



Florida Turtle Conservation Trust

1213 Alhambra Way S.
St. Petersburg, FL 33705-4620

www.ftct.org

PRESS RELEASE

Date: 24 November 2008

Subject: Update on recent Florida freshwater turtle conservation efforts

The commercial harvest of freshwater turtles is a significant and growing conservation threat in Florida. Turtles are slow-growing, long-lived animals that take years to reach sexual maturity. It is our opinion that harvest of freshwater turtles is unsustainable, particularly when you take into consideration the many other threats, both natural and anthropogenic. Over the past year, this conservation threat has received considerable attention by turtle scientists, conservationists, and the general public.

Efforts to ban the harvest of freshwater turtles in Florida have increased in November. A group of biologists met with the Office of the Governor and a letter from 32 leading turtle scientists was presented to Governor Crist urging him to act on behalf of Florida's wild turtles. A letter writing campaign was initiated by the Florida Turtle Conservation Trust (FTCT) and other conservation NGOs with considerable success. A Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) biologist reported that collectively the governor's office and the state wildlife agency received over 3,000 pro-turtle letters and only 22 pro-harvest from the public. We believe this clearly speaks for how the citizens of Florida feel about this conservation issue. Finally, a meeting to address this issue was held by the FWC and the large turnout included at least nine non-FWC turtle biologists. An excellent case was made for complete harvest closure.

On 20 November, Governor Crist sent a letter to FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto stating "With the world market demand for freshwater turtles, it is clear that the commercial harvest of our wild populations of turtles could result in long term impacts very quickly. According to many of the turtle biologists, if the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is not vigilant and does not act swiftly we could be in grave danger of irreparable damage to our turtle population. Based on the information, I would urge the commission move toward a complete ban on the harvesting of our wild turtles."

The FTCT thanks Governor Crist for his sound leadership on this turtle-related issue and for demonstrating a strong act of responsible environmental stewardship. We also commend the Commission for their earlier decision to expedite the rule making process.

Despite these positive developments, we must remain diligent and steadfast if we are to see a timely regulatory change banning the harvest of Florida's wild turtles. We need your help to make this happen. We urge Florida conservation NGOs and interested parties to support the following actions.

1) Letters need to be sent to Governor Crist thanking him for his call "toward a complete ban on the harvesting of our wild turtles."

Contact info for Governor Charlie Crist:

Office of Governor Charlie Crist
State of Florida
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Charlie.Crist@MyFlorida.com

2) Separate letters need to be sent to FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto and Executive Director Ken Haddad urging them to implement a regulatory change to ban the harvest of Florida turtles.

Contact info for FWC Chairman Rodney Barreto:

Mr. Rodney Barreto, Chairman
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
620 S. Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

commissioners@MyFWC.com

Contact info for FWC Executive Director Ken Haddad:

Ken Haddad, Executive Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
620 S. Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

ken.haddad@MyFWC.com

3) Please forward this information to other conservation-minded individuals and encourage them to write letters to the above parties.

Resource information:

Link to packet presented to Governor Crist by the Florida Turtle Experts Working Group and IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group:

http://www.ftct.org/Packet_for_Gov.%20Crist.pdf

Link to FWC press release:

http://myfwc.com/whatsnew/08/statewide/News_08_X_TurtleWorkshop3.htm

For additional information, please contact:

George L. Heinrich, Founding President, FTCT
Director, Florida Riverine Turtles Conservation Program
george@heinrichecologicalservices.com

Tim Walsh, President, FTCT
turtleconservationist@gmail.com