



April 16, 2014

*Sent via Email and U.S. Mail*

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**Re: New Study Splits Alligator Snapping Turtles into Three Species**

On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, we are writing to inform the U.S. Fish and Wildlife of a study published last week that splits the alligator snapping turtle into three species:

Thomas, T.M. et al. 2014. Taxonomic assessment of Alligator Snapping Turtles (Chelydridae: Macrochelys), with the description of two new species from the southeastern United States. *Zootaxa* 3786 (2): 141–165.

By analyzing the fossil record, modern turtle morphology and genetics, the researchers revised the taxonomy of the alligator snapping turtle to identify two new species. Turtles furthest west in their range – river drainages of the Mississippi and Mobile rivers – will remain as the alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*). Turtles from the Suwannee river system in Florida and Georgia are now the Suwannee alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys suwanniensis*), while turtles from the Apalachicola and other panhandle rivers in Florida, Georgia and Alabama are now the Apalachicola alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys apalachicola*).

These newly identified species are even more endangered than the previously recognized singular entity. As such, this new study reaffirms the need to provide Endangered Species Act protection for alligator snapping turtles.

On July 11, 2012, the Center for Biological Diversity submitted a petition to list the alligator snapping turtle and 52 other amphibian and reptiles species. The petition asks the FWS to protect six turtles, seven snakes, two toads, four frogs, 10 lizards and 24 salamanders under the ESA. A copy of the petition, along with a list of the petitioned species, is available here: [http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/amphibian\\_conservation/pdfs/Mega\\_herp\\_petition\\_7-9-2012.pdf](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/amphibian_conservation/pdfs/Mega_herp_petition_7-9-2012.pdf). Backed by hundreds of scientific articles, the 450-page petition details the status of, and threats to, the petitioned animals, demonstrating the urgent need for their federal protection.

Alligator snapping turtles and the other petitioned species are at risk and deserve a prompt status review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Please add this new study – which is attached to this letter – to your file of best available science on alligator snapping turtles. Feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



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