

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Missouri agency considers ban on unlimited turtle hunting

By Ashley Lisenby
St. Louis Post-Dispatch
October 24th 2016

ST. LOUIS • At the request of environmental advocates, the Missouri conservation agency says it will consider amending the state regulation that allows for unlimited commercial hunting of wild turtles.

In August, the Center for Biological Diversity and Great Rivers Environmental Law Center filed a petition with the state's Department of Conservation asking the agency to ban the unlimited commercial trapping of snapping and softshell turtles because of its detrimental impact on turtle populations. Commercial hunting of the two kinds of turtles can intensify water pollution, habitat destruction, road mortality and incidental fishery devices, the groups said in a letter to the department.

Agency leader Tom Draper said Monday in a statement the department agrees the unlimited collection of the turtles "should be addressed through the rule-making process."



Common snapping turtle.

Courtesy of Center for Biological Diversity

The turtles contribute to local economies and can be a source of food for some, according to the department. Turtles are harvested and sold abroad for food, medicinal purposes and can serve as pets.

Under current state regulations, a person with a commercial fishing permit can take unlimited numbers of common snappers, spiny softshells and smooth softshells from parts of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers without season restrictions, the groups said. They said turtles are helpful in maintaining a balanced ecosystem.

"A small number of for-profit turtle collectors should not be allowed to put the state's turtles at risk," said Collette Adkins, biologist and senior lawyer for the Center of Biodiversity.

“We’re hopeful that the Missouri Department of Conservation will do the right thing and ban the state’s harmful turtle trade.”

She said developing the proposed rule could take months and would later have to be approved by the Missouri Conservation Commission.

The Arizona-based group is spearheading efforts nationwide to stop the unlimited collection of the two types of turtles, Adkins said Monday. She said the group has submitted similar petitions to the one filed in Missouri in other states including Louisiana and Iowa.

“The turtle trappers are flocking to (states without regulations)... and doubling down on a harmful practice,” she said.