

# Trade protections proposed for four species of turtles

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Faced with growing concerns about the hunting of freshwater turtles in the United States for Asian food markets, federal officials this week proposed adding four species to an international list of plants and animals designed to manage commercial trade in the reptiles.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Thursday said that listing the common snapping turtle, Florida softshell turtle, smooth softshell turtle and spiny softshell turtle would allow it to better monitor exportation of these [species](#), particularly to Asian nations, where [turtle populations](#) have been wiped out due to high demand for their meat.

Bringing the species under the protection of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora would require exporters to obtain a permit before shipping turtles overseas. That would help the federal agency determine the extent of legal and illegal exportation and decide whether additional conservation efforts were needed.

The listing would mandate humane shipping standards and enlist the assistance of 179 other countries that are members of the convention in monitoring [trade](#) in these species.

The proposal is the agency's response to a 2011 petition from the Center for Biological Diversity urging the U.S. to take a leading role in regulating the international turtle trade. More than 12 million wild-caught [freshwater turtles](#) were exported from the U.S. between 2006 and

2011, the center said.

In addition to threatening wild populations in the U.S., some exported turtles escape, and some are released, increasing the risk of introducing diseases and polluting the genetic makeup of species in ecosystems elsewhere.

"We're pleased the agency is taking this action," Collette L. Adkins Giese, amphibian and reptile senior attorney at the center, said in an interview. "Asian nations that have already depleted their own lakes and rivers of turtle populations are now turning to our waterways."

"We need to get a handle on commercial trade before it gets out of control like it has in Vietnam and southern China," she said.

There are 89 species and subspecies of turtles in the United States, a bigger variety than in any other country in the world. In 2013, following the center's 2011 petition, three of them - Blanding's turtles, spotted [turtles](#) and diamondback terrapins - received increased protection under the convention.

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