

Taking Action for Turtles

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The common snapping turtle is not so attractive or charming as its terrapin cousin, but it has its own fan base. The nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity has petitioned Maryland Department of Natural Resources to end commercial collection of these wild freshwater turtles.

Under current Maryland law, trappers can collect unlimited numbers of common snappers to sell domestically or to Asian markets. More than 70,000 wild snapping turtles were trapped in Maryland between 2008 and 2016, according to reports submitted by harvest permit holders.

The petition asks DNR to amend its rules to prohibit the practice. The agency has 60 days to adapt or deny the petition with a written explanation.



“Turtle trappers shouldn’t be allowed to profit off a practice that puts the state’s natural heritage at risk,” said Jenny Loda, an attorney and biologist at the Center. “Even modest commercial trapping of freshwater turtles can lead to population crashes.”

In 2007 Maryland banned commercial collection of diamondback terrapins. Then, in 2008 and 2009, new regulations restricted trapping of snapping turtles to tidal waters and set a minimum harvest size.

The Center claims that current harvest regulations are not likely to be sustainable for wild turtles and that freshwater turtles cannot sustain any significant level of wild collection without population declines. The native turtle populations in Asia have been depleted by trapping for use as food and medicine.