

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
Wednesday, March 21, 2018

Contact: Jenna Loda (510) 844- 7136 or [jloda@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:jloda@biologicaldiversity.org)

Evelyn Merz (713) 644-8228 or [elmerz@hal-pc.org](mailto:elmerz@hal-pc.org)

**Texas Proposes Ending Unsustainable Commercial Wild Turtle Trapping**  
*List of States Curbing Commercial Turtle Harvest Grows*

**Austin, TX** -- In response to a [petition](#) filed by the Center for Biological Diversity and several Texas-based conservation organizations, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission today approved publication of a proposed rule that would prohibit commercial collection of the state's wild turtles.

"We're so grateful these badly needed protections for Texas' rare, native turtles are moving forward," said **Jenny Loda, a Center attorney and biologist** who works to protect vulnerable reptiles and amphibians. "For-profit collectors shouldn't be allowed to put the state's turtles at risk of extinction."

Texas is the latest in a growing list of states - including Missouri, New York and Iowa - that have put an end to unlimited commercial collection of freshwater turtles.

Under current Texas law, unlimited collection of four native, freshwater turtle species is allowed on private property: common snapping turtles, red-eared sliders, smooth softshells and spiny softshells.

Texas modified its regulations in 2007 to protect freshwater turtles from collection on the state's public lands and waters. But this only resulted in protections for turtles in 2.2 percent of the water bodies in Texas. Recent studies concluded that current turtle collection in Texas is likely not sustainable.

At today's Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission meeting, staff from the state Parks and Wildlife Department presented their findings based on a review of the petition, along with scientific literature and the department's own data. Department staff determined that there is sufficient scientific justification to prohibit the commercial collection of the common snapping turtle, red-eared slider, smooth softshell and spiny softshell.

Department officials further explained that turtles are among the nongame species of greatest concern in Texas. Turtles' slow reproduction makes it unlikely that populations can remain stable when high numbers of adults and older juveniles are steadily removed from a population.

"This is great news for Texas' freshwater turtles as commercial trapping is devastating to turtle populations that are already suffering from multiple other threats, including habitat loss, water pollution and vehicular collisions," said **Evelyn Merz, conservation chair for the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter**. "We hope that the state will finalize the proposed rule and ban commercial turtle trapping; otherwise, Texas' turtle populations will continue to plummet."

The petition that spurred today's action was submitted last year by the Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter, Texas Rivers Protection Association and Texas Snake Initiative.

#### Background

Millions of turtles classified as wild-caught are exported from the United States every year to supply food and medicinal markets in Asia, where native turtle populations have already been depleted by soaring consumption. Because turtles bioaccumulate toxins from prey and burrow in contaminated sediment, turtle meat is often laced with mercury, PCBs and pesticides, posing a health risk. Adult turtles are also taken from the wild to breed hatchlings for the international pet trade.

As part of a [Campaign](#) to protect turtles in the United States, the Center for Biological Diversity has been petitioning states that allow unrestricted commercial turtle collection to improve their regulations. Earlier this month, in response to a Center petition, the Missouri Department of Conservation banned commercial collection of the state's wild freshwater turtles. In September of last year, Nevada created a statewide ban on the destructive commercial collection of all reptiles and New York halted all commercial terrapin turtle harvesting.

Before that, in March 2017, Iowa adopted new regulations setting closed seasons and possession limits for commercial turtle trappers. In 2012 Georgia approved state rules regulating the commercial collection of turtles, and Alabama completely banned commercial collection. And in 2009 Florida responded by banning almost all commercial collection of freshwater turtles from public and private waters.

Texas is in a regional hotspot for commercial turtle collectors, and reform is needed. If the state ends commercial collection within its borders, adjacent states would likely follow its example; the region would be better equipped to protect its turtle populations by making clear to turtle traders that trade is strictly regulated and enforced.

The Center recently petitioned for a ban on unlimited commercial trapping in [Arkansas](#), [Louisiana](#), and [Oklahoma](#), three states that share a border with Texas.

Texas spiny softshell turtle photo by Gary M. Stolz, USFWS. This image is [available](#) for media use.

###

About the Center For Biological Diversity

*The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.6 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.*

About the Sierra Club

*The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3 million members and supporters. In addition to helping people from all backgrounds explore nature and our outdoor heritage, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org).*