



# Minnesota Herpetological Society

PO Box 130366, Roseville, MN 55113

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January 16, 2023

Dear Mr. Strohmeier,

I am writing in my capacity as the Conservation Committee Chair of the Minnesota Herpetological Society to express support for current efforts related to the elimination of commercial turtle harvest in Minnesota. The Minnesota Herpetological Society is one of the largest and oldest herpetological societies in the country and has a long history of supporting amphibian and reptile conservation and research in Minnesota and beyond.

Minnesota is the Land of 10,000 Lakes and turtles play an important role in keeping Minnesota's waters clean and aquatic ecosystems functioning. Many of Minnesota's turtles are omnivorous, and readily feed on dead and dying plant and animal material, which keep Minnesota's lakes and rivers clean.

Turtles are long-lived organisms that are relatively slow to reach maturity. In addition, turtles have evolved over hundreds of millions of years to rely on very high levels of adult survivorship to sustain their populations. With few natural predators, turtle populations are not adapted to handle many of the anthropogenetic threats they now face. Threats such as harvest, road mortality, and invasive species (including disease) have resulted in turtles being one of the most imperiled groups of vertebrates in the world.

We must act now to reverse the current crisis facing Minnesota's turtles. MHS supports efforts to conserve Minnesota's turtle fauna, including those outlined in H.F. 234, and on behalf of our members and Minnesota's turtles, we thank the committee for its support on this issue.

Sincerely,

*Christopher E. Smith*

Christopher E. Smith, M.Sc., CWB®  
Conservation Committee Chair  
Minnesota Herpetological Society  
[conservation@mnherpsoc.org](mailto:conservation@mnherpsoc.org)



# Turtles 101

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Christopher E. Smith, M.Sc., C.W.B.  
Chair – Conservation Committee  
Minnesota Herpetological Society



# Protect Our Turtles

**Snapping Turtle**



**Painted Turtle**



**Blanding's Turtle**



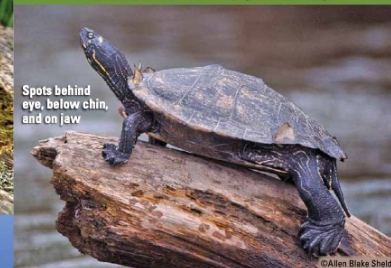
**Wood Turtle**



**Northern Map Turtle**



**Ouachita Turtle (WAH-shi-tah)**



**False Map Turtle**



**Smooth Softshell**



**Spiny Softshell**
















































- Preserve water quality
- Protect upland turtle habitat
- Leave turtles in the wild
- Do not disturb nesting turtles
- Avoid or brake for turtles if it is safe to do so
- Don't release pet turtles



## General comparison of reproductive potential among big-game species in Ontario

Snapping Turtle column was added by the Ontario Multi-Species Turtle Recovery Team in 2008.

Please note that up to 1400 eggs need to be laid by a snapping turtle before one offspring reaches maturity. This may not occur until year 50.

Year	Snapping Turtle	Black Bear	Moose	White-tailed Deer
0				
1				
2				 
3			 	 
4			 	 
5				 
6		 		 
17	 	  = 25	   = 681	  = 912

Note this chart does not take mortality into consideration.

This chart was developed by the OMNR Black Bear Technical Team in 2005 based on an original idea by George Kolenosky.

Snapping Turtle column was added by the Ontario Multi-Species Turtle Recovery Team in 2008.

Please note that up to 1400 eggs need to be laid by a snapping turtle before one offspring reaches maturity. This may not occur until year 50.

