



## MDC to consider turtle trapping limits

Tuesday, October 25, 2016

In response to a petition filed Aug. 24 by the Center for Biological Diversity and the Great Rivers Environmental Law Center to place limits on the trapping of wild turtles in Missouri, the two nonprofits announced a positive response from the Department of Conservation Monday, Oct. 24.

According to a letter from MDC Interim Director Tom Draper addressed to CBD Senior Attorney Collette Adkins, the department had been monitoring developments and agreed that the unlimited commercial collection of both common snapping turtles and softshell turtles should be addressed through the rule-making process.

In the petition, the CBD and GRELC expressed concern that those with a commercial fishing permit could take an unlimited number of both species from the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers with no closed season, as well as a concern that vast amounts of U.S. turtles were being exported to Asia for use in the food and medicinal markets. According to the MDC letter, just 3 percent of Missouri's river miles are open to commercial turtle harvest. Additionally, the letter states commercial fishermen are currently required to submit monthly records of each species taken to the MDC, allowing for that data to be used to monitor fishing pressure and commercial harvest of the turtle populations.

"The Department shares some of the concerns mentioned in your petition and supported by recent scientific studies related to the life history traits (e.g. delayed female maturation, relatively low fecundity, low recruitment, long generation times, etc.) of turtles that potentially make these species more vulnerable to harvest," the letter states. "... In addition, the Department shares some of your concerns regarding increasing trafficking of turtles internationally."

A new rule imposing limits would need to be developed and presented to the Missouri Conservation Commission for approval.

"This is great news for Missouri's turtles and for all of us who care about the health of the state's rivers," Adkins states in a press release announcing the MDC response. "A small number of for-profit turtle collectors should not be allowed to put the state's turtles at risk. We're hopeful that the Missouri Department of Conservation will do the right thing and ban the state's harmful turtle trade."