

# Minnesota Commercial Turtle Harvest

## Stop an Unsustainable Practice: Support SF 1394 (Hawj)/ HF 387 (Vang)



Turtles are one of the most endangered groups of animals on the planet. Over 60% of turtle species are at risk of extinction.

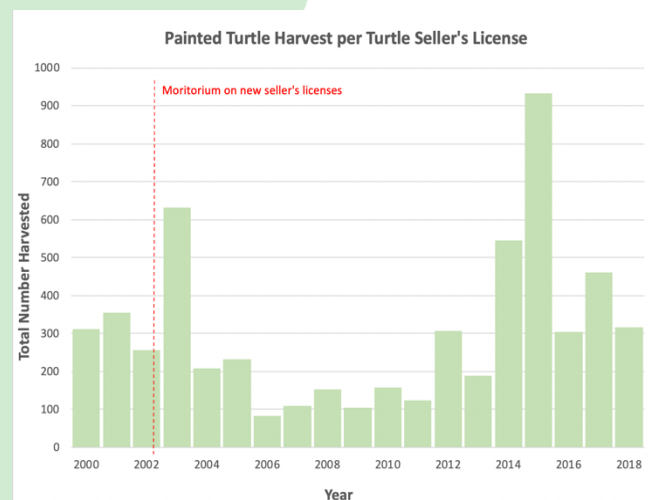
In Minnesota, turtle populations face many threats, including but not limited to habitat loss, climate change, pollution, disease, and over harvest. In light of these threats, even a small amount of increased mortality may drive populations to extinction – the threat of this is greatest in northern latitudes<sup>1</sup> due to our short summers and turtle-growing season. Even once harvest stops, Minnesota turtle populations are likely to continue to decline without intervention.

Turtles are an important part of Minnesota's aquatic ecosystems. They serve as janitors of wetlands, lakes and rivers, and help keep water clean improving habitat for wildlife and humans.

**What is the solution?** Act now to stop the commercial harvest of Minnesota's turtles.

### The Facts:

- Although a moratorium was placed on new turtle seller's licenses in 2002, thousands of turtles are still harvested annually by 21 remaining licensees
- Three species of turtle may be commercially harvested (painted, snapping, and spiny softshell)
- No limit for commercial harvest
- Harvest steady or increasing in recent years due to increased exploitation for food and pets overseas
- Minnesota is one of fewer than 25 states that still allow commercial harvest of wild turtles
- Goal of the bill is to eliminate commercial harvest; recreational harvest for personal use is retained, an allowance for turtle races is retained



## Why are turtles different?

Unlike many game species, turtles are long-lived animals, and many species take a decade or more to mature. As adults they are adapted to have very low rates of mortality. Once mature, an adult female may lay eggs for 50 or more years. As a result, losses of adults due to road mortality and harvest deprive individuals of decades of reproductive potential – resulting in significant population-level effects.



<sup>1</sup> Midwood, J. D., Cairns, N. A., Stoot, L. J., Cooke, S. J., & Blouin-Demers, G. (2015). Bycatch mortality can cause extirpation in four freshwater turtle species. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 25(1), 71-80.