 = young of the year

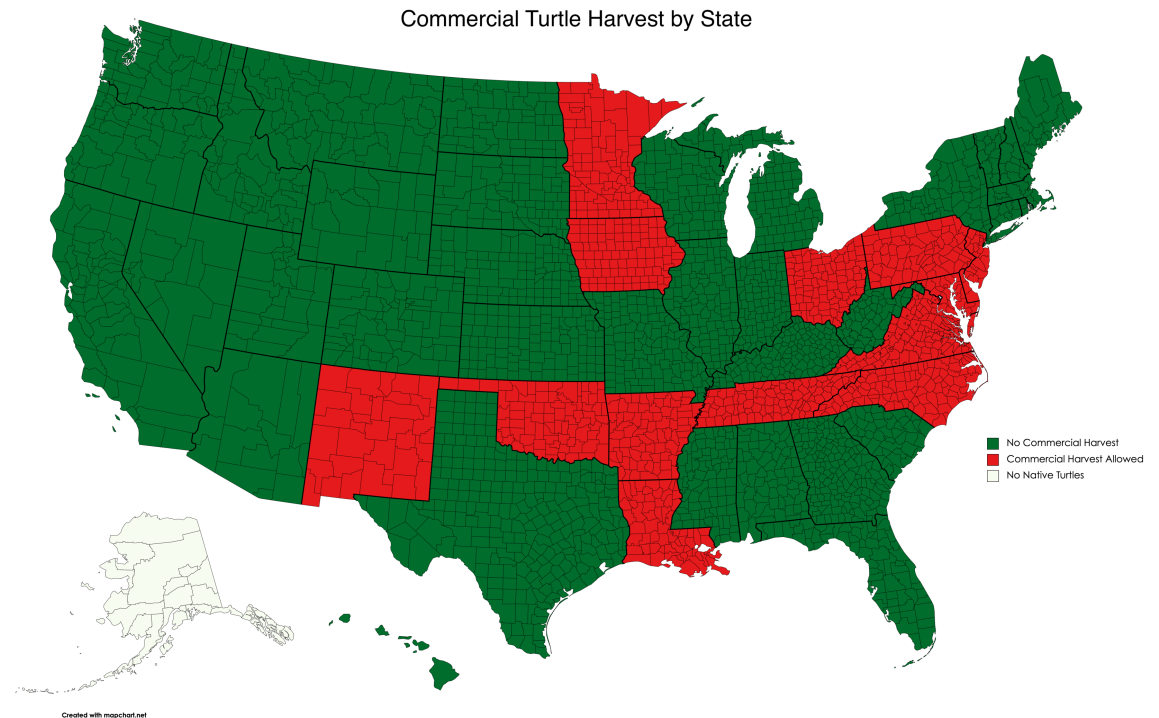
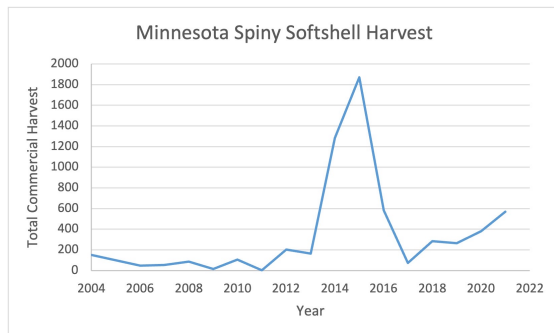
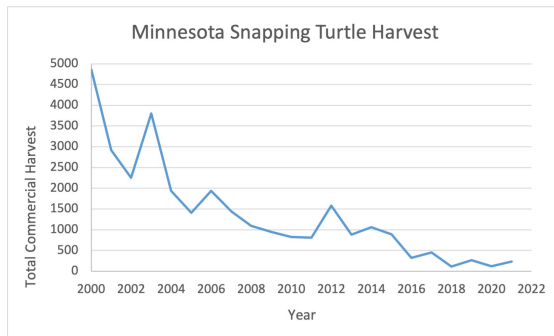
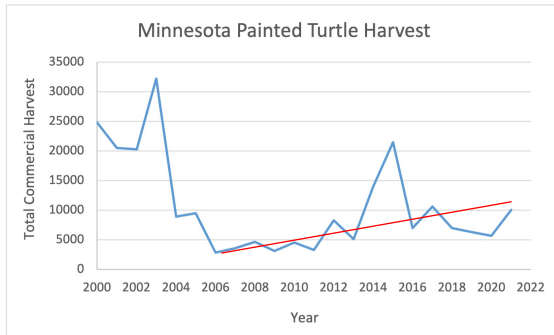
 = sexually immature

 = sexually mature

*It's not just that turtles CAN live a long time, it's that they MUST live a long time...*

