

Arkansas Game & Fish Commission
Attn: Fisheries Division
2 Natural Resources Drive
Little Rock, Arkansas 72205
Chris.Racey@agfc.ar.gov

Re: Ban Commercial Turtle Trapping in Arkansas

We, the undersigned scientists—with collective expertise in conservation biology, ecology, population dynamics, wildlife management and other areas relevant to turtle conservation—urge the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission to ban commercial trapping of Arkansas’s wild turtles.

Scientists have repeatedly found that freshwater turtles cannot sustain any significant level of wild collection without suffering population declines. For example, a 2014 Missouri study found that under mean demographic rates, softshell turtles could sustain no harvest at all without population declines, and common snapping turtles could withstand only minimum rates of juvenile harvest and no adult harvest.

The science shows that Arkansas’s turtle trapping regulations need to be amended to prevent turtle declines. Under current state regulations, Arkansas residents holding the required fishing permits may collect 14 species/subspecies of turtle in unlimited numbers from across the southeastern half of the state. Trappers’ self-reported numbers show that they removed more than 120,000 wild turtles from Arkansas’s waters between 2014 and 2016, the majority of which were large, sexually mature turtles. This level of trapping puts wild turtles at risk.

To ensure the health of Arkansas’s turtles and the waterways where they live, we ask that the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission promptly propose a ban on commercial exploitation of the state’s turtles.

Sincerely,

Kurt A. Buhlmann, Ph.D.
Senior Research Associate
University of Georgia
Savannah River Ecology Laboratory
Aiken, South Carolina

Justin D. Congdon
Professor Emeritus
University of Georgia
Savannah River Ecology Laboratory
Aiken, South Carolina

Dr. Russell Burke
Professor of Biology
Hofstra University
Hempstead, New York

Bruce J. Weissgold, M.A. (ret.)
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Fairfax, Virginia

Jim Godwin
Alabama Natural Heritage Program
Auburn University Museum of Natural History
Auburn, Alabama

Dr. Jacqueline D. Litzgus
Professor
Department of Biology
Laurentian University
Sudbury, Ontario, Canada
Michael Ogle
Curator
Department of Archelosaurs and Lepidosaurus
Zoo Knoxville
Knoxville, Tennessee

Janine Perlman, Ph.D.
Wildlife Nutrition Consultants
Alexander, Arkansas

Dr. Julia E. Earl
Assistant Professor
Louisiana Tech University
Ruston, LA.

Ed Neil, B.S., M.B.A.
Member, Turtle Survival Alliance
Dallas, Texas

William H. Heyborne, PhD
Associate Professor of Biology
Director - SUU Center for STEM Teaching and Learning
College of Science & Engineering
Southern Utah University
Cedar City, Utah

Steven Kimble, Ph.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor
Towson University
Baltimore, Maryland

Dr. Mark Feldman
Member, Turtle Survival Alliance
Hudson, New Hampshire

Dr. James Hanken
Alexander Agassiz Professor of Zoology and Director
Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Juanita A. R. Ladyman, Ph.D.
Ecologist and Botanist
JnJ Associates LLC
Portland, Oregon

Alexander Hill, B.S.
Memphis, Tennessee

Dr. Stephen P. Mackessy
School of Biological Sciences
University of Northern Colorado
Greeley, Colorado
Richard Lis, Ph.D.
Senior Environmental Scientist
Redding, California

Steven C. Anderson
Prof. Emeritus, Biological Sciences
University of the Pacific
Stockton, California

Steven Krichbaum, Ph.D.
Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Staunton, Virginia

Lorri Cramer
Director of Rehabilitation
New York Turtle & Tortoise Society
New York City, New York

Christopher L. Rowe
Associate Professor
University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science
Chesapeake Biological Laboratory
Solomons, Maryland

Karen A. Bjorndal, Ph.D.
Distinguished Professor and Director
Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research
Department of Biology
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

Robert D. Tronzo, MD
Export, Pennsylvania

Kay Martin
New York Turtle & Tortoise Society
Brooklyn, New York

Jim Boone, Ph.D.
Desert Wildlife Consultants, LLC
Las Vegas, Nevada

Charles J. Innis VMD DABVP
Director of Animal Health
New England Aquarium
Boston, Massachusetts

Gary S. Casper, Ph.D.
Associate Scientist, UWM Field Station
Associate Editor, Herpetological Conservation and Biology
Co-Chair, Wisconsin Chapter of Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
Editorial Board, Natural Areas Journal
Slinger, Wisconsin

Scott W. Buchanan, Ph.D.
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, Rhode Island

Gerald Marzec
Boca Raton, FL