



Protect the Turtles in the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area

The Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area is a biodiversity hotspot for amphibians and reptiles - frogs, toads, turtles, salamanders, lizards, and snakes. This area has the highest number of amphibian and reptile species in the state, along with the highest number of rare species of amphibians and reptiles in the state. Fifty sevenⁱ of the 72ⁱⁱ amphibians and reptiles native to Iowa live in the Conservation Area, including 15 species listed on the Threatened and endangered listⁱⁱⁱ. This area is so special that it became the first amphibian and reptile conservation area in the country.

The Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area encompasses a topographic region of the state known as the Mississippi Alluvial Plain. The habitat is key to sustaining the diverse species of amphibians and reptiles – wetlands, ponds, rivers, streams, and upland areas. The conservation area includes areas along the Cedar, Iowa, and Mississippi Rivers in Johnson, Cedar, Lee, Muscatine, Louisa, Des Moines, and Washington counties. Of the approximately 470,000 acres in the Conservation Area, some of the land is owned by private citizens and some of the land is owned by federal and state government agencies. Two-thirds of Iowa's rivers empty into the Mississippi River^{iv}, helping to create this unique area.

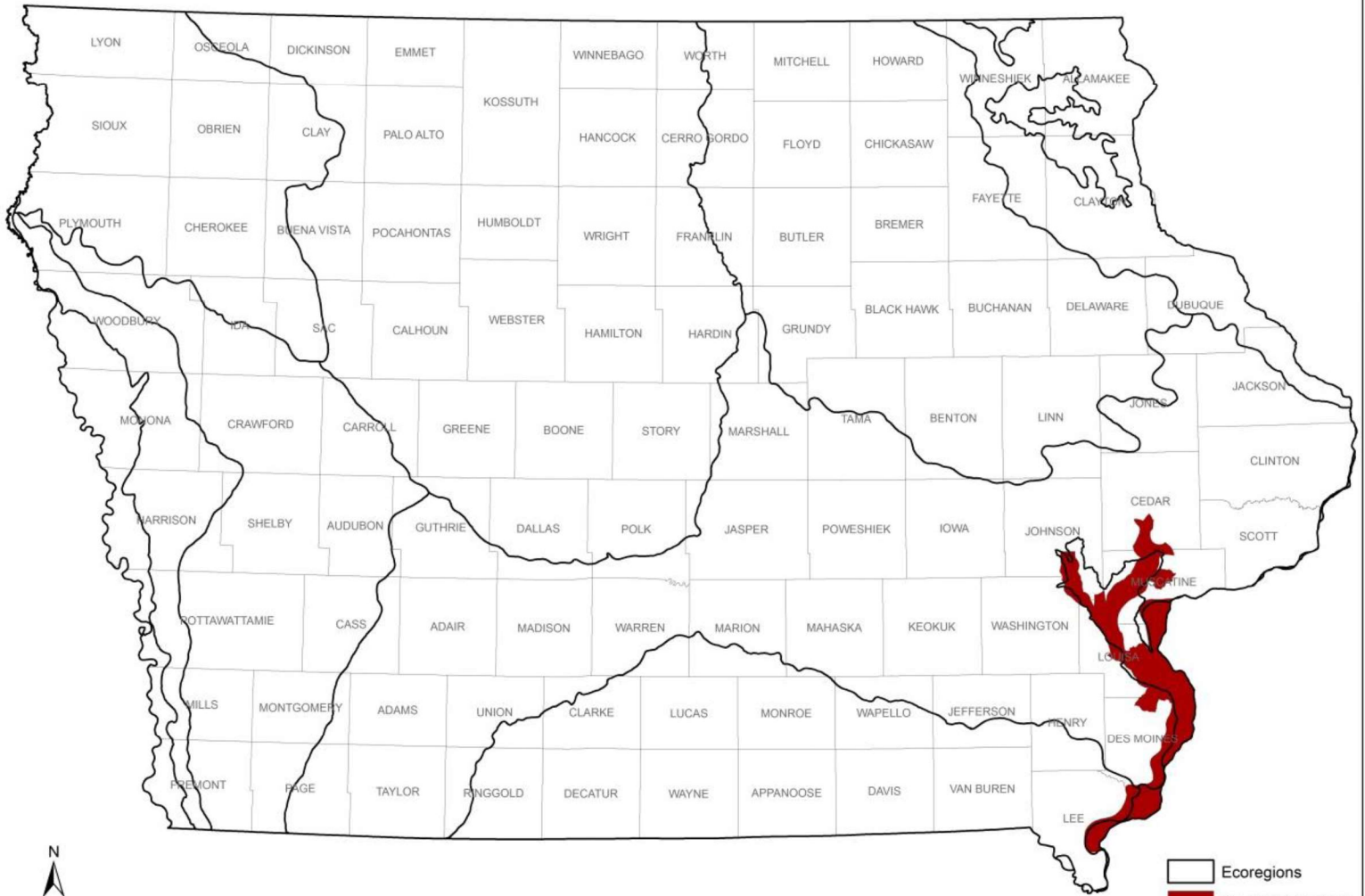
Even though this area is rich habitat for amphibians and reptiles, four turtle species – common snapping turtle, smooth softshell turtle, spiny softshell turtle, and the painted turtle -- can be commercially and recreational trapped in the Conservation Area. The turtle populations in Iowa are declining significantly. In fact, Iowa's Wildlife Action Plan lists the snapping turtle, smooth softshell turtle, and spiny softshell turtles as reptiles of greatest conservation need^v. Species of greatest conservation need have low or declining populations as well as those that are listed as endangered or threatened species; all of the species of greatest conservation need are in need of conservation action to prohibit further declines and to begin rebuilding their populations.