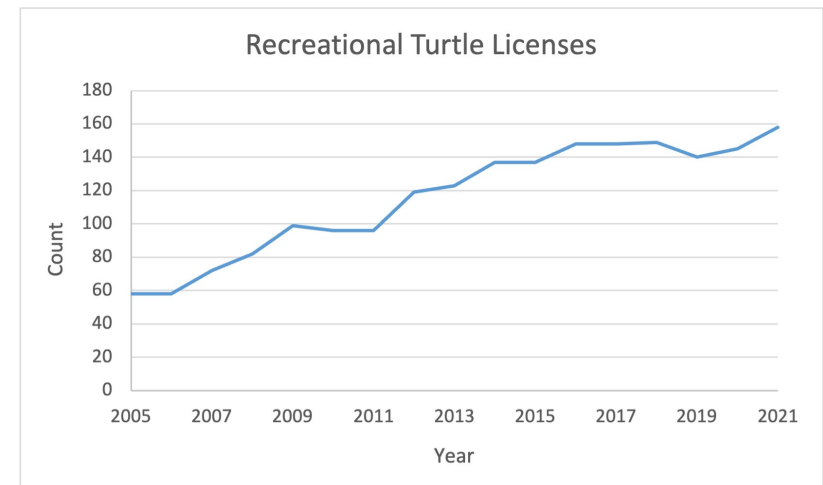
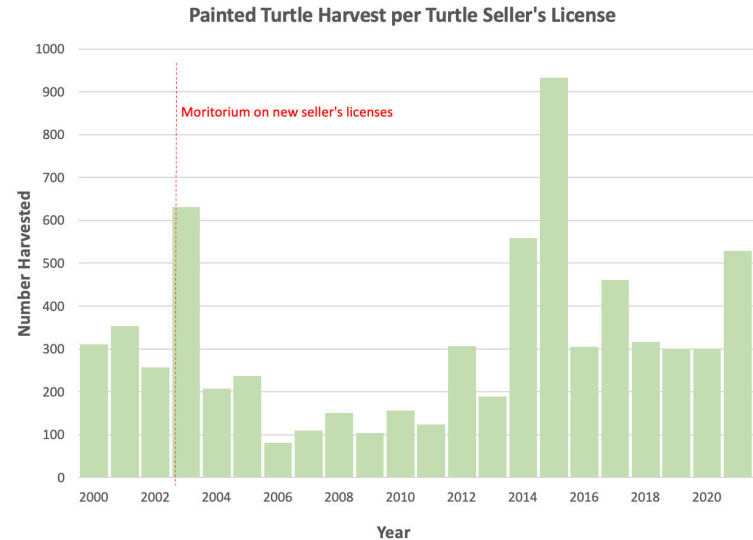
# History

- Moratorium on new turtle seller's licenses early 2000s
- Turtle sellers made aware of goal to eliminate harvest
- Then Senator Bob Lessard announced to the commercial turtle harvesters in the audience that "...this is the initial step and we will eliminate commercial harvesting in the future."



## Current Trends

- Commercial harvest per license increasing
- Recreational harvest license sales increasing
  - No reporting / data beyond license numbers
- Possession limits
  - Snapping Turtles: 3
  - Painted Turtles: 3
  - Spiny Softshell: Harvest eliminated as of December 1, 2021.





### What the bill does:

- Eliminates commercial harvest (19 licensees remaining)

### What the bill does not do:

- Prohibit recreational harvest
- Prohibit turtle races





# Questions?

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Contact:

Christopher E. Smith

[Conservation@MnHerpSoc.org](mailto:Conservation@MnHerpSoc.org)





Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to urge the revision of Minnesota DNR rules that allow what they refer to as “harvesting” turtles.

There are 19 DNR licenses issued in 2002. Already extreme challenges to ecologically-vital turtle populations are growing rapidly, and our turtle species populations are in genuine peril.

The science shows “taking” turtles adds significantly to that.

Turtles are a joy to many Minnesotans and are essential to the ecosystem of our lakes and rivers. They are not human food, or should not be, in this century.

