



## Center for Biological Diversity seeks Missouri ban on commercial trapping of wild turtles



Common snapping turtle  
Photo contributed by Dakota L.

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The Center for Biological Diversity and Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, the former a nonprofit organization and the later a nonprofit environmental law firm, are attempting to end commercial turtle trapping in the state of Missouri.

The organizations announced Wednesday, Aug. 24, that they had petitioned the Missouri Department of Conservation to end commercial collection of the state's wild freshwater turtles. According to a press release from the CBD, turtle traders are currently able to legally collect unlimited numbers of common

snapping and soft-shell turtles, and thousands of Missouri turtles have been caught and sold within the past 10 years.

“Unregulated turtle traders are mining Missouri rivers in a frenzy that’s reminiscent of the gold rush,” CBD Biologist and GRELC Attorney Collette Adkins stated in the release. “Commercial trapping is devastating to turtle populations that are already suffering from a lot of other threats, like habitat loss, water pollution and getting hit by cars.”

According to the state’s current wildlife code, common snapping turtles may be taken throughout the year, though there is a limit of five turtles per day and a possession limit of no more than 10. The same limits are applied to soft-shelled turtles, though that season is limited from July 1 to December 31. However, the CBD’s release states the regulations allow for holders of a commercial fishing permit to take an unlimited number of both species from portions of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers with no closed season.

The CBD points to a Missouri study published December 2014 in *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* by Stephanie A. Zimmer-Shaffer, Jeffrey T. Briggler and Joshua J. Millspaugh, which finds that even low annual harvest rates could have detrimental effects on the long-term sustainability of turtle populations.

“The Missouri Department of Conservation, on its website, urges Missourians to ‘Help Turtles Thrive in Our State,’” general council for the GRELC Bruce Morrison is quoted in the release. “But the state needs to do more than merely post messages like these on the web. To protect our turtle population, Missouri should follow the lead of Kansas and Illinois and ban for-profit turtle exploitation.”

According to the release, more than 17 million wild-caught live turtles have been exported from the United States within the past five years.

“(The turtles go) to supply food and medicinal markets in Asia, where native turtle populations have already been depleted by soaring consumption,” the release states.

The CBD states its efforts have previously resulted in improved harvest regulations in Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Iowa, as well as four species of turtles being added by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to a list of species that requires an export permit and documentation that the animal was caught or acquired legally.