



Minnesota Herpetological Society

PO Box 130366, Roseville, MN 55113

February 7, 2021

Dear Mr. Strohmeier,

I am writing in my capacity as President 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 anthropogenic threats they now face. Threats such as harvest, road mortality, invasive species, and climate change 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, and on behalf of our members and Minnesota's turtles, we thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

Laura Windels

President - Minnesota Herpetological Society

Roseville, MN

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Minnesota Commercial Turtle Harvest

Stop an Unsustainable Practice



Turtles are one of the most endangered groups of animals on the planet. Over 60% of turtle species are at risk of extinction.

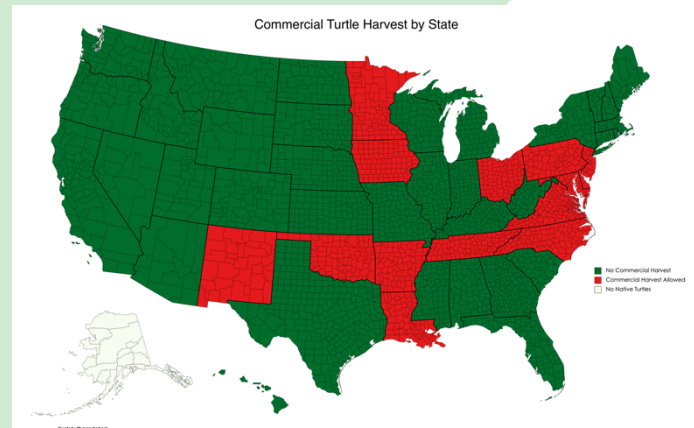
In Minnesota, turtle populations face many threats, including but not limited to habitat loss, climate change, pollution, disease, and over harvest. In light of these threats, even a small amount of increased mortality may drive populations to extinction – the threat of this is greatest in northern latitudes¹ due to our short summers and turtle-growing season. Even once harvest stops, Minnesota turtle populations are likely to continue to decline without intervention.

Turtles are an important part of Minnesota's aquatic ecosystems. They serve as janitors of wetlands, lakes and rivers, and help keep water clean improving habitat for wildlife and humans.

What is the solution? Act now to stop the commercial harvest of Minnesota's turtles.

The Facts:

- Although a moratorium was placed on new turtle seller's licenses in 2002, thousands of turtles are still harvested annually by 21 remaining licensees
- Three species of turtle may be commercially harvested (painted, snapping, and spiny softshell)
- No limit for commercial harvest
- Harvest steady or increasing in recent years due to increased exploitation for food and pets overseas
- Minnesota is one of fewer than 15 states that still allow commercial harvest of wild turtles
- Goal of the bill is to eliminate commercial harvest; recreational harvest for personal use is retained, an allowance for turtle races is retained



Why are turtles different?

Unlike many game species, turtles are long-lived animals, and many species take a decade or more to mature. As adults they are adapted to have very low rates of mortality. Once mature, an adult female may lay eggs for 50 or more years. As a result, losses of adults due to road mortality and harvest deprive individuals of decades of reproductive potential – resulting in significant population-level effects.



¹ Midwood, J. D., Cairns, N. A., Stoot, L. J., Cooke, S. J., & Blouin-Demers, G. (2015). Bycatch mortality can cause extirpation in four freshwater turtle species. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 25(1), 71-80.