

Testimony on include Raised H.B. No. 5315

I am writing as the Executive Director of the Jonah Center for Earth and Art, an environmental education and advocacy nonprofit organization based in Middletown. Having observed over the past 10 years commercial trapping of Snapping Turtles in the freshwater tidal wetlands known as the “Floating Meadows” or “Cromwell Meadows,” our organization is strongly in favor of including Snapping Turtles among the other wildlife creatures protected from commercial taking. Current state law excludes Snapping Turtles from this protection. All other forms of wildlife, except Snapping Turtles, are protected from commercial taking.

Our primary reasons for this position are as follows:

- Virtually nothing is known by CT DEEP on Snapping Turtle population or population trends, as Snapping Turtles have not been studied. Since other turtle species – ones that are not commercially taken – are in decline, we feel that most likely Snapping Turtle population is declining too, But there is no “safe” number that can be removed, because no data exists on the subject.
- Snapping Turtles are apex predators that serve an important function in an ecosystem. Furthermore, they are scavengers that perform important services to their ecosystem.
- Snapping Turtles are a very ancient species that deserves our reverence and protection. We prefer to live in a world that values and retains biodiversity.
- Since Snapping Turtles inhabit polluted waters, they retain heavy metals in their meat and are not safe for human consumption. Therefore, they should not be commercially taken for reasons of public health.
- Current DEEP regulations that merely limit the number of Snapping Turtles that may be taken commercially are virtually unenforceable, so it is quite possible that these regulations have done little or nothing to reduce this trapping.
- The Jonah Center encourages and instructs the public to report any Snapping Turtle trap that is found. However, as long as there is a possibility that a trap seen in the wild is legal, the public is reluctant to report a trap siting, and DEEP is apparently not willing or lacks the resources to investigate a trap that may be legal, especially when it can be approached only by boat and the location of the trap is hard to determine or describe. To protect Snapping Turtles in the absence of a robust and expensive monitoring program, the only option is to say that any Snapping Turtle trap is illegal and should be reported.

Thank you very much for your consideration of my views on this matter.

John C. Hall, the Jonah Center for Earth and Art  
P.O. Box 854  
Middletown CT 06457