Mark Damian Duda, Executive Director  
Peter E. De Michele, Ph.D., Director of Research  
Steven J. Bissell, Ph.D., Qualitative Research Director  
Ping Wang, Ph.D., Quantitative Research Associate  
James B. Herrick, Ph.D., Research Associate  
Carol Zurawski, Research Associate  
William Testerman, Director of Survey Center  
Martin Jones, Report Writer  
Alison Lanier, Business Manager

130 Franklin Street  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801  
Phone: 540/432-1888 Fax: 540/432-1892  
Email: [mdduda@rica.net](mailto:mdduda@rica.net)  
[www.responsivemanagement.com](http://www.responsivemanagement.com)

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## **Introduction & Methodology**

In 1998 the Arizona Game and Fish Commission approved a Five-Year Rules Review report that included significant changes to a number of the Article 4 Live Wildlife rules. In 2001, the Commission approved a timeline submitted by the Arizona Game and Fish Department to allow for public input and additional Department study of the proposed Article 4 rule changes. Among the rules for which it was determined that additional public input was needed was Rule 406, which stipulates which wildlife species can be possessed in Arizona and describes the regulations associated with such possession.

This report summarizes the findings of focus groups conducted by Responsive Management on behalf of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The focus groups were conducted to identify the attitudes and opinions of two customer segment groups toward Rule 406 regulations and potential changes to Rule 406.

Responsive Management conducted two focus groups: one with a commercial customer segment and one with a personal customer segment. The commercial segment group consisted primarily of pet store owners and managers, while the personal customer segment group consisted of wildlife rehabilitators and wildlife club members. The size of the commercial segment group was six people, while the size of the personal segment group was 12 people. Focus group participants were recruited by telephone calls from the Responsive Management National Office. The Arizona Game and Fish Department provided lists of eligible participants for this study.

The following general questions were used for evaluation purposes:

### *Evaluation Questions – Commercial Segment Group*

- In what capacity does your business utilize live wildlife?
- In what species does your business deal?
- Which species do you feel are currently in the greatest demand?
- Would you say your greatest needs are for established “bread and butter” species, or is there a need for new or exotic species?

- What do you see as the industry trends over the next two years, in terms of demand for certain species?
- What do you consider to be commercial activities related to live wildlife? Non-commercial?
- Are you aware of current regulations that restrict live wildlife possession and use in Arizona? Do you know which species are currently restricted and require special licensing?
- In general, how do these restrictions regarding live wildlife affect your business?
- What are the specific problems you have had with these restrictions regarding live wildlife?
- What about benefits you've derived from these restrictions regarding live wildlife?
- To the best of your knowledge, which agencies regulate wildlife possession in Arizona?
- What are your feelings about existing regulations as they impact commercial use of live wildlife? What about personal use of live wildlife?
- What is your opinion on why these restrictions regarding live wildlife exist?
- Do you feel that these restrictions are effective in accomplishing their goals? Why or why not?
- How difficult is it to obtain a special license for restricted species?
- Do you think the requirements/criteria of the license are fair and reasonable?
- What about the application process?
- What about the ability to become involved with new species?
- Do you feel the needs of commercial wildlife users are met through the current special licensing system? Why or why not?
- Do you think existing regulations are too strict or too lenient regarding live wildlife?
- In terms of regulation, do you think a conservative approach or a liberal approach is better?
- What are some alternative approaches to regulation that you would like to see?
- What do you see as the positive effects of greater restriction?
- What do you see as the negative effects of greater restriction?
- What do you think should determine which species are/are not restricted?

- Would you support additional restriction if you knew a species posed a threat to humans because of disease? Physical threat? Property damage? Nuisance?
- Are there species that are currently restricted that you think should not be?
- Are there species that are not currently restricted that you think should be?
- If the Arizona Game and Fish Department determined that additional restrictions were necessary, how would you like to see these restrictions implemented? What provisions would make these restrictions satisfactory to you?

*Evaluation Questions – Personal Segment Group*

- In what capacity does your club/organization utilize live wildlife?
- With what species are you involved?
- Which species do you feel are currently in the greatest demand?
- Would you say the greatest industry needs are for established “bread and butter” species, or is there a desire for new or exotic species?
- What do you see as the industry trends over the next two years, in terms of demand for certain species?
- What do you consider to be commercial activities related to live wildlife? Non-commercial?
- Are you aware of current regulations that restrict live wildlife possession and use in Arizona? Do you know which species are currently restricted and require special licensing?
- In general, how do these restrictions regarding live wildlife affect your club/organization?
- What are the specific problems you have had with these restrictions regarding live wildlife?
- What about benefits you’ve derived from these restrictions regarding live wildlife?
- To the best of your knowledge, which agencies regulate wildlife possession in Arizona?
- What are your feelings about existing regulations as they impact commercial use of live wildlife? What about personal use of live wildlife?
- What is your opinion on why these restrictions regarding live wildlife exist?

- Do you feel that these restrictions are effective in accomplishing their goals? Why or why not?
- How difficult is it to obtain a special license for restricted species?
- Do you think the requirements/criteria of the license are fair and reasonable?
- What about the application process?
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- Are there species that are currently restricted that you think should not be?
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- If the Arizona Game and Fish Department determined that additional restrictions were necessary, how would you like to see these restrictions implemented? What provisions would make these restrictions satisfactory to you?

