



IUCN SSC TORTOISE AND FRESHWATER TURTLE SPECIALIST GROUP
INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE / SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION



c/o Chelonian Research Foundation, 168 Goodrich Street, Lunenburg, Massachusetts 01462 USA
www.iucn-tftsg.org; www.chelonian.org

February 5, 2021

Dear Mr. Strohmeier,

I'm writing in my capacity as Chair of the IUCN SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group to express strong support for the legislation pending in Minnesota to finally end the commercial trapping of turtles for the pet or meat trades. We are 350 conservation biologists representing the main global intergovernmental organization that monitors and responds to threats facing freshwater turtles worldwide. The TFTSG works in close cooperation with the United States Federal and several State governments, international conventions like CITES, and a range of US-based and international organizations focused on freshwater turtle conservation, such as the Turtle Survival Alliance, Turtle Conservancy, Chelonian Research Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society, Global Wildlife Conservation, Asian Turtle Program, and others. We work towards minimizing or reversing threats to these animals.

The state of Minnesota has a rich heritage of biodiversity, but continues to allow the commercial collection and sale of 3 species of native American turtles: Painted Turtles (*Chrysemys picta*), Snapping Turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*) and Spiny Softshells (*Apalone spinifera*). These are among the most widely seen and enjoyed wild animals for Minnesotans or out-of-state tourists while canoeing or enjoying the many lakes and ponds for which the state is rightly famous.

Most states have eliminated or curtailed such harvesting through legislation and have stopped issuing commercial harvesting licenses over the past 20 years. Harvest data show that thousands of freshwater turtles continue to be collected in Minnesota. These are shipped or sold across the U.S. for pets or for meat, and increasingly turtles are shipped legally or illegally to Asia for the burgeoning pet trade there. For example, during a recent 5-year period, nearly 60,000 Snapping Turtles were shipped from

Minneapolis-St. Paul airport to China. These were not declared as wild-caught, but it is usually the case that many are. Numerous studies have shown that wild turtle populations cannot withstand intensive collection without experiencing severe population declines or extirpation.

Turtles and tortoises are among the world's most endangered vertebrates, with more than half of all 366 species threatened with extinction, as determined by the IUCN Red List and the IUCN SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group. Turtles and tortoises are at high risk of extinction because of their combination of life history traits: long lifespan, delayed reproductive maturity and high adult survival rates (when they are not exploited by people). These life history traits served turtles well during their history, but render their populations unable to respond adequately to high levels of harvesting. Unsustainable collection is a severe threat to their existence.

We urgently request that the state of Minnesota pass HF387 aimed at stopping the commercial harvesting of freshwater turtles in Minnesota.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CS', is displayed on a light gray rectangular background.

Craig B. Stanford, Ph.D.
Chair, IUCN SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group
on behalf of the 350 members of the specialist group