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 seven of the 72 amphblians and reptiles native to Iowa live in the Conservation Area, including 15 species listed on the Threatened and endangered list. 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, 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. 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.
What you can do to help protect the Turtles in the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area

Contact the following agencies and tell them that you want them to prohibit commercial and sport trapping of turtles living in the Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area.

Natural Resources Commission
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
502 East 9th Street, 4th Floor
Des Moines, IA 50319-0034
To send an email to the staff supporting the Commission, use Kim.Rasler@dnr.iowa.gov
The names and emails of the commission members can be found using a link found on the webpage www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/Boards-Commissions/Natural-Resource-Commission

Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
502 East 9th Street, 4th Floor
Des Moines, IA 50319-0034

Bruce Trautman
Deputy Director, Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
502 East 9th Street, 4th Floor
Des Moines, IA 50319-0034
bruce.trautman@dnr.iowa.gov

Your state senator and state representative
An email address for your legislator can be found at
www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/informationOnLegislators/allLegislators

Gov. Kim Reynolds
State Capitol
1015 E. Grand Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50319
To register an opinion with the governor, use https://governor.iowa.gov/constituent-services/register-an-opinion
Southeast Iowa Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area
Reptile Species Richness

Total Reptile Richness

Eastern Tallgrass Prairie (Northwest Iowa Plains)
Prairie Pothole (Des Moines Lobe)
Eastern Tallgrass Prairie (Iowan Surface)
Eastern Tallgrass Prairie (Southern Iowa Drift Plain)
Prairie to Hardwood Transition (Paleoico Plateau)
Loess Hills

Number of Species per Hexagon

- 9 - 14
- 15 - 19
- 20 - 23
- 24 - 29
- 30 - 37
Amphibian Species Richness
Snapping turtles harvested in 2008 to 2013

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.
Snapping turtles harvested in 2014

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Snapper Numbers Harvested by County 2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 - 59</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 - 99</td>
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<tr>
<td>100 - 199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200 - 831</td>
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</tbody>
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Sources


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


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


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