Focus groups are an important method to begin studies such as this one because they allow for extensive probing, follow-up questions, group discussion, and observation of emotional reaction to various topics – aspects that cannot be measured in a traditional telephone or mail survey. Focus group research is considered “qualitative” research. Qualitative research sacrifices reliability for increased validity. This means that although focus group findings cannot be replicated statistically as can sample surveys (high reliability), they often give researchers a more valid understanding of issues at the heart of a study (high validity). Focus groups produce

results with extremely high content validity, or the total range of opinions (Babbie 1989), but are not random sample surveys.

The analysis of these focus groups and interviews was an iterative process. The moderator took notes and observations at the time of the focus group. Next, the audiotapes were listened to and detailed notes were taken, including quotes that would be used for the final report. After both of the videotapes and audiotapes were reviewed, they were analyzed for content and the focus group report was written. The focus groups were analyzed to identify major themes and were then combined into a single report, taking care to differentiate attitudes and opinions where appropriate. Quotations are always written verbatim unless otherwise noted, and are written in *italics* to differentiate them from the text.

## Commercial Customer Segment

### *Awareness of Rule 406*

Overall, the commercial segment group displayed very little awareness of Rule 406. Most participants expressed no knowledge of Rule 406 or limited knowledge of the regulation.

*“I read some of it... we get some updates and some people come in to talk to us, but not a lot.”*

*“I don’t know about [Rule 406] and I haven’t gotten anything on it.”*

### *Industry Trends Regarding Live Wildlife*

When asked about the major industry trends, participants cited a large increase in demand for small aquarium animals, specifically reptiles and amphibians. Species of turtles and tortoises, snakes and other reptiles were mentioned as animals for which demand has grown. Specifically, time and convenience were listed as the major factors responsible for this trend. These species of animals are viewed by customers as requiring less maintenance than traditional pets, such as cats and dogs. Illegal fish such as sharks and piranha were also mentioned as high demand species, although the reasoning for having such animals was simply novelty. Furthermore, animals that require more care and maintenance such as rabbits, guinea pigs, and ferrets were mentioned as being in less demand.

*“They want something they can put out there, leave for a weekend, and not be worried.”*

*“They’re very easy. You can leave them for five days or so, they’re very easy to take care of.”*

*“Let’s face it; it’s time. People are very busy in their lives. They still want the advantage of having a pet – teaching their children the responsibility of having a pet and I think that’s why we’re seeing our reptiles really increase... I think time is the big issue here, the kids are doing soccer, the after school activities and all that.”*

*“I get lots of requests for sharks... all different types of small-type sharks.”*

*“[Sharks] fill a void that hobbyists are looking for... Some of these customers have an exorbitant amount [of money], they want to have something nice in their house and they want to do something like that.”*

*“My ferret sales have dropped, almost to nothing. A ferret is a high maintenance animal...a rabbit, guinea pig, dog, cat are very high maintenance.”*

Another trend reported was that of Arizona residents releasing non-native animals into the wild. This was cited as a major issue in Arizona and participants stated that these acts occurred frequently. Participants stated that owners of non-native pets release the animals into the wild because they have no alternative means to dispose of the animals when they become an inconvenience. Motivations for releasing non-native animals into the wild ranged from the animals becoming problematic due to their size or care requirements or the fear of being caught with illegal animals by the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

*“I’m sure that anyone who deals in reptiles knows that people buy these cute little Burmese pythons that are eighteen inches and in a couple years they’ve gotten twelve to fourteen feet. And I get that phone call all the time, ‘You either take him, or I’ll toss him out in the desert.’”*

*“They get eighteen feet - they don’t realize this little baby is going to get huge.”*

*“The reason why they’re releasing them is that these animals are most likely being kept illegally. So what’s happened is Game and Fish has somehow found out – well now they’ve got to do something with the animal, they don’t want to get caught with it, so they release it into the wild.”*

### *Knowledge of Rule 406 Regulations*

Overall, the group members were mostly in agreement that suppliers of retail stores and retailers of live wildlife are aware of which animals are restricted by Rule 406 and which are allowed for sale in Arizona. Furthermore, they felt that it is the retailers’ responsibility to know which species are legal for sale, although they cited a lack of Arizona Game and Fish Department involvement in this process.

*“I didn’t think about it; I just kind of knew what was legal in Arizona and what wasn’t and I never even gave it a thought.”*

*“I deal with a fish company out of California and there has been a couple of requests from customers for certain fish and I call them up and say, ‘Can I get this?’ and they told me right off, ‘No we can’t ship to Arizona.’”*

*“They’re pretty educated about what’s legal... There’s one wholesaler in Phoenix, he knows what’s legal and if we have a request we’ll call XXX... and now I know one more animal.”*

*“As a store owner, nobody ever told me what I could and couldn’t bring in... So I go looking for that information.”*

*“There just is not a lot of information for the store owners to know what is appropriate and what is not. It’s not presented to anybody – it’s not presented unless you go asking about it.”*

Conversely, the participants stated that most consumers are generally unaware of which species are listed in Rule 406 as illegal to possess in Arizona. As a result, people are bringing restricted animals into the state without the knowledge that the animals are illegal. It was also noted, however, that some people knowingly bring non-native species into the state with the intentions of selling the animals.