All licenses should be revoked and trapping for commercial and private use must end. Minnesota can then join the majority of more enlightened states in protecting rather than exploiting this precious resource.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Karin Winegar  
1832 Carroll Avenue  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55104

Dear Representative Hansen and members, Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee,

I am writing in support of HF234 (Vang) Game and fish; provisions for taking turtles modified. Please advance HF234 and put an end to all commercial turtle harvest in Minnesota. Policy related to the state's native wildlife should be based on sound conservation practices and principles guided by science. We know that the state's populations of turtles (and reptiles and amphibians as a group) are imperiled by many threats. Our leaders in government should be looking for opportunities to conserve them rather than sanctioning activities that further diminish their chances of survival in our wetlands, lakes and rivers. There is now no legitimate justification for even a small number of commercial licenses, much less licenses that allow an unlimited harvest. Like many Minnesota citizens, I care about native wildlife and understand the unique contributions that turtles make to our water quality, fisheries and the health of aquatic ecosystems. Please amend the law to eliminate any and all remaining commercial licenses to harvest turtles, as so many states have done. The time is now to make this a priority. Thank you.

Laurie Allmann Marine on St. Croix, MN

Dear Representative Strohmeier,

I am writing in support of legislation to PROTECT turtles- that they not be allowed to be taken as game.

They who remain need to remain in peace. Not sold for turtle soup.

**HF234 (Vang) Game and fish; provisions for taking turtles modified on January 18<sup>th</sup>.**

Sincerely,

Sarah Nettleton



I support HF234 (Vang) and the end of the commercial turtle harvest in MN!

Gary Noren -- 651-214-1965

Lower St. Croix Watershed -- 07030005

"Love is the bridge between you and everything." - Rumi

Please support HF234 (Vang) — No more turtle trapping

Ron Kroese and Kimberly Colburn  
Falcon Heights, MN

Dear Rep. Strohmeier,

As an avid nature lover and birder, it pains me to notice the obvious dismantling of our natural environment. No one seems to say "enough is enough" when, if we cared to step back a moment and look at the bigger picture, we would see the inevitable results of our behavior. We cannot afford our blinders that have put us on this selfish path of profit over the greater good and health of the earth beneath our feet.

Please change the rules for harvesting turtles by passing HF 234.

Thank you. I hope, once again, to see turtles laying eggs more frequently than I have in recent years.

Judy Chucker  
St. Louis Park

*"Wherever there are birds, there is hope." --Mehmet Muratilden*





PO Box 22262, St. Paul, MN 55122

January 17th, 2022

Rep. Rick Hansen  
Chair, Env. and Natural Resources Finance and Policy  
407 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Hansen,

Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates, MLR, is writing in support of two bills before the committee; 1) Rep. Vang's HF 234, Game and fish; provisions for taking turtles modified and, 2)HF 245 Rough Fish Report, Appropriation.

MLR has over 270 lake associations as members. One of their key messages and educational efforts, particularly early in the spring, is the protection of turtles. Lake associations recognize that turtles are key to lake ecology in Minnesota and that turtle numbers have been falling. These lake associations encourage members to watch for turtles crossing roads, and urges them to protect turtle nests and hatchlings trying to make their way back to the water.

The changes to the licensing requirements for taking turtles and an end to the commercial turtle license effectuated by HF 234 support lake association efforts and values. These changes are long overdue and welcome.


MLR also supports HF 245 (Rep. Jordan) Report on rough fish funding provided, and money appropriated.

During the 2018 Aquatic Invaders Summit sponsored by MLR, we had a presentation on the long-lived Bigmouthed Buffalo fish. There is not much known about the Bigmouth Buffalo, but researchers have begun to understand that due to its longevity, reproduction is more complex, is native to Minnesota's waters, and is under increasing pressure from Aquatic Invasive Species and bow hunting. Investing in research is a critical first step to making wise management choices. It is a recognition that so-called "rough fish" have a value and provide ecosystem services that we do not fully understand even if they are not highly valued by sports anglers.

If there is anything we can do as an organization in support of these bills, please do not hesitate to ask. Thank you for your efforts to promote conservation of Minnesota's natural resources.

We strongly encourage the committee to approve these two important pieces of legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Forester", written in a cursive style.

Jeff Forester, E.D. MLR  
612-961-6144  
jeff@mnlakesandrivers.org