As the most diverse area for reptiles and amphibians in the state, this area should be a sanctuary for the reptiles and amphibians living there; the turtles should be allowed to live there free from turtle trapping, especially for those turtles that have been placed on the list of reptiles of greatest conservation need.

Commercial and recreational turtle trapping should be prohibited in the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area.

Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area^{vi}

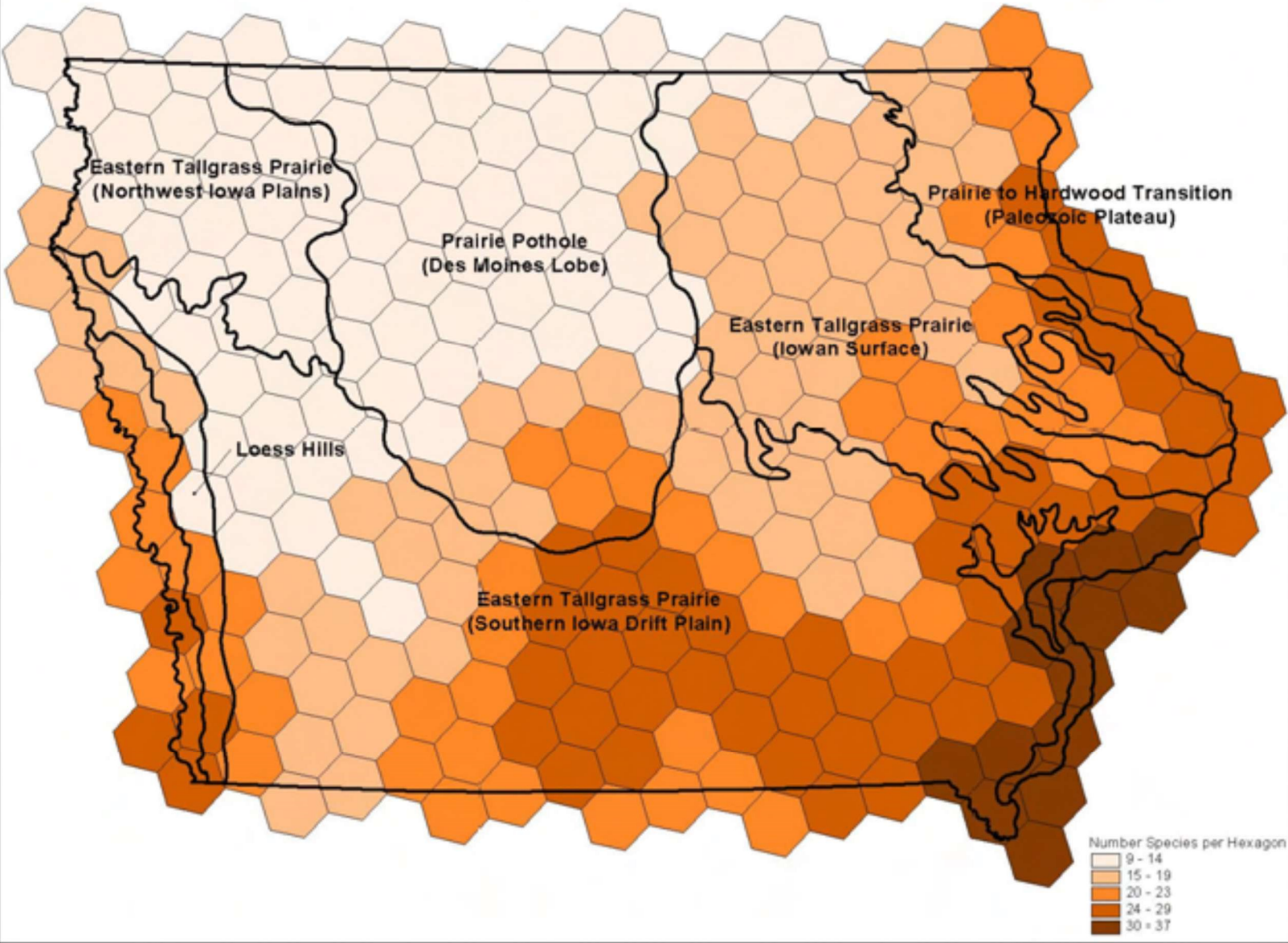
Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area