*“Most hobbyists are unaware that you can’t have sharks in Arizona. I haven’t found one hobbyist yet who knew that that was illegal... Why would sharks be illegal in the desert?”*

*“You also seeing a lot of people coming in with American alligators and crocodilians... that have brought them over from another state and are shocked that they are not legal.”*

The group members also mentioned that there is little awareness among retailers and consumers alike regarding the penalties associated with the possession or sale of restricted wildlife.

*“No one knows what the penalty is? Is there a penalty?”*

*“I couldn’t tell you what the penalty is if I got caught in my store with a shark in it. I know that the law here says you’re not supposed to have them but there’s nothing really clear as to what happens when they do get caught.”*

*“No retailer knows what they’ll be fined... I didn’t see anything in here... that would actually explain what happens to a retailer or a consumer if they are caught with an animal that is inappropriate.”*

### *The Importance of Rule 406 Regulations*

There was some ambivalence among the group members regarding the importance of Rule 406 regulations. Some participants were aware of the value of Rule 406 in protecting Arizona from the impacts of non-native wildlife. Other participants, however, did not establish a link between the release of non-native animals into the wild and the potential impacts on Arizona's native wildlife and habitat. In large part, this disconnection was due to the belief that non-native species would not survive long enough in Arizona's climate to have a serious impact on human populations or the Arizona's native wildlife. Still others did not believe that there are enough people releasing non-native animals into the wild to cause a significant problem or stated they lacked the information to comment on the importance of the regulations.

*"Their concern is, and it's a just concern, sharks have been known to swim up into fresh water. They have been found as far north in the Mississippi River as the Ohio River and some of them are quite ferocious."*

*"The [sharks] can be adapted to fresh water, so I'm sure the concern from one of the officers, many years back before I opened my store, was that somebody is going to release one into a canal and some little kid is going to get eaten up. And it's like, yeah, you've got a point there; I didn't really think about that too much."*

*"There is not an animal on this earth that doesn't occur here naturally that releasing it into the wild is not going to impact the environment... It's a huge problem."*

*"The animals aren't going to survive unless they're raised here."*

*"Ferrets, for example... they come in spayed, neutered, descended. They are not going to go out into the wild and start reproducing. There's no threat. They are not from the desert. If they were turned out, their survival might be, what, five days."*

*"I don't think it's a big issue, turning the animals loose, I really don't"*

*"I don't have enough knowledge [about what is legal and what is not] to tell you if I think they are good or bad."*

Despite the existence of what seems to be a lack of connection between the release of non-native wildlife and the impacts on native species, group members acknowledged that some non-native species had clearly established themselves in Arizona's wild landscape.

*“I never realized there was a problem [with crawfish] until I went fishing a couple of weekends ago for the first time in years and I caught crawfish!”*

### *Compliance with Rule 406 Regulations*

Although the group members expressed the belief that most retailers are aware of which species are restricted in Arizona, some felt that it is quite easy to acquire illegal animals through certain retailers and that some retailers will bring illegal animals into the state, as long as there is a profit to be made. The general feeling, however, was that the retail shops were typically compliant with Rule 406 regulations.

*“Your regulations are good but they need to be directed at the public not the shops. The shops are doing what they’re supposed to.”*

*“There still are some animals, saltwater wise, that are being sold. I’m sure there are freshwater ones, too, that are being sold around town to those hobbyists who want to seek those out or find a retailer that will bring them in.”*

*“We’ve received [sharks] as well. What happened is the airport gave us the wrong box... one of the boxes was not ours...it was to another retailer who apparently regularly brings them in.”*

*“We have other competitors that say, ‘What are they talking about? Sharks are legal; this is the desert.’”*

In addition to retailers, consumers were also blamed for propagating the possession of illegal live wildlife in Arizona. It was stated these people fall into two major categories: those that know the animals are illegal yet still desire to possess them or sell them for financial gain and those that import the animals without the knowledge that they are restricted in Arizona. It was stated that the former group desired restricted animals due to the novelty of having something that is not legal or that they purposefully bring illegal animals into Arizona to trade to retailers or for outright sale. It was said that the latter group simply brought restricted animals into Arizona when moving to Arizona from another state or vacationing outside the state.

*“We have a lot of customers, we have steady customers that go and get things [from Mexico] for themselves. They don’t just get them to sell to people – they go get them for their own takes. We have had other people come in with different things saying, ‘Oh, can we sell this to you?’ They go to Mexico to sell what they get.”*

*“The majority of the people that I have had to deal with, probably, I’d say close to 90% - 95% is lack of knowledge, but we have had, when we started our business, several that tried to bring animals in [for sale] that apparently do this to other stores.”*

*“The hobby I happen to be in business in is very expensive, so they’re looking for ways to get store credit or something that supplements the foods and all the extra expenses associated with maintaining their aquarium. If they can supplement that by bringing something and trading it in, they will do that.”*

*“I think that’s probably the major reason for it, not so much lack of knowledge – it’s a money issue. They’re just trying to make some money... The people I’ve dealt with have not been lacking knowledge.”*

*“The bottom line of why these people do it is they want something they can’t have. If it’s illegal, they want it.”*

*“They are extreme hobbyists. They want something nobody else has, that they can’t get easily.”*

*“One of the big concerns how a lot of this stuff comes into the state is from the new people moving in – it’s legal in Colorado so why can’t I have it in Arizona.”*

### **Effectiveness of Rule 406 Regulations**

Group members overwhelmingly felt that Rule 406 was ineffective in accomplishing its goals of preventing the trade and possession of restricted wildlife in Arizona. A lack of enforcement efforts was cited as the primary reason that Rule 406 was not effective. It was stated that people who possess illegal wildlife do so without fear of being caught because of the ease with which enforcement efforts can be evaded. Group members also felt that animals can be easily brought into Arizona from Mexico due to a lack of enforcement presence at the Arizona-Mexico border. Furthermore, it was stated that when consumers want an animal that is restricted and cannot be purchased by conventional means, they would simply find it elsewhere.

