

**Conservation and Trade Management of
Freshwater and Terrestrial Turtles in the United States**
St. Louis, Missouri, September 20-24, 2010
Convened and hosted by the
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, International Wildlife Trade Program

Management Working Group

FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Shaded recommendations are those determined by the workshop to be the most important and most actionable in a short timeframe.

Group Charge - Evaluate information on State management, existing national (including Endangered Species Act), and international (CITES), strategies and regulations, and their effectiveness for turtle conservation.

Make recommendations to improve current management and regulatory regimes and measures needed to strengthen the conservation of freshwater and terrestrial turtles.

Overall

States should recognize that an international demand for wild-collected turtles from the United States will persist into the future.

Therefore, the Management Working Group recommends the following:

Funding

1. Modify State Wildlife Action Plans to allow surveys for turtle species that may be under harvest pressure.
2. Establish a use pay process (e.g. turtle hunters, collectors, etc).

Regulatory

1. Recognizing the need for some legitimate exemptions, at a minimum, require a permit and/or license prior to collection of turtles from the wild. Permit fees should adequately cover costs (administrative, enforcement, management, and research).
2. Recognizing the need for some legitimate exemptions, all collection of turtles should be accurately reported in a timely manner to the State, including information on the size of animals (i.e. categories of size by species, use, or disposition).

3. Regulate harvest of turtles from the wild based on the best available scientific knowledge of species-specific life history traits to ensure self-sustaining viable populations in the wild. For species where data are lacking, consider more restrictive and/or more conservative regulations.
4. Consider regulatory harvest limits for turtles based on one or more of the following areas: bag limits, possession limits, seasonal limitations, size limits, life stage limits, [geographic] area limits, species look-alike considerations, etc. Where species are shared across State boundaries, endeavor to cooperate in establishing these limits to ensure sustainability and prevent over-harvest.
5. Where feasible, either by policy and/or regulatory means, move the supply stream of turtles from wild sources to captive produced stock.
6. Consider creating certification systems for captive bred animals to differentiate those specimens from wild collected animals as a management and enforcement tool.
7. Regulations on turtle farming operations should include:
 - Farms should be closed cycle (self-contained populations)
 - A single agency should have the lead on regulations
 - Farms should support the costs of regulating them (e.g. user-pay)
 - Farms should provide detailed reports
 - Stock should be identified/identifiable
 - Only native species should be farmed; a “white list” of approved species would be beneficial
 - Disease control procedures should be in place
 - Waste control/disposal procedures should be in place
 - Adequate inspection protocols should be instituted

Education/Information

Develop a communication plan that highlights key toolbox strategies:

1. Focus on outreach to State decision-makers – especially to make State Directors champions of turtle conservation.
 - Use regional/State chapters of The Wildlife Society (TWS) [and American Fisheries Society?] and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) as the vehicle to deliver this message.
 - Prepare talking points/summary for each State:
 - Generate State stewardship pride in unique contributions to protecting turtles in the mega-diversity turtle nation (the United States)
 - Discuss unique problems of the life history constraints of turtles
 - Discuss regulatory actions
 - Press release
 - Use Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) and other partners to engage in the above within the Year of the Turtle and other existing outreach programs covering turtles - - UNDERWAY.

Interstate Communication

1. States should share information about commercial turtle operators/permit holders with neighboring (or nearby) states (identity, violation history, etc) within confidentiality constraints.
2. Explore feasibility of extending Interstate Wildlife Violator compact to all herpetofauna.
3. Disseminate AFWA State regulatory study to the States for use in reviewing/refining regulatory scheme (cross-State regulatory coordination) - - COMPLETED.
4. Work with PARC and other partners to develop and conduct training for enforcement personnel in identification and handling and other relevant enforcement matters.
5. States and Federal agencies should recognize the need for tracking of interstate commerce in herpetofauna.
6. Develop turtle farming Best Management Practices (BMPs) including:
 - humane treatment of turtles
 - encourage innovation
 - disease management
 - waste management
 - uncontaminated food source
 - farm construction