



CCITT

COLLABORATIVE TO COMBAT
THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN TURTLES

2025-2030

COLLABORATIVE TO COMBAT THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN TURTLES

STRATEGIC PLAN







The mission of the CCITT is to advance efforts to better understand, prevent, and eliminate the illegal collection and trade of North America's native turtles — a threat that puts many species at risk.



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The CCITT is a PARC
National Task Team

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Cover photo: Eastern box turtle. / Gabby DeMeillon. Rhode Island DEM.

Opposite page: Eastern box turtles after confiscation. / New England Aquarium.



The Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) is a Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) national task team that formed in 2018 with the intent to better understand, prevent, and eliminate the illegal collection and trade of North America's native turtles. Two of CCITT's primary objectives are to raise the profile of the issue of illegal collection and to build bridges between the biologist and law enforcement communities in an effort to ensure the enforcement of existing state and federal laws and regulations that protect native turtles.

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Pulling Back the Curtain on an Unseen Conservation Crisis

How a talk at a regional herpetological conservation meeting sparked a grassroots movement to combat illegal turtle trade



Images of North American turtles confiscated by wildlife law enforcement authorities that demonstrate characteristic features of illegal collection and trade. Clockwise from top left: Confiscated eastern box turtle / USFWS; Florida box turtles and three-striped mud turtles illegally collected from the wild in Florida / Florida FWC; Confiscated diamondback terrapin hatchlings / USFWS; Confiscated diamondback terrapin adults that were inhumanely constrained during shipment / USFWS. Figure reproduced from Christman et al. 2025. The Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles: Addressing illegal wildlife trade with an adaptive socio-ecological approach. *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* 23:176-188.

There were several compelling talks at the annual meeting of the Northeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation in 2018, on topics ranging from head-starting timber rattlesnakes to the impacts of cannibalism on all-female lineages of salamanders.

But there was one talk that caused a stir: Corporal K. Michael Lathroum of the Maryland Natural Resource Police's presentation on Operation Kingsnake — a multi-

year investigation into the illegal collection of Coastal Plains milk snakes on Maryland's Eastern Shore in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

For most attendees — primarily biologists from academia, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations — it wasn't news that people illegally collect and trade amphibians and reptiles for profit. But Corporal Lathroum pulled back the curtain on the sophistication and scale of

trafficking, and laid bare the conservation implications, particularly for turtles.

When an individual turtle is taken illegally from the wild, the ethical and ecological impacts are bad enough. But when someone poaches dozens or hundreds of turtles, they could put entire populations at risk, undermining investments to conserve species that already face steep population declines.

The talk was also eye opening for another reason. It revealed the unwitting role researchers can play in the problem. Published research, Corporal Lathroum explained, can be a roadmap to rare wildlife.

The most important takeaway was this: the investigation was a success not only because state and federal law enforcement officials collaborated so closely, but because wildlife biologists contributed their expertise to the effort. For many in the audience, that meeting was a turning point — a collective realization that ensuring the long-term conservation of our native turtles requires collaborative action to address the impact of illegal collection and trade.

It was with this sense of purpose and urgency that a small group formed to organize around the issue. By the time the meeting came to a close, the idea for the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) was born. In the weeks and months that followed, a small number of co-founders, including fellow founding co-chair Jennifer Sevin, got to work.

Today, the CCITT has grown from a grassroots movement to a National Task Team of the Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, with more than 200 members from state and federal agencies, academic institutions, and nongovernmental organizations, with expertise in biology, conservation law enforcement, law and policy, social science, and more.

The growth of the CCITT is a testament to its value, and the release of our Strategic Plan is an important milestone. Its creation comes after over a year of focused and collaborative critical assessment of how to move the needle towards reducing illegal collection and trade.



Scott Buchanan surveying wood turtles. / Samantha Young.

With the momentum that CCITT has helped to generate, we intend to implement all parts of this plan to ensure the sustained protection of North America's irreplaceable native turtles.

Respectfully,

Scott Buchanan

CCITT CO-CHAIR AND CO-FOUNDER

Purpose

This document outlines a five-year strategy (2025 to 2030) for the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT), developed with input from members and partners. The strategy identifies priority Goals, Objectives, and Supporting Actions to advance efforts to reduce the illegal trade in turtles and create a more sustainable and ethical environment around trade.

Big-picture milestones key to advancing our mission



Background photo: An eastern box turtle / Bernhard J. Mueller-Anderson. Getty Images.

Introduction

Between July 2018 and July 2022, nine major turtle trafficking cases were prosecuted in the United States, involving a total of more than 23,000 native tortoises and freshwater turtles.

But that number is just the tip of the iceberg.

It doesn't include small cases, open cases, cases still being prosecuted, cases involving turtle parts, and cases where North American turtles were seized abroad. It doesn't include the unknown number of illegally collected and trafficked turtles that are never detected at all.

While only a snapshot of illegal turtle trade, for agencies and organizations working to conserve turtles, that number is already too high.