*“That becomes quite a problem... because it’s so easy to come back across the border. For years it has been known by the hobbyist that you can bring back your own personal use items: snails, urchins, rays, shrimp, which is totally bogus – it’s illegal to bring any wildlife into Arizona from Mexico. Mexico doesn’t do a good job of making that known.”*

*“I was in Mexico about two weeks ago. I drove in, in my snake mobile – I’ve got a truck that’s painted as a snake and they asked if I had any wildlife. I said, ‘No,’ and they said,*

*‘Alright.’ If you’re not going to check a truck painted like a snake, who are you going to check? I had six coolers in the back – if that doesn’t flag something, what does?’*

*“They just go to the next state and get it and bring it back.”*

*“People can’t get it at the shops so they’re going to get it somewhere else. They’re going to Nevada, they’re going through the Internet.”*

*“It’s hard to catch them – it’s inside your home, it’s kind of hard to catch them.”*

*“I have people come into my store all the time that tell me that they have cobras, that they have Gabon vipers, that they have all these animals. Basically, they have no fear, they know the laws, they know they’re illegal and as soon as Game and Fish finds out that they have them, they release them.”*

One group member also noted that it is easy to acquire Arizona Game and Fish Department permission to import illegal animals into Arizona if the animals are to be transported out of state. It was stated that this authorization could be obtained without proof of purpose or identification and no follow-up was conducted to ensure that the animals left the state.

*“I called law enforcement, a guy with Fish and Game, and said, ‘I have this reptile show in Colorado... I need to be able to transport these animals from Florida to Phoenix, including crocodilians, cobras, elapids,’ and he said, ‘No problem, we’ll get you a letter.’ The two largest wholesalers in the nation will not ship without a letter – but that letter is very easy to get hold of... If I wanted to bring in these animals into the state it’s not a problem.”*

Overall, group members were divided when asked about the effects that Rule 406 regulations have on their businesses. Some participants felt that Rule 406 impacts them negatively because it limits the species that they can sell and they are concerned about further restrictions. Other participants felt they turn what could be a negative economic impact into a positive experience.

*“Today I was selling a California king snake... Someone came in with Arizona king snakes. They came in with these animals that are obviously native and said, ‘I’ll sell you these for half.’”*

*“Sure. Go as far as Texas and ban all animals that weren’t indigenous to the state – that’s put every pet store out of business.”*

*“I turn it into a positive thing. If someone comes in and they’ve captured something... If you’re going to keep it, ok, you’ve got to house it; I’ll sell you all that you need.”*

*“There are a few customers that have gone to other stores and got their animals they wanted. Most of them have been very impressed that we are trying to do the right thing and educating them... It hasn’t harmed our business at all, if anything, we’ve gotten more respect. The customer that I want is the one who wants to do the right thing. I’m not looking to move illegal animals – there’s not going to be that much money in trying to set up shark tanks around Arizona.”*

### ***Criteria for Establishing Rule 406***

When probed about the criteria used for establishing restricted species, it was felt by some that Rule 406 lacked a logical process for determining which species are restricted and which are not. Some group members stated that specific species that are currently listed by Rule 406 as restricted should not be on the list because they could simply not cause harm to Arizona’s wildlife or inhabitants. Furthermore, it was stated that the regulations needed to be constructed in such a way that each species was examined individually to determine if it met the criteria for restriction, rather than including an entire group of similar animals when some may not pose a threat.

*“Some of these regulations are good and understandable and others are not. Why can’t we have a two-toed sloth? There is no reason why we can’t have a two-toed sloth. What do they do?”*

*“Certain [sharks] should not be allowed, I do agree with that... As long as it’s something that’s not going to be put back into the wild, I don’t see as being that big of a problem but there are some animals that certainly should not be [legal] for just physical size alone... but there are certainly some [sharks] that don’t get large enough to do any harm; [Game and Fish] would just have to somehow distinguish those particular species.”*

### ***Recommended Solutions to Rule 406 Issues***

The need for information was cited as a major factor in increasing the efficacy of Rule 406. The group members felt that consumers lack a good source of information regarding which species were restricted in Arizona and lack information on the needs of particular species. The

participants did not feel that information was made readily available to them and that contact between retailers and Game and Fish Department personnel was deficient. The group members felt that by providing information to the public on which species are restricted, the Arizona Game and Fish Department could reduce the number of restricted animals brought into the state. Furthermore, by providing information regarding requirements and proper care of non-native species, both before and during ownership of the animal, the number of animals that are released into the wild would diminish.

