

September 21, 2017

To the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners:

We, the undersigned scientists – with collective expertise in conservation biology, ecology, population dynamics, wildlife management, and for many of us herpetology—urge the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners to institute a permanent ban on the commercial collection of reptiles.

Nevada has one of the most significant levels of herpetological biodiversity in the western United States. These snakes and lizards are an important part of the desert food web, consuming insects and other invertebrates while acting as prey for mid- to upper-level predators. They are an integral part of Nevada’s vibrant desert ecosystems.

Globally, herpetofauna face numerous stressors including climate change, overexploitation, and habitat loss, which is driving localized extinctions and may be foretelling of broader declines. Research also shows that there are environmental impacts associated with the practice of commercial collecting itself, degrading habitat for the remaining animals.

NDOW has presented compelling data that collection numbers have been very significant over the past 30 years—resulting in the loss of nearly half a million reptiles from Nevada’s public lands. These data also indicate that reptile density may be going down in places that have been heavily collected, and as a result the impacts from collecting are spreading to previous unexploited areas.

Nevada is the only state in the Western U.S. to permit this practice, making it an outlier in managing its wildlife resources. In light of the unique reptile community in the state, the indicators that commercial collection may be impacting population levels, and the broader context of threats to reptiles, we encourage the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners to ban the practice of commercial collection of reptiles.

Sincerely,

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