



Center for Biological Diversity's Testimony in Support of SF 612

Before Senate Committee on Environment, Climate, and Legacy

Tuesday, January 31st, 2023 3:00 PM

Less than 20 people hold licenses to trap Minnesota's turtles for profit, but they unsustainably remove thousands of turtles from state's waterways each year. To protect Minnesota's natural heritage, the Center for Biological Diversity asks that you support SF 612, which would ban commercial collection of Minnesota's turtles.

The Center is a national nonprofit organization with more than 1.7 million supporters – including 20,000 Minnesotans – dedicated to conservation of rare wildlife and plants.

Collection and sale of wild turtles for pets, meat, and traditional Asian medicines is one of the top threats contributing to decline and extinction of wild turtle populations across the world. Commercial collection places additional pressure on turtle populations already suffering from threats like water pollution, habitat loss, road mortality, and climate change.

Minnesota's native wild turtles are highly sought-after for domestic and international commercial trade. Minnesota previously took the important step of limiting the number of licenses issued to turtle sellers, and less than 20 licensed commercial turtle trappers remain.

Even so, these trappers remove unsustainably high numbers of the state's precious turtles. In 2021, commercial turtle trappers removed approximately 10,000 painted turtles from the state's waterways. That level of exploitation is possible because a single trapper with minimal effort can place several inexpensive underwater hoop nets that each can catch dozens of turtles – a single trapper with a couple days effort can nearly clear a waterway of all its turtles.

Unlikely typically hunted species, like deer, turtles can take a decade or more to reach an age where they can begin breeding, and their populations depend on adults living for several more decades and breeding throughout their long lifespan.

The Center has worked for more than a decade to end unsustainable commercial trapping and trade of wild turtles in the United States. The Center has helped to end commercial trapping in Florida, Missouri, New York, South Carolina, and Texas, and secured additional protections in Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, and Oklahoma.

For so many other issues, Minnesota is a national leader in environmental protection. But our antiquated law on turtle trapping is a stain on the state's conservation record. Minnesota is one of only a handful of states in the entire country that still allows commercial collection of turtles.

Turtles are an essential part of Minnesota's ecosystems, and citizens depend on lawmakers to protect them for generations to come. Your support for this bill would stop a very small number of for-profit turtle traffickers from depleting the state's great wild heritage. Please support SF 612 and help secure a future for the state's turtles.