*“Every pet shop should have a brief pamphlet or something from the Game and Fish Department. That would help a lot.”*

*“It takes a lot of time, you can call people... it takes a lot of research.”*

*“Retailers kind of do what they want to – they sell animals to people that will get too big for small tanks... We have to make those sales, but sometimes you have to do the couth thing and you have to make sure that the animal is going to a proper home and that the customer understands that this thing is going to get to be two feet long.”*

*“I’ve never seen a wildlife person... every couple months we get a little newsletter.”*

Better tracking of the importation of non-native wildlife through a more comprehensive licensing system was mentioned as a way for the Arizona Game and Fish Department to better control the possession of restricted species. It was stated that this type of system would allow for responsible people to have the animals that they want, but would also allow the Department to more easily track the number and type of restricted species in the state and determine who is responsible for releasing non-native animals into the wild.

*“If you were to, say, put out a permit, along with maybe an educational program to teach people how to take care of the animals correctly and handle them correctly, possibly you wouldn’t have the problem or at least greatly decrease the problem with people releasing [animals] into the wild.”*

*“That’s where a nice educational program would come in. In order to get the permit, they would have to take a serious class involving animal handling of a certain species and care.”*

*“There is no permit or anything that’s allowed to be able to have an animal that is listed here as being inappropriate for Arizona and I think that eventually if Game and Fish*

*were to come up with something like some of the other states do... you pay a fee very similar to having a tag on your car for a year and if you lose an animal you take it back to them and you get off the list. If they ever find a piranha in a lake they're looking at everybody that's got them and checking to see if they've still got their animals."*

*"There has got to be a way of people having certain things that want to be responsible owners – education and a permit. I think people who are really serious about whatever they want are going to do it. They are going to go through the education class; they are going to get the permit, they are going to take care of the animals."*

*"It would make more sense to make them legal and buy them through a store so there is some tracking involved, so they know where the animals come from... They bought it through a pet store and you have a paper trail – ok it was brought in from the importer to the pet store to the consumer and Fish and Game is involved. If you buy a gun, you go ahead and fill a form out. They want this animal they are going to get it one way or another... If they brought it in legally to a pet store and had a permit for it and in turn a copy was sent to Fish and Game so that they could track these animals, would that be a solution?"*

It was also stated that the Arizona Game and Fish Department should have a means of disposal of non-native animals that are no longer wanted by pet owners. They felt that this would prevent the release of non-native animals into the wild.

*"If the Game and Fish could have some kind of a setup where people could bring this stuff to them and then they could export it... That's what they need, a center where people can take these animals and not get in trouble... If there was a place people could take it, they would not be turning them loose."*

Increased enforcement efforts were also cited as an important part of increasing compliance with Rule 406. Furthermore, it was stated that there is a need for increased education efforts among enforcement officers. One participant felt that even the enforcement officers were not well informed regarding Rule 406 regulations.

*"Half the Fish and Game wouldn't know a cobra from a garter snake. The enforcement is lacking education also. I had ring-tailed lemurs in my store and I had enforcement come into my store and say, 'Those aren't legal, are they?' You tell me."*

### *AZGFD and the Commercial Segment Working Together*

Overall, participants seemed open to the idea of working with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to increase the effectiveness of Rule 406. Most of the group members did exhibit a strong environmental ethic and indicated that they would be willing to work with the Department to protect Arizona's natural resources. Some group members did, however, cite an overall need for communication with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to foster a better relationship. This included being kept abreast of current issues related to restricted species, particularly as it relates to the rationale for restricting certain species.

*"They need to do this more. That's where they get their information – from us."*

*"I'd be curious to know just exactly what the problems are."*

*"[We need] to be given the information on why [they want to restrict] the species."*

## **Personal Customer Segment**

### *Awareness of Rule 406*

As in the commercial segment group, most participants of the personal segment group displayed little or no knowledge of Rule 406.

*“I’ve never seen these regulations at all.”*

### *Industry Trends Regarding Live Wildlife*

One major industry trend related to live wildlife reported by the participants was that of an increase in demand for birds. Also mentioned was a large increase in the number of ponds being built in Arizona that house fish such as goldfish and koi. The group members also indicated that the pet trade has recently become more sophisticated and members of the general population are obtaining animals that are rare and unusual. This trend includes a growing mainstream interest in reptiles that were once only sought by herpetologists and others with a specific interest in these animals.

*“[Birds] are definitely increasing. I think birds are the third most popular pet at this point, over cats and dogs.”*

*“There’s a fairly large growth in ponds... The issue is that there’s a huge insurgence of ponds being built all around the country. You’ll find in this city alone, my guess is, between three to five thousand ponds, and growing very rapidly.”*

*“I think one thing that is happening is that the pet trade is getting a bit more sophisticated and I think that they are catering to the ‘oh-wow factor’ particularly in reptiles. It used to be a very closed-circle kind of a cultish type of thing almost.”*

Similar to the commercial segment group, this group also revealed the trend of Arizona residents releasing pets into the wild because the ownership of these animals becomes burdensome. The group felt that this was, in part, due to an interest in animals for which little care instructions are given. Similar to the commercial segment group, the reasons cited for this trend were that people are too busy to take care of the animals and lack an understanding an animal’s care requirements prior to purchasing the animals.