Map Date : August 2015

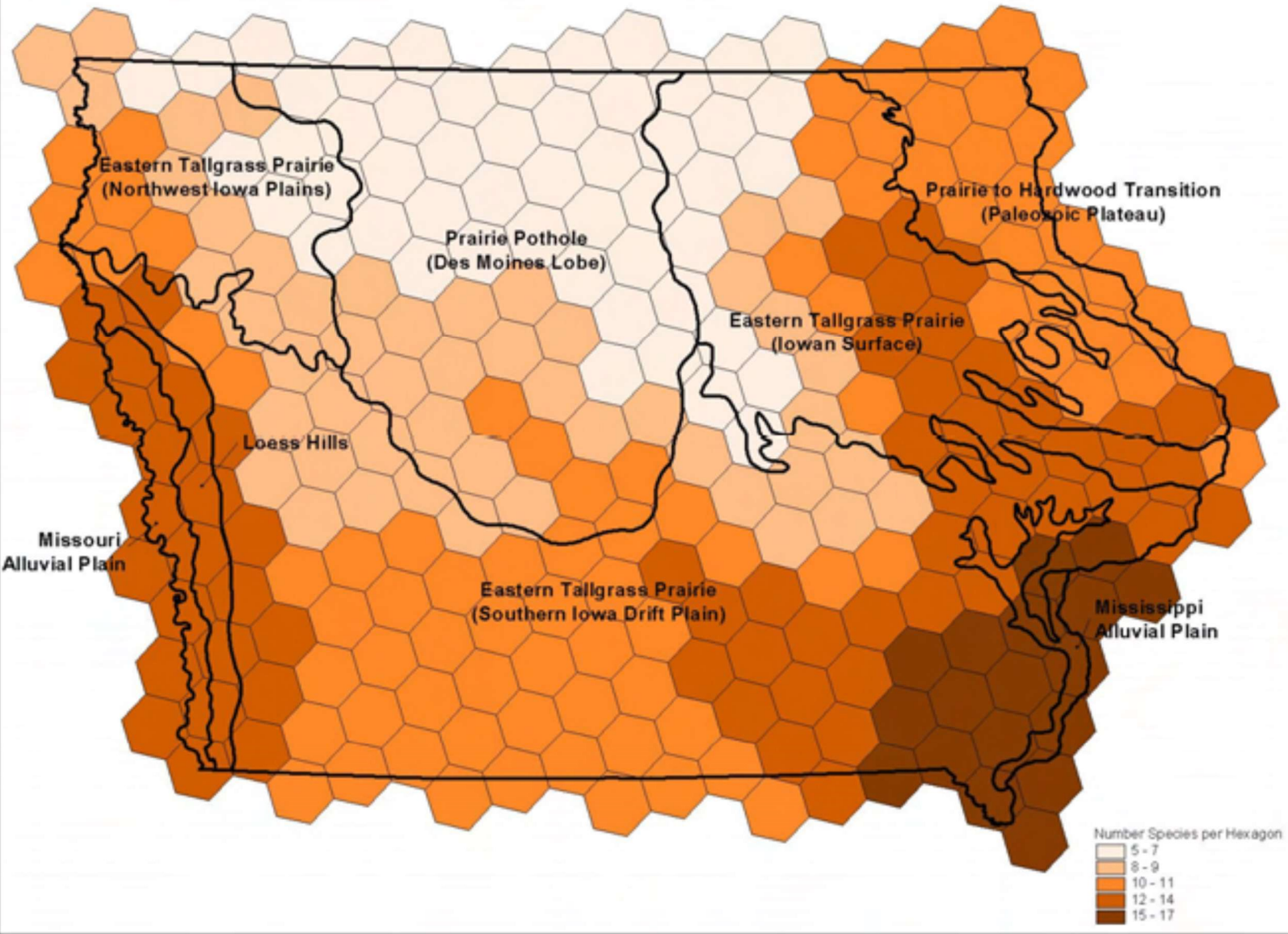
Reptile Species Richness^{vii}

Total Reptile Richness



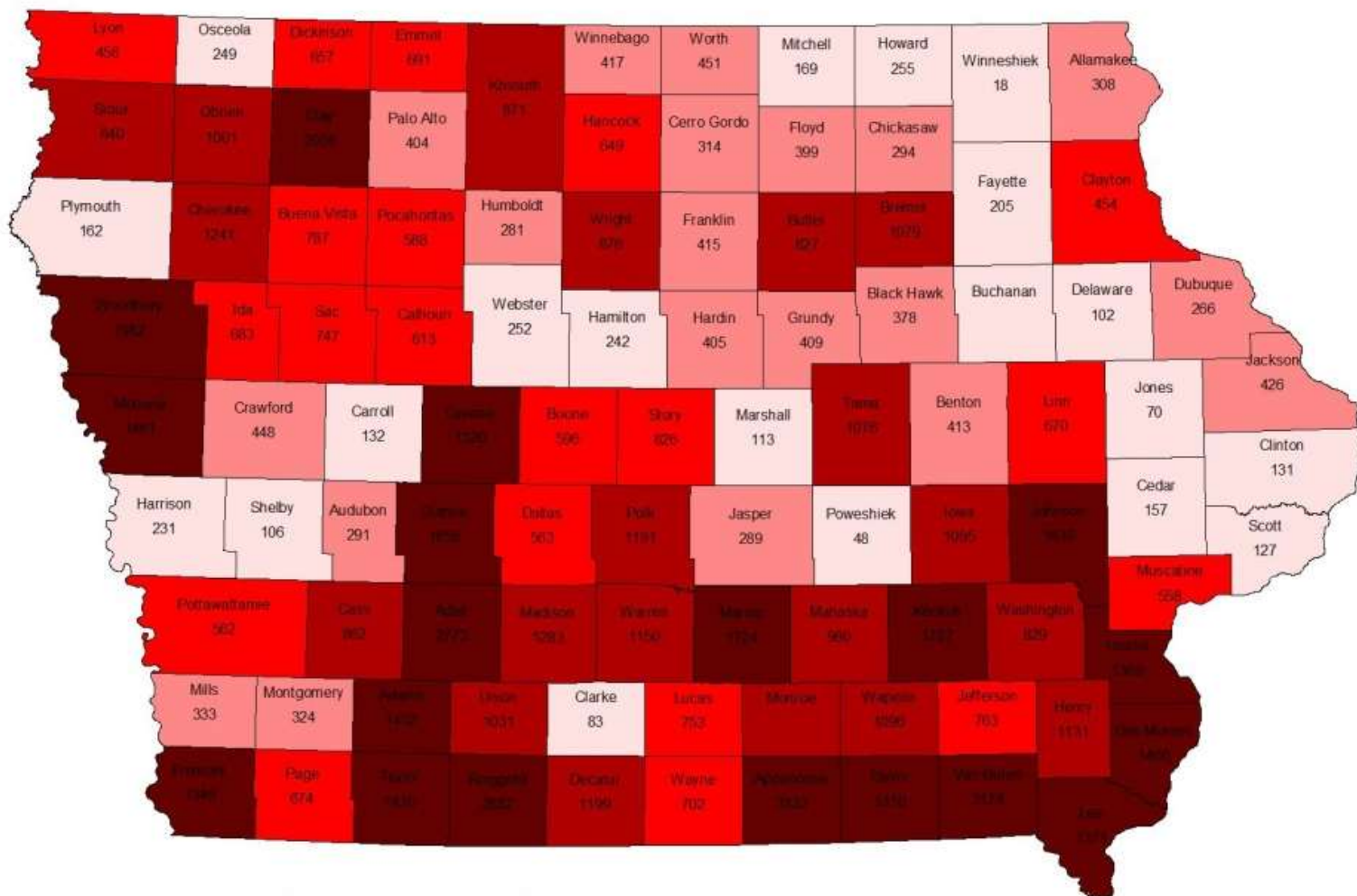
Amphibian Species Richness^{viii}

Total Amphibian Richness



Snapping turtles harvested in 2008 to 2013^{ix}

Note that the turtle harvest in the counties in the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area is among the highest counties in the state.

