



## Management of Freshwater Turtles

Sept 17, 2008

At the June commission meeting, you approved draft rule language to protect Florida's freshwater turtle populations and directed us to move forward with final rulemaking.

## Additions to 68A-25.002

- No person shall take more than a total of five (5) native Florida freshwater turtles each day



Demand for freshwater turtles as food and pets is increasing. A FWC team is designing a strategy for the conservation of Florida's amphibian and reptile populations. While the team works, this rule will protect freshwater turtle populations from over-exploitation, while allowing some use of the resource.

...(6) No person shall take more than a total of five (5) native Florida freshwater turtles each day unless authorized by permit from the Executive Director as provided in Rules 68A-9.002 and 68A-27 F.A.C. Freshwater turtles may be taken as prescribed in Rules 68A-23.012 and 68A-23.003, F.A.C., and manually or by baited hooks, bow, dip nets, traps so designed that any freshwater fish taken therein may escape, or by spearing only during daylight hours. The taking of turtles by bucket traps, snares, or shooting with firearms is prohibited. No person shall buy, sell, or possess for sale any alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*), box turtle (*Terrapene carolina*), Barbour's map turtle (*Graptemys barbouri*), Escambia River map turtle (*Graptemys ernsti*), diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*), river cooter (*Pseudemys concinna*), or loggerhead musk turtle (*Sternotherus minor*), or parts thereof. No person shall possess more than two (2) Barbour's map turtles, two (2) Escambia River map turtles, two (2) diamondback terrapins, two (2) river cooters, two (2) box turtles, two (2) loggerhead musk turtles, or one (1) alligator snapping turtle unless authorized by permit from the Executive Director as provided in Rules 68A-5.004, 68A-9.002, and 68A-27.002 68A-27 F.A.C. River cooters may not be taken from 15 April to 31 July.

(7) No softshell turtles (*Apalone* spp.) or their eggs may be taken from the wild during the period 1 May to 31 July.

(8) No person shall possess more than 50 eggs taken from the wild in the aggregate of species of freshwater turtle native to Florida except as authorized by permit from the executive director as provided in Rules 68A-5.004, 68A-9.002, and 68A-27.002 68A-27 F.A.C. Eggs of those turtle species enumerated in subsection 68A-25.002(6), F.A.C., are subject to the same possession limits as apply for those turtles. The purchase or sale of turtle eggs taken from the wild is prohibited...

## Stakeholder comments

- Florida's softshell turtles cannot be over harvested due to limited lake access for harvesters, high rates of turtle reproduction, and few harvesters
- Florida's turtles should not be harvested because of their life history that includes slow growth of individuals, long life spans, and high juvenile mortality



We received two themes of input from various stakeholders:

A letter from commercial fishermen suggested that softshell turtles are protected from overharvest by limited lake access, few harvesters, and the turtle's reproductive success.

- Staff has learned that demand for softshell turtles in international and domestic markets has caused turtle harvests to increase dramatically. Under these circumstances, staff feels that this rule is required to protect freshwater turtles from overharvest.

Researchers on Florida's freshwater turtles have suggested that freshwater turtles are particularly vulnerable to overharvest because of their unique life histories.

- The dynamics of turtle harvests have changed recently in Florida with the closing of harvests in surrounding states and increased demand for turtles. Although Florida's turtle populations have withstood years of harvest under the current rules, staff believes these new, more restrictive limits will protect freshwater turtle populations during the interim while a long term conservation strategy for turtles and other reptiles is developed.

## Staff recommendation

- Staff recommends adoption of the rule changes to 68A-25.002 as advertised



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