*“It’s also alarming how fast [birds] are being given up, too, because people are not educated when they purchase them. They go out and see this pretty bird and think that it can sit in a cage and just feed it and that’s all you have to do.”*

*“It’s really frightening that people think they can go buy a parrot, a wolf-hybrid, just about anything. We can go buy it and if we don’t like it we’ll just set it free or we’ll take it out in the desert and leave it.”*

*“With parrots we get calls, ‘Come and get this bird or I’m going to turn it loose.’ And we say, ‘Don’t turn it loose, we’ll be there.’ It’s screaming, they can’t stand it anymore, and they are going to turn it loose.”*

*“It’s real clear that most people don’t know much about birds... they know even less about Koi or about taking care of fish in the wild. It’s quite unique.”*

*“There are no instructions that they give these people. You plop down your ninety bucks for your African spurred tortoise and you can walk right out the door. Two weeks later I’ll get a call to go pick up a ‘desert’ tortoise... because Joey has left it out in the front yard and it has wandered off.”*

*“No matter what animal it is, people get tired of them. Whether they are educated on how to care for them or not, they still do get tired. They’re moving; they’re transient and leave them...”*

*“If you were to visit golf courses or lakes you would find millions of Koi... People do the same thing with Koi that they do with birds. I get tired of my Koi pond and I have to take my Koi someplace.”*

### **Knowledge of Rule 406 Regulations**

Among the group members there was a perception of a lack of knowledge among the general population regarding Rule 406 regulations. Participants stated that residents are generally aware that it is not legal to own native wildlife but it was stated that these activities are occurring. It was also noted that few people know which non-native animals are legal to own and which are not in Arizona. Furthermore, it was mentioned that few residents know that it is not legal to release non-native wildlife into Arizona’s natural habitat. The primary reason cited for this lack of knowledge among the general population was the absence of good information available to the public.

*“A lot of people don’t know that it’s illegal to turn exotic animals loose.”*

*“There’s a lot of ignorance as far as the public goes, as far as what’s allowable and what’s not and what’s ok to turn loose and what’s not.”*

*“As far as self-educating yourself, if you get a tiger or a parrot or something, you go on-line and you try and do some education and find out why is my bird jumping up and down and screeching. You can get good information and you can get bad information out there and people don’t know how to discern the difference and they don’t know who to talk to as far as the experts go.”*

### *Support for Rule 406 Regulations*

The participants did show a high level of support for Rule 406. In contrast to the commercial segment, there seemed to be a general understanding of the need for Rule 406 among the group members. Specifically, the participants understood the relationship between the release of non-native species into the wild and the impacts these exotic animals have on native Arizona wildlife.

*“These million Koi, what do they do to our natural environment? If you have an exotic animal and you turn it loose, what is the consequence? There’s millions of Koi in these lakes... I’ve seen them out in canals and I don’t know what they do out there.”*

*“It’s like the lovebirds... The biggest problem with the lovebirds is that they are cavity nesters and what they are starting to do is displace things like elf owls, the western screech owls and kestrels. It’s a perfect example of people’s exotics either escaping on their own or someone tossing them out because their noisy little creatures. They’re actually causing problems for indigenous species.”*

When asked to rate the need for regulations that restrict the possession of certain species, participants rated this need as a 10, with 10 being the highest priority need. Human safety was cited as one of the main concerns for regulating the possession of certain animals. It was also noted, however, that the protection of Arizona native wildlife is a more important concern than human safety with regard to Rule 406 regulations. Furthermore, the group members seemed to agree that the effects of these regulations were largely positive and were designed with the best interests of the animals in possession, as well as Arizona wildlife, in mind.

*“I think it’s a ‘ten’ that they need to have something in place.”*

*“Arkansas is a classic example of a state that just never had any regulation. And that’s where you’re seeing these horrendous hybrids.”*

*“There’s also some very clear and defined regulations basis, and that would be protecting people from doing harm to others in the community or themselves with animals that are capable of doing that.”*

*“[The regulations] are for the best interest of the animal.”*

*“The regulations are there to protect the animals that are in our care. We certainly want to do what is in the best interest of the animal.”*

*“I’d put the safety of our natural environment over [human safety]. All the way.”*

### *Effectiveness of Rule 406 Regulations*

Although support for Rule 406 regulations was high, participants agreed that Rule 406 regulations were somewhat deficient regarding their effectiveness. Primarily, the group members cited a lack of Arizona Game and Fish Department enforcement presence as the reason for this deficiency. Some group members seemed frustrated at the lack of enforcement efforts and insisted that it makes little sense to have regulations in place if the Department isn’t willing to dedicate the necessary resources to enforce them.

*“There’s a lot of frustration on our part, too, because we don’t see the enforcement. If you are going to create rules and regs then you better enforce them across the board.”*

*“We just dealt with another rehabber on the east end of town here that had gotten a Coyote puppy from somebody in Casa Grande and evidently there was a litter of them. No Game and Fish officer would go down there and check it out. It’s very frustrating.”*

It was also mentioned that some of the Rule 406 regulations lacked relevancy and had unreasonable provisions that made acquisition of certain special permits impossible.

*“When you design and develop and build regulations they ought to have relevancy.”*

*“They are asking for a certification which is impossible to get... A viral infection is down somewhere around 400 micron range, with the only way to look at that is through an electron microscope.”*

Finally, it was noted that Rule 406 regulations lacked the ability to regulate the importation of animals that could cause serious problems in Arizona.

