



January 28, 1010

Governor Sonny Perdue  
203 State Capitol  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Georgia General Assembly  
State Capitol Building  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Dear Governor Perdue and Georgia General Assembly:

On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, the Wild Classroom, and Dr. Bruce Means, we ask that the state of Georgia enact legislation to outlaw Rattlesnake Roundups. Roundups are annual contests in which hunters bring in as many snakes as they can catch in a year. The roundups have depleted populations of eastern diamondback rattlesnakes in the southeastern United States. This once-common species is now being pushed toward extinction: A study analyzing 50 years of roundup data found that the total number of snakes and the size of individual snakes have declined, and that hunters must travel farther to catch snakes for the event.

Two of these events take place annually in Georgia, in Whigham and Claxton. One of the justifications for the continuation of these killing contests is the generation of community revenue. Other communities that used to hold roundups have successfully changed the focus of their annual event. For example, San Antonio, Florida changed its roundup to a Rattlesnake Festival where there is no collection contest and snakes are not killed. Similarly, the town of Fitzgerald, Georgia replaced its roundup with a Wild Chicken Festival, which organizers say has been an enormous success.

The roundups are environmentally harmful. Snakes are commonly caught by the gassing of tortoise burrows, which is harmful to 350 other wildlife species which use the burrows, including some federally listed species. Rattlesnakes play an important role in the food web, especially in terms of rodent control and deserve respect.

Another justification for roundups is the extraction of venom which is purportedly sold for medical purposes, but producers of rattlesnake antivenin only purchase it from approved suppliers under sterile conditions. Wildlife education is also a supposed benefit of the roundups, but it is undeniable that the educational value of the roundups would be far greater if snakes were not collected and killed, and the importance of saving native species was emphasized.

The roundups are not necessary to protect the public from the danger of rattlesnake bites. Eastern diamondback rattlesnakes are considered to be a gentle species, and the majority of bites occur when humans try to capture or kill the snake. In the United States, there are six times more annual fatalities from lightning strikes or bee stings than from venomous snake bites. We urge you to amend Georgia state law to protect this declining species, and other venomous snakes, from future roundups.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity  
Wild Classroom  
Dr. Bruce Means