

Environmental groups want to ban commercial hunting of snapping and softshell turtles in Missouri

By Kristen Taketa
Aug 24, 2016

Two environmental groups want Missouri to ban commercial hunting of snapping and soft-shelled turtles, which they say is crippling the reptiles' habitats and taking a toll on the turtle population.

Commercial hunting of the two kinds of turtles exacerbates water pollution, habitat destruction, road mortality and incidental take from fishery devices, according to a letter penned to the Missouri Department of Conservation by the Center for Biological Diversity, a national organization based in Tucson, Ariz., and St. Louis-based Great Rivers Environmental Law Center.

A 2014 research report about the common snapping and soft-shelled turtles, the only kinds of turtles that Missouri considers to be game, found that "even low annual harvest rates may have detrimental effects on the long-term sustainability of turtle populations at localized scales."



Courtesy of Center for Biological Diversity. Common snapping turtle.

"Unregulated turtle traders are mining Missouri rivers in a frenzy that's reminiscent of the gold rush," said Collette Adkins, a biologist and senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "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."

A Missouri Department of Conservation document called the turtles "economically important" and said they are "highly valued as a human food source." Turtles are harvested and exported abroad for food, medicinal purposes and to serve as pets.

Turtles are good for the environment because they help keep balance in an ecosystem's food web structure by feeding on water plants, dead animals, snails, aquatic insects and crayfish, the letter said.