

For Immediate Release
Contact: Coleman Wood
Communications Director
404-876-2900 x 104
cwood@gaconservancy.org



GEORGIA'S FRESHWATER TURTLES PROTECTED

Georgia Conservancy Helps Pass Legislation Regulating Commercial Turtle Harvesting.

ATLANTA (Jan. 31, 2012) – The Georgia Conservancy worked hard during the 2010 legislative session to secure passage of a bill that will place strict limits on the commercial harvest of 10 native freshwater turtle species in Georgia. Conservancy Vice President Will Wingate led the fight for passage of the bill and subsequently served on the committee that fashioned the rules to implement the legislation.

“The Georgia Conservancy deserves a lot of credit for getting these regulations in place,” said Mike Harris, chief of non-game conservation with DNR’s Wildlife Resources Division. “They were a key factor in getting the legislation passed that authorized the regulations, and they were a key stakeholder on the committee that created them.”

According to the Wildlife Resources Division, the limits were needed due to increased demand for U.S. turtles for food, folk medicine and pets in other parts of the world, specifically Southeast Asia. Turtle populations in Asia have been devastated by overharvesting and attention has turned to the Southeast United States to satisfy this demand. Georgia was previously the only Southeast state without harvesting regulations, and it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of freshwater turtles have been exported annually in recent years because of the lack of restrictions.

“The Georgia Conservancy is proud to have played a key role in protecting turtles in Georgia,” said Georgia Conservancy President Pierre Howard. “We believe that every strand in the web of life is important to maintaining a healthy ecosystem. We will always step forward to advocate for Georgia’s natural treasures.”

The regulations, which were adopted last week, do not apply to people planning to keep up to 10 native turtles as pets or licensed pet dealers. Freshwater turtle species listed under the Georgia Endangered Wildlife Act and the federal Endangered Species Act will remain protected.

“I am grateful to the General Assembly as well as DNR Commissioner Mark Williams and his staff for their hard work protecting our state’s freshwater turtles,” said Rep. Joe Wilkinson (R-Sandy Springs), Georgia Conservancy member and sponsor of the legislation that created the regulations. “This occasion shows the great partnerships the Georgia Conservancy has formed with environmental groups and the General Assembly to bring solutions to Georgia’s environmental problems.”

About the Georgia Conservancy

The Georgia Conservancy was founded in 1967 to protect Georgia's natural resources for present and future generations by advocating sound environmental policies, advancing sustainable growth practices and facilitating common-ground solutions to environmental challenges. For more information, visit our website at www.georgiaconservancy.org.

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