

Oil and Gas Development Threatens Eastern Indigo Snake Recovery

Proposed energy development in Alabama's Conecuh National Forest could jeopardize one of the nation's most significant snake recovery efforts.

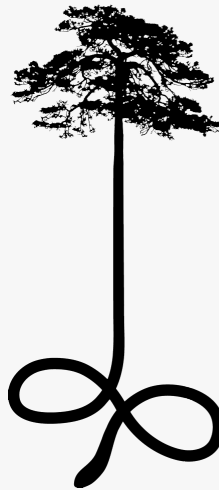
CLAYTON, GA, UNITED STATES, August 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Orianne Society](#) is raising concerns over a proposal to allow oil and gas development in Alabama's Conecuh National Forest, warning that the project could undermine nearly two decades of work to restore the federally threatened Eastern Indigo Snake (*Drymarchon couperi*) to its historic range. The proposal, currently under consideration by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, would allow oil and gas leasing on approximately 2,263 acres of Conecuh National Forest.

Known as the "Lord of the Forest," the Eastern Indigo Snake is the longest native snake in the United States and serves as a wide-ranging top predator within the longleaf pine ecosystem, consuming a variety of prey, including venomous snakes. Once found throughout the southeastern Coastal Plain from Mississippi to Georgia, the species disappeared from the Florida Panhandle, southern Alabama, and southeastern Mississippi after decades of habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, direct human persecution, and other threats.

Since 2010, The Orianne Society and conservation partners have worked to restore the species to Conecuh National Forest through a collaborative reintroduction program. To date, 350 captive-



Eastern Indigo Snake - Photo by Houston Chandler



THE Orianne
Society

reared Eastern Indigo Snakes have been released into the forest, and researchers are now seeing encouraging signs of success, including wild reproduction and the expansion of snakes into new areas.

According to The Orianne Society, new roads and energy infrastructure could destroy and fragment critical habitat, increase road mortality, complicate prescribed fire management and negatively affect Gopher Tortoises, whose burrows provide essential shelter for Eastern Indigo Snakes during the winter months.

These are the very threats conservationists have spent years working to overcome.

"The ultimate goal of endangered species conservation is recovery," said Dr. Chris Jenkins, CEO of The Orianne Society. "For the Eastern Indigo Snake, successful reintroduction into the western portion of its historic range is essential to meeting recovery objectives. Development that further fragments habitat and increases mortality could jeopardize the long-term success of these conservation efforts."

Under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's recovery plan, Eastern Indigo Snakes cannot be considered for delisting (removal from the federal list of threatened and endangered species) until multiple secure populations have been established across their historic range, including within the Panhandle Region where no naturally occurring populations remain today. The Conecuh reintroduction effort is therefore a cornerstone of the species' long-term recovery strategy.

"I have worked on a wide variety of conservation projects over the last 15 years," said Dr. Houston Chandler, The Orianne Society's Director of Science. "Without fail, the annual releases of Eastern Indigo Snakes receive the most public interest and positive reactions. They are an icon of the southeastern longleaf pine ecosystem, and conserving them benefits countless other native plants and animals while protecting one of America's most endangered ecosystems and the communities that depend on it."

Chandler added that opening Conecuh National Forest to oil and gas development risks undermining years of public and private investment dedicated to restoring the species.

The full article, "Oil and Gas Development Threatens Eastern Indigo Snake Recovery," is available on The Orianne Society's website.

<https://www.oriannesociety.org/science-of-scales/oil-and-gas-development-threatens-indigo-snake-recovery/>

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