

Environment Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5354

AN ACT CONCERNING SNAPPING TURTLES AND RED-EARED SLIDER

Title: TURTLES.

Vote Date: 3/14/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/9/2018

File No.: 76

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Environment Committee

Rep. Devin R. Carney, 23rd Dist.

Rep. Matthew Lesser, 100th Dist.

Rep. Mary M. Mushinsky, 85th Dist.

Rep. Diana S. Urban, 43rd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

The General Assembly passed legislation in 1971 prohibiting the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) from regulating the commercial trade of snapping turtles; however, DEEP is able to regulate every other wild species present in the state. Additionally, proponents of the bill shared concerns of the invasive nature of the red-eared slider turtle. The bill seeks to remedy such concerns by (1) prohibiting the commercial trade in snapping turtles, and (2) prohibiting and release of red-eared slider turtles.

Substitute Language – LCO No. 2613:

Substitute language provides an exception to the prohibition in regards to the importation of red-eared slider turtles for scientific or education institutions. It had been brought to the Environment Committee's attention that there are currently a number of educational institutions or facilities that have red-eared slider turtles for research and education.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Submitted

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Representative Mary Mushinsky 85th District: Supports the bill. Red-Eared sliders tend to be bigger and bulkier than native species around the state, allowing them to out-compete other species for food and living space. Involving snapping turtles, it is suggested that the committee amend the bill to have DEEP monitor the number of snapping turtles taken from the state to determine if this practice is sustainable.

Susan Armknecht: Supports the bill. "In no way, shape, or form should turtles be bought and sold. No exceptions. Subsections b and c should be removed."

John C. Hall, The Jonah Center for Earth and Art: Supports the bill, urging removal of one sentence from Section 26-78 of the general statutes: "The provisions of this section shall not apply to snapping turtles." They strongly support amending this statute to include protections for snapping turtles along with other forms of wildlife. Concerning red-eared slider turtles, these animals typically outgrow their cages and are released into the wild, exposing local species to viruses and bacteria they have no immunity to.

Margaret Miner, Executive Director, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut: Supports the bill. Snapping turtles help keep the bottoms of ponds and lakes clean. They deserve the same protections as other species. The red-eared turtle is a nuisance and non-native to the state.

Dennis Richardson, PH.D, Quinnipiac University: Supports the bill with suggestions. It is becoming clear that red-eared turtles do have a negative impact on local species around the state. They strongly encourage the ban on importation and ownership of these turtles. It is also recommended that standards for collecting snapping turtles be updated to reflect the way other species are regulated. In addition to the trapping endorsement, there should also be a mandate revealing the number, date, and location of turtles harvested.

Barrett S. Robbins-Pianka: Supports the bill, however, found the references to possible regulations concerning reporting and collection of fees in subsections (b) and (c), difficult to understand, superfluous and redundant. The bill is an opportunity to restore the health and balance of ecosystems across the state.

Valerie Woodruff: Supports the bill.

David Brensilver: Supports the bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Laura Reid, Chair, Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC): Opposes the bill. PIJAC proposes that an outright ban on red-eared sliders is unnecessary. "A better solution to mitigate concerns about the impact of red-eared sliders to Connecticut's native populations of reptiles and amphibians would be to allow for responsible businesses and enthusiasts in Connecticut to obtain, sell or exchange re-eared sliders for commercial purposes like the pet trade."

Reported by: Steve Smith, Asst. Clerk

Date: 4/2/2018