



**SIERRA
CLUB**

IOWA CHAPTER

Protecting Iowa's Wild Turtles from Overharvest

In 2016, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) implemented rules that closed the commercial and sport turtle harvest between May 15 and July 15, the primary weeks that turtles lay their eggs. The rules also set daily catch limits and possession limits. The rules close the sport and commercial trapping of turtles between May 15 and July 15, for the 8 weeks during the primary nesting season, for painted and softshell turtles; the same season applies to the commercial harvest



Snapping turtle. Photo by Mark Rouw

of snapping turtles. For commercial trappers, the rules also set a daily catch limit of 4 common snapping turtles and a possession limit of 20, a daily catch limit of 1 painted turtle and a possession limit of 5, and a daily catch limit of 1 softshell turtle (either smooth or spiny) and a possession limit of 5 softshell turtles. For sport trappers, the daily catch limits are the same as for the commercial trappers, along with a possession limit of 100 pounds of live turtles or 50 pounds of dressed turtles.

Ensuring a Sustainable Harvest:

Sierra Club supports closing the season between January 1 and July 15, for both commercial and sport trappers. Closing the season during some of the months the turtles are breeding as well as during the primary nesting season allows the turtles to sustain or increase their populations, while allowing some turtles to be harvested. The season should be closed for both male and female turtles.



Softshell turtle

Background

Turtle populations are declining due to over-harvest. Additionally turtles face challenges due to nest predation, habitat loss, water pollution, collisions with automobiles as the turtles move from and to nesting sites, flooding which inundates nesting sites and droughts which dry the wetland habitat required for the turtles. Most of the turtles that are commercially trapped are sent to overseas markets, mainly in Asia.

The Good News:

The turtle populations can increase their populations to a more sustainable level with a closed season that corresponds with the breeding and nesting season. However, the ongoing population health is fragile and could easily result in over-harvest if adequate and proper monitoring is not pursued. Consequently the Iowa Chapter supports annually monitoring the populations of the four commercially harvested turtle species. The Chapter also supports authorizing the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to close the season for any turtle species that faces population declines.

A harvest is considered sustainable if the population of turtles is able to maintain its population, or even grow its population, allowing the turtles to continue to live in Iowa's waters for generations to come. The turtle harvest is not sustainable if it results in declining populations. Likewise the harvest is not sustainable if there is a risk that the turtles will be extirpated from the waters in Iowa. Once the turtles have been removed from a water body, turtles have great difficulty re-establishing their populations. Turtle trappers call the turtles a renewable resource. However the resource is not renewable if the populations cannot sustain themselves. The resource is not renewable if the turtles have vanished from the water bodies where they have traditionally lived.



Painted turtle. Photo by Ray Harden

**Let's ensure that turtles are able to live sustainably
in Iowa's rivers and lakes!**