

# Daily Comet

## LTE: State's turtles need greater protection

Elise Bennett  
Reptile and amphibian staff attorney,  
Center for Biological Diversity  
St. Petersburg, Fla.

July 13, 2017

This letter is in response to a story from July 3, "Turtles head back to 'newly renovated home.' "

Former Wildlife and Fisheries Secretary Charlie Melancon's statement that the "demand (for wild, freshwater turtles) is far below supply" is illogical and not based on the hard realities of wildlife management.

Louisiana's turtles cannot be managed in supply-and-demand terms because biological limitations prevent them from reproducing quickly enough to keep up with even low harvesting demand. It takes turtles years to mature to breeding age, and they lay small clutches of eggs, only a few of which hatch and survive to adulthood, about 1 percent to 3 percent. So harvesting one adult turtle can mean removing several future generations from the wild.

Moreover, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries does not have the information needed to even begin the complex calculus to determine the impacts of turtle harvesting.

Louisiana's turtle harvest reporting law did not go into effect until August 2016, meaning the agency cannot possibly have even one year of data. Meanwhile, Louisiana allows trappers to harvest 20 types of turtle in unlimited numbers. Any claim that Louisiana has a handle on the extent of turtle harvesting is either naïve or disingenuous.

While it's heartening to know a clutch of diamondback terrapins will have a chance in the wild, the numbers are miniscule compared with the turtles – including terrapins –harvested in unlimited numbers across the state. I hope current Wildlife and Fisheries Secretary Jack Montoucet will reconsider the state's problematic management of turtles by following sound science and reining in this rampant trade