

KUT**90.5**

Texas Won't Let Commercial Turtle Hunting Slide Anymore

By Mose Buchele
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Turtles across the state can breathe a sigh of relief this weekend, thanks to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission. In a vote this week, the statewide environmental regulator prohibited commercial hunting of Texas turtles – a measure that's been slow-moving for years.

A 2007 ban protected certain species from being harvested on public land and public water ways, but it left a loophole. You could still trap an unlimited number of four species – the common snapping turtle, the red-eared slider, the smooth softshell and spiny softshell – on private land.

The thing is, 95 percent of Texas is privately owned, and conservationists say that fact – combined with a growing taste for Texas turtles in Asia – put the state's population at risk.



Gabriel C. Pérez / KUT

“You might wonder why is there’s this concern about the export of turtles and turtle meat to Asia,” said Evelyn Merz with the Sierra Club in Houston. “Well, the reason is because in Asia they have pretty much depleted their own population of wild turtles.”

For years, conservationists have been tagging some of Texas’ most common turtle species to establish a baseline understanding of their numbers.

However, the vote did not ban people from trapping turtles on their own land for noncommercial purposes, and Merz says it doesn't stop a landowner from walking out to a stream, catching a turtle and eating it.

"I won't do it myself, because I keep seeing the turtle in front of me – and they're just too cute to eat."