



RESOLUTION 2022-01-04

IN SUPPORT OF ENHANCING REGULATORY, COLLABORATIVE, AND STRATEGIC CAPACITY TO COMBAT THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN TURTLES

WHEREAS, turtles are one of the most vulnerable vertebrate groups worldwide, and unsustainable take is a significant threat to turtle species; and

WHEREAS, delayed maturation, small clutch sizes, low embryonic and juvenile survival rates, and increased vulnerability of nesting females can predispose turtle populations to rapid declines following loss of adults; and

WHEREAS, natural resource management agencies are making considerable efforts to reverse turtle population declines by collaboratively developing model legislative and regulatory language, convening workshops and conferences designed to assess regulatory, capacity, and funding needs, population statuses and limiting factors, developing confiscation and repatriation plans, and taking law enforcement actions; and

WHEREAS, these efforts are sustained by leadership support and coordination between biological, law enforcement, and legal and policy personnel, including through directed training, skills development, and information-sharing; and

WHEREAS, agencies can benefit from consulting experts on aspects of prosecutions such as species identification, handling protocols, and managing evidence;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) recognizes that the illegal trade in turtles is a significant threat to native turtle species that natural resource management agencies are entrusted to manage and conserve; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Association hereby urges agencies to identify enforcement of laws and regulations for the conservation of native turtles as an important law enforcement priority, to communicate the urgency of this priority to prosecutors, judges, and other arms of law enforcement, and to engage with federal partners to make use of enforcement tools available including the Lacey Act, other federal statutes, and the Interstate Wildlife Violators Compact; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that model language and reports on regional needs reviewed by the Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Committee, Law Enforcement Committee, and Legal Committee emphasize the clarification of agency functions as applied to conserving turtles, including:

1. Declarative statement of mission that expressly extends to conserving wild reptiles and amphibians including native turtles;
2. Definition(s) of resources under agency jurisdiction that comprehensively cover all reptiles and amphibians, including every part of any individual species, whether or not bred, hatched, or born in captivity, and including any part, product, egg, or offspring thereof;
3. Plenary authority to regulate the take, possession, scientific collection, commercial use, and transportation of native reptiles and amphibians, including through the establishment of take prohibitions or limits, harvest seasons, size limits, license and permit requirements, and areas of harvest; and
4. Direct authorization for law enforcement to cooperate with agencies in other states and cross-deputize with federal law enforcement agencies;

and

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that the Association supports efforts to ensure the continued survival of North America's native turtles by raising public and professional awareness of the threat of illegal trade, and by promoting statutory and regulatory solutions, encouraging agency nongame funding and capacity enhancements, and recommending increased interstate and regional information-sharing.

Resolution jointly submitted by the Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Committee, Law Enforcement Committee, and Legal Committee.