



Walter Wright, Jr.
wwright@mwlaw.com
(501) 688.8839

Robbing the Wild - How 10 States' Refusal to Ban Trapping is Hurting America's Wild Turtles: Center for Biological Diversity Report

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The Center for Biological Diversity ("CBD") issued a report titled:

Robbing the Wild: How 10 States' Refusal to Ban Trapping is Hurting American's Wild Turtles ("Report")

The *Report* analyzes state laws in terms of how effective they are believed to protect wild turtles from commercial practices.

The *Report* expresses concern that:

- Turtles are one of the most threatened groups of vertebrates in the world partially due to commercial trapping
- Turtles cannot withstand low levels of commercial trapping because their survival depends on living long lives
- Global demands for turtles for food, pets and traditional medicine is high
- The United States exports millions of live turtles
- Unustainable trade results in the disappearance of wild turtle populations in the United States
- Turtles serve important roles in their ecosystems which include food webs to mineral cycles

Findings in the Report include:

- 30 states allow no commercial turtle harvest, eight states provide moderate protection, and 10 states have weak protections.
- Of the 15 states where the Center petitioned or advocated to ban commercial trapping of wild turtles, five banned trapping and three adopted stronger protections.
- The states with the weakest protections are stated to include Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, South Carolina, Maryland and Ohio.
- In 2020 South Carolina legislators are considering a bill to end commercial trade of native reptiles and amphibians, positioning the state to join the majority of states that prohibit commercial wild turtle trade.
- 10 states still allow unlimited commercial harvesting of at least one native turtle species

The Report includes a discussion of the State of Arkansas, stating:

Arkansas allows resident trappers holding permits to commercially trap 13 types of turtle from waters across roughly half of the state with no bag limit, including common snapping turtles, southern painted

turtles, softshell turtles, musk turtles and map turtles. According to state wildlife officials, trappers reported taking more than 1.3 million wild turtles from 2004 to 2017, with an annual average harvest rate of more than 94,000 turtles. Many of these turtles were classified as large, reproductively mature adults which are critical to the survival of wild populations. These numbers represent only a fraction of commercial trapping in , as fewer than 50% of turtle harvesters actually reported their catch during that time period.

In response to a petition from the Center and Arkansas environmental groups, in 2018 the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission closed the Gulf Coastal Plain ecoregion to trapping (representing 0.2% of wild turtle harvest in the state), banned the harvest of razorback musk turtles, tightened reporting requirements, and committed to a three-year study of the effects of commercial trapping on wild turtle populations in the Mississippi Delta ecoregion. While these changes are a step in the right direction, they leave many of Arkansas' wild turtles vulnerable to overexploitation.

A copy of the Report can be downloaded [here](#).