*“When you don’t have any regulation of the influx or importation of these big carnivores into Arizona, sooner or later there’s going to be some serious problems.”*

*“I only see the problem getting worse, too, with the Internet. You can go on the Internet and buy anything you want.”*

Another issue regarding the efficacy of Rule 406 that was mentioned is the belief that the Arizona Game and Fish Department is targeting the wrong constituent group with regulations concerning non-native wildlife. Rather than directing their efforts at the ownership of non-native species, it was stated that the Department should focus its efforts on the people responsible for selling these animals. It was felt by several members that the education process associated with the sale of animals is the key to making the Rule 406 regulations more successful. Specifically, falconry was cited as a model program because of its long standing successful track record due to the extensive education program associated with the sport.

*“I think we missed the point of this issue of trying to regulate people owning stuff. What we ought to regulate is the people that sell the stuff.”*

*“This thing here [Rule 406] doesn’t say one d---n thing about the education process of selling of wildlife; it just says you can’t have it.”*

*“And in my view at least, that is the cornerstone of falconry. It’s the education process.”*

*“When I see a falconer with a bird on their fist, I know, even if it’s the worst falconer in the world, that person has training. They know natural history; they know how to take care of the bird; they’ve had a sponsor. When you see someone walking around with a bobcat, they have money. That person may not know anything about bobcats... There are no regulations that say that this person had to do anything to learn how to take care of that animal before they were able to purchase it.”*

### ***Criteria for Establishing Rule 406***

As with the commercial segment group, this group felt that the logic used for determining which species are restricted under Rule 406 needs to be examined. It was noted that Rule 406 does not restrict some species that may pose a significant health threat to human safety. Furthermore, some group members voiced the opinion that the Arizona Game and Fish

Department should consider broadening the Rule 406 restrictions to include additional exotic species.

*“You can have very rare animals and very difficult species to take care of.”*

*“In the thirty years I’ve been in the zoo field – the state regulations, the 406 restricted live wildlife regulations – I could never understand how they could have been propagated. There are people that strut around their macaques in the park. It’s not a secret that they can be carriers of the Herpes B virus, which is fatal to human beings... When I read the regulation... it says, “All species of the family Pongidae of the order primates, common names orangutans, chimps and gorillas, are the only restricted primates in this state. So that means anybody can import these overgrown macaques that carry Herpes B virus.”*

*“This is an evasive regulation, the restricted wildlife rules. It’s saying that we don’t deal with these and you can have everything else but this. It doesn’t take into consideration that there are some very insidious things out there.”*

*“Falconers are regulated, rehabbers are regulated, the zoo is regulated, but Koi aren’t... parrots aren’t, the school is not. So there are a lot of exotics out there that have no regulation.”*

*“There’s just no control. If there’s a biological reason or if there’s a reason for fear with these primates, that’s where the Game and Fish would have to come in... they’re the ones with the biologists, they’re the ones with the research behind them. They’re not making this stuff up – If they don’t want an animal let in the state there is a reason behind it. I’m saying that their import regulations would have to get more strict.”*

It was also stated that the regulations need to be rewritten so that species are considered by their individual impacts on the safety of Arizona’s residents and wildlife, rather than blanketing many species by generic regulations. One individual even felt that the Rules were constructed in such a way that they allow the Arizona Game and Fish Department to neglect their enforcement duties.

*“The deal is, what’s dangerous to our state? What’s dangerous to our animals, our wildlife. What’s dangerous to our people. Are tigers dangerous to us? Are bobcats dangerous to us? It’s a double-edged sword. I don’t like the idea of somebody having a bobcat, but I got a hawk.”*

*“I think the restrictive wildlife rules are almost ludicrous and the trend that I’ve seen over the thirty years that I’ve been dealing with it is that it seems as though Game and*

*Fish is attempting to get out from under the responsibility to enforce exotic wildlife regulations. They'd rather not."*

*"In less than one hour this whole thing for fish could be rewritten and it would be relevant and you could administer it versus having a piece of paper."*

### *Recommended Solutions to Rule 406 Issues*

There was an overwhelming sentiment that greater information availability regarding Rule 406 is the key to increasing the effectiveness of these regulations. Specifically, participants specified the importance of the role that retailers should play in educating the public concerning various animals. It was stated that consumers needed to be educated on the care and commitment requirements of an animal before the sale of the animal takes place. It was believed that this strategy of education before ownership would reduce the number of pet owners that feel inconvenienced by animals that have demanding care requirements and would, therefore, reduce the number non-native animals released into the wild.

*"I think one of things for your average person going into a supplier or a pet store is that you're dependent on those people telling you that you can have this or you can't have it... PetCo is the only major chain that I have seen that actually has care sheets and little plaques that say this animal lives this long, this animal gets this big, this is what you need to care, it's nocturnal, or whatever and has the warnings about salmonella... Which is what I'd like to see every single pet store have."*

*"That's part of what our club is trying to do is to educate people before they buy a bird. I'm a breeder; I raise birds and if a person has never had one before and they approach me to buy one of my birds, the first thing I say is, 'Do you know that all parrots are noisy, messy, demanding, and destructive and they also bite?' I don't want to sell them to somebody that can't put up with that."*

*"You get a parrot that's going to yell and scream and screech, that's going to bite and tear up your furniture. Know that when you buy it; don't know it after you buy it."*

*"A carp, a common carp lives 35-50 years in the States... In Japan it lives 250 years. Are you prepared to make a 250 year commitment?"*

Similar to the commercial segment group, these participants also stated a need for greater enforcement presence from Arizona Game and Fish Department law enforcement officers. In

addition to increased enforcement presence, education programs targeted at enforcement officers were suggested.