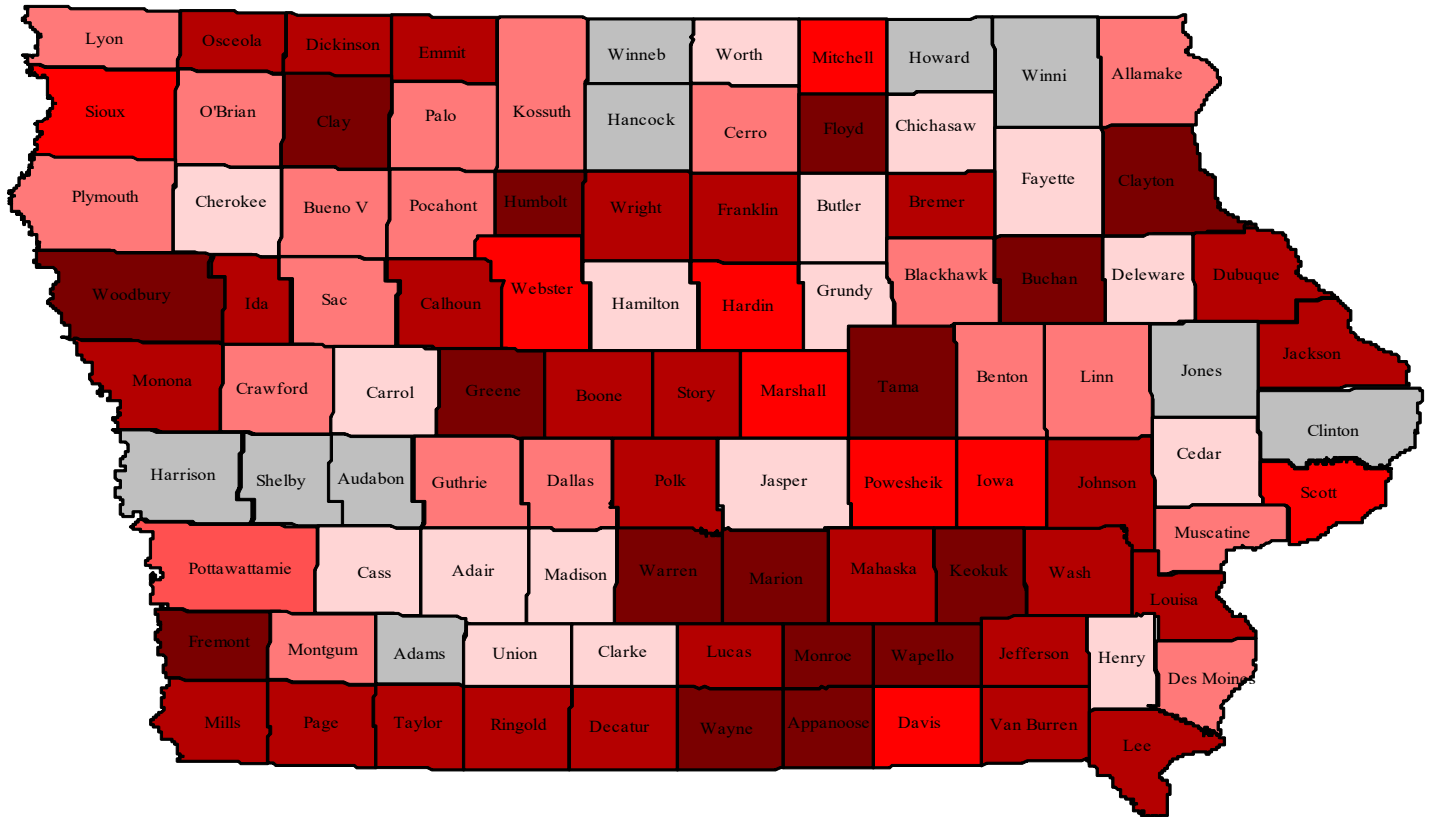


Snapper Numbers Harvested by County 2008-2013

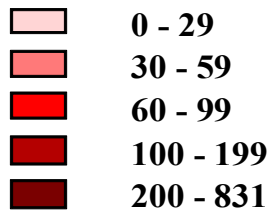
18 - 255 266 - 451 454 - 826 827 - 1283 1310 - 3333

Snapping turtles harvested in 2014^x

Note that in 2014 the turtle harvest in the counties in the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area had declined from being the highest counties to lower numbers. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has not indicated reasons for the decline.



Snapper Numbers Harvested by County 2014



Sources

Bruce Ehresman, "SE Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area Now a Reality", Wildlife Diversity News, Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program, June, 2007

Iowa Wildlife Action Plan, "Securing a Future for Fish and Wildlife - A Conservation Legacy for Iowans", Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 2015

Connie Street, "Turtles and snakes and frogs, oh my!" Muscatine Journal, March 28, 2007

"Chapter Eight Priorities For Conservation Actions", Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Jeffrey B. LeClere, A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Iowa, ECO Herpetological Publishing and Distribution, 2013

Chad R. Dolan, "Challenges Facing Iowa's Turtle Populations", Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Scott Gritters, Karen Osterkamp, Denny Weiss, Chad Dolan, Mike Mason, Karen Kinkead, Mike Steuck, Joint Committee on Turtle Harvest, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Iowa's Commercial Turtle Harvest", released in 2013

