

# The Marshall Democrat-News

## MDC proposes ban on commercial trapping of wild turtles

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JEFFERSON CITY — In response to a petition filed by the Center for Biological Diversity and Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, the Missouri Department of Conservation yesterday proposed a ban on commercial collection of the state's wild freshwater turtles — following a national trend of ending unsustainable turtle harvesting.

Under current law, traders can legally collect unlimited numbers of common snapping and soft-shell turtles to sell domestically or export for Asian food and medicinal markets. Thousands of Missouri's turtles have been caught and sold during the past 10 years.

"I'm so glad Missouri is poised to do the right thing for its turtles," Collette Adkins, biologist and senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a press release. "The science shows for-profit trapping is putting the state's turtles at risk. If it's finalized, this ban would protect the state's turtles from trappers seeking to make a quick buck."

Under current regulations in Missouri, holders of a commercial fishing permit may take unlimited numbers of common snappers, spiny soft shells and smooth soft shells from portions of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers with no closed seasons.

According to the department, 1,100 river miles are open to turtle collection.

Scientists have repeatedly documented that freshwater turtles cannot sustain any significant level of wild collection without leading to population declines. For example, in a 2014 Missouri study, researchers found that no commercial collection could be sustained for soft shells and common snappers could withstand only minimum rates of juvenile collection and no adult collection.

"The survival of Missouri's wildlife is in the hands of Missouri's Department of Conservation," Bruce Morrison, general counsel for Great Rivers Environmental Law Center, said in the release. "Thankfully the department appears ready to take this step to protect these animals as a vital part of our state's ecosystems."

The public has 30 days to submit comments, which will be compiled and presented for consideration by the Missouri Conservation Commission. The state is expected to public a final rule in February.