



Petition asks AGFC to ban turtle trapping

A petition lead by the Center for Biological Diversity asks Arkansas Game and Fish to stop allowing commercial harvesting of turtles.

Erika Ferrando,
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Arkansas Game and Fish will consider putting a stop to unlimited commercial turtle trapping in the state. State records show from 2014 to 2016, 126 and 381 freshwater turtles were harvested.

A petition led by the Center for Biological Diversity asks Arkansas Game and Fish to stop allowing commercial harvesting of turtles. The commission discussed it Thursday morning, July 19.

“Turtles are really important to keep water quality high -- they clean up debris and dead fish,” said Glen Hooks, Director of Arkansas Sierra Club one of the petitioners asking Game and Fish to end unlimited commercial turtle trapping in Arkansas.

Marcus Balch spoke against the ban, claiming it’s not an issue. Balch traps turtles to sell them for turtle races, food and studies at colleges.

“There’s not a large market,” said Balch. “I’ve done this since I was little bitty. I ask you not to take that right away from me.”

Currently, Arkansas allows commercial trappers to take an unlimited number of 14 species of turtles, including red-eared sliders and common snapping turtles. Only 11 of the 14 species are actually available for harvest in the state. The practice is only permitted in about half of the state, excluding places like the Ouachita’s and the Ozarks.

Game and Fish records show a decrease in turtle harvesting. In 2007, they issued 146 turtle harvest permits. In 2017 they issued 35, with only six of those actually harvesting turtles.

“People are doing it less it seems the demand for turtles has waned,” said Trey Reid with Game and Fish.

Of more than 800 public comments to Game and Fish, about 60 percent were against this ban.

“I’ve not seen an influx or a decrease of turtles one way or the other,” said Stan Jones, commissioner with Arkansas Game and Fish.

Commissioners will vote on this proposal at their next meeting in August.