Endnotes

ⁱ Jeffrey B. LeClere, A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Iowa, ECO Herpetological Publishing and Distribution, 2013, page 20

ⁱⁱ Connie Street, "Turtles and snakes and frogs, oh my!" Muscatine Journal, March 28, 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ Jeffrey B. LeClere, A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Iowa, ECO Herpetological Publishing and Distribution, 2013, page 20

^{iv} Jeffrey B. LeClere, A Field Guide to the Amphibians and Reptiles of Iowa, ECO Herpetological Publishing and Distribution, 2013, page 20

^v Iowa Wildlife Action Plan, "Securing a Future for Fish and Wildlife - A Conservation Legacy for Iowans", Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 2015, page 42

^{vi} Iowa Wildlife Action Plan, "Securing a Future for Fish and Wildlife - A Conservation Legacy for Iowans", Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 2015, page 143

^{vii} "Chapter Eight Priorities For Conservation Actions", Iowa Department of Natural Resources, page 147

^{viii} "Chapter Eight Priorities For Conservation Actions", Iowa Department of Natural Resources, page 148

^{ix} Chad R. Dolan, "Challenges Facing Iowa's Turtle Populations", Iowa Department of Natural Resources

^x Chad R. Dolan, "Challenges Facing Iowa's Turtle Populations", Iowa Department of Natural Resources