*“We have a zoo license through the state of Arizona. We are never inspected by the state of Arizona. The way that works is that somewhere in the regs it says that if they are inspected by the federal government through the American Welfare Act and an accredited member of the AZA [American Zoo and Aquarium Association] that’s enough and they want to see your licenses and that’s enough for the state of Arizona. They don’t have to go through the regulation part of it and I think that’s probably the biggest stumbling block... It’s the biggest fiscal liability you are going to run into, is the regulation capabilities of the whole thing.”*

*“I see the role of the Game and Fish Department changing tremendously. I mentioned the police officer that shows up at your door for the domestic dispute and these Game and Fish Officers who carry firearms are going to have to get some education and the Department is going to have to do some reeducation on their own, too. I bet you a lot of these Game and Fish officers don’t know the rules and regs anymore than we do probably, when it comes to enforcing them. They are going to have to get some reeducation and know where their grounds are and where it is appropriate and where it’s not to intercede either on behalf of the animal or the behalf of the industry.”*

### ***AZGFD and the Personal Segment Working Together***

Overall, the personal segment group indicated that they would be willing to work with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to protect Arizona’s wildlife and natural resources. The primary recommendation made to establish a better working relationship between the personal segment group and the Department was increased communication. Specifically, participants mentioned that the Department should listen to the needs of this customer group with an open mind. It should be encouraging to Arizona Game and Fish Department personnel that members of this customer group not only wish to be included in discussion regarding establishing Rule 406 regulations, but feel that their involvement is necessary to produce effective and relevant regulations due to their intimate role in caring for these animals.

*“It seems like anybody here would want to talk about this with them at greater length if they were interested in listening to it. I’m sure that any one of us would be happy to sit down and talk to somebody about it.”*

*“What I would like to propose is to at least seek out those people that in their own right, in their own professions, and in their own hobbies are experts.”*

*“If they are going to make rules and regulations, they need to talk to the people who know what the problems are so that they make good rules and regulations.”*

*“It would seem that if there is any advice... that would be interesting for Game and Fish it would be that if you want to do something that is relevant, then involve the subject member experts with an open mind and not with the fact that you are going to write more rules and regulations which no one is going to follow anyway.”*

*“The club we have is more than willing to participate if we talk to people that are willing to listen... It’s very clear that Fish and Game has a choice: You can get people engaged that are subject matter experts and will help you rewrite these rules so that they are relevant.”*

## Major Findings

Overall, there were several major findings revealed by the commercial customer segment and personal customer segment focus groups on Arizona live wildlife. The highlights from these groups are summarized below.

- Overall, there is a low level of awareness regarding Rule 406 among both the commercial customer segment and the personal customer segment. Very few of the focus group participants had any knowledge of these regulations.
- Both customer groups acknowledged that there is a significant problem with pet owners releasing non-native animals into the wild. Among Arizona's residents, there seems to be a disconnection between the act of releasing these animals into the wild and the impacts releasing these animals has on native Arizona populations.
- Both customer groups indicated that there is a lack of knowledge among the general population regarding which species are legal to possess in Arizona. Furthermore, there are a large number of people in violation of Rule 406 regulations, many simply because they do not know the laws.
- A lack of Arizona Game and Fish Department law enforcement efforts were cited by members of both focus groups as the reason for the limited efficacy of the Rule 406 regulations. Increased Game and Fish Department presence in pet stores where exotic animals are sold as well as increased efforts to enforce Rule 406 regulations regarding individual possession of illegal wildlife were cited as necessary changes to current Game and Fish Department activities.
- Although Rule 406 regulations were generally viewed as positive and well-meaning regulations, participants from both the commercial and personal customer segments expressed dissatisfaction with the criteria used for determining restricted species in Arizona. It was stated that the regulations were too general and need to be rewritten to consider individual species based on their potential detriment to Arizona's natural resources. Furthermore, the regulations were said to not be strict enough and should include other species that threaten public safety or Arizona's natural resources.

- Increasing availability of information to all Arizona residents regarding Rule 406 was cited by both the commercial customer segment as well as the personal customer segment as an important task for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. It was felt that information is difficult to find and it is challenging to discern whether or not information comes from credible sources. It is noteworthy that members of the commercial customer segment cited a need for information in their retail locations and a lack of Department communication, while the personal customer segment stated that increased information at the time of sale was one solution to the unnecessary release of exotic wildlife.
- Members of both customer segments indicated a strong willingness to work with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to more effectively develop and enforce Rule 406 regulations. The number one need to ensure a successful relationship between the Department and these customer groups was again information. All participants seemed likely to cooperate with the Department as long as they felt their opinions would be included in the rule-making process and they were kept informed regarding decisions surrounding Rule 406. It was, in fact, made clear that members of both the commercial customer segment and the personal customer segment want to be included in this process.