Because turtles are slow to reach reproductive age, and few hatchlings survive to adulthood due to natural predation, the loss of thousands of individuals to the illegal trade takes an unsustainable toll on species that already face myriad threats and pressures.

Turtle populations stressed by habitat loss, climate change, and collisions with cars when crossing roads cannot afford more losses.

GRASSROOTS RESPONSE

Born in 2018 out of a consensus that the illegal trade had reached a crisis level, the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) rallied experts across agencies and disciplines to better understand, prevent, and reduce the illegal collection and trade of North America's native turtles.

From the outset, the CCITT has prioritized raising the profile of this issue and developing a network of conservation professionals willing to contribute time, resources, and expertise to help address it — with an emphasis on building bridges between biologists and conservation law enforcement officials.


The growth of the CCITT — measured in membership, organizational representation, and disciplinary diversity — is a testament to its value and credibility.



Common musk turtle. / Eitan Grunwald.

WHO MAKES UP CCITT?

- More than 200 members, including those with expertise in biology, conservation law enforcement, law and policy, social science, and more
- Numerous state and Federal wildlife agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Department of Justice, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and select academic and nongovernmental organizations
- Five working groups that focus on: (1) Confiscation and Repatriation, (2) Data and Research, (3) Human Dimensions and Communications, (4) Policy and Regulations, and (5) Law Enforcement



STRATEGIC GROWTH

While the sustained engagement of members and activities of the working groups have enabled the CCITT to make progress on its mission, addressing a complex, global challenge like illegal turtle trade requires a strategic, long-term approach.

In January 2023 the CCITT held a workshop at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, titled Understanding the Socio-Ecological Context of the Illegal Freshwater Turtle and Tortoise Trade.

During this three-day meeting, approximately 40 conservation professionals, mostly CCITT members, convened from diverse areas of expertise — conservation biology, law enforcement, law and policy, social science, and communications — used open-sourced Conservation Standards (developed by the Conservation Measures Partnership) as a framework to develop actionable strategies to address the illegal trade in turtles.

The workshop resulted in a prioritized list of six strategies for the CCITT to pursue, along with accompanying “Theory of Change” models that document assumptions, identify key results that need to be achieved to make progress towards goals, and generally help connect the dots among actions, cause, effect, and expected outcomes to advance each strategy.

Those strategies are the foundation for the CCITT Strategic Plan, which offers a set of five priority goals, and associated objectives and supporting actions, that will meaningfully advance our work over the next five years.

Mission, Vision, & Values

MISSION

The mission of the CCITT is to advance efforts to better understand, prevent, and eliminate the illegal collection and trade of North America's native turtles — a threat that puts many species at risk.

VISION

Over the next five years, we aspire to strategically build and leverage our network of collaborators to ensure we bring diverse perspectives and cross-disciplinary expertise to this complex issue.

Our long-term vision is to reduce illegal collection and trade to a point where it's no longer a threat to populations of North America's native turtle species and, in parallel, to change public perception of turtles so they are valued for their irreplaceable contributions to natural and cultural heritage when conserved in the wild.

VALUES

1. We support compliance with laws and seek solutions grounded in the principles of good governance.
2. We take a holistic approach that reflects the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems, and considers the wellbeing of both people and turtles.
3. We conduct ourselves ethically and with integrity.
4. We encourage innovation and resourcefulness to address the urgency of the issue and maximize our impact.
5. We prioritize building trust within our network and encourage leadership from all members.
6. We are respectful of different perspectives and aspire to draw on a range of disciplines and experiences to inform our work and its outcomes.
7. We recognize that in order to succeed, we need to inspire people outside the field of conservation to care about conserving turtles.
8. We value all wildlife, and seek to uplift other efforts to reduce illegal and unsustainable trade by developing and sharing transferable approaches and tools.



CCITT leadership at the National Conservation Training Center gathered for Strategic Plan development in January 2024. / USFWS. Pictured from top left to right: Ryan Connors (USDOJ), Thomas Loring (USFWS OLE), Lane Kisonak (AFWA), Mike Ravesi (Connecticut DEEP), Bridget Macdonald (USFWS), Cristina Jones (USFWS), Julie Slacum (USFWS), Kerry Wixted (AFWA), Michelle Christman (USFWS), Scott Buchanan (USFWS), Rachel Boratto (Monitor Conservation Society), Nancy Karraker (Univ. of Rhode Island), Jennifer Sevin (Univ. of Richmond), Emily Horton (USFWS). Not pictured: Justus Nethero (Ohio DNR LE).

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The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The findings and conclusions in this document are those of the member(s) or author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of any affiliation.

Priority Goals



A Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) officer cannot contain his smile, moments before releasing a confiscated chicken turtle back into the wild. / FWC.

GOAL 1

Build and maintain strategic partnerships to support the CCITT's mission to address the illegal turtle trade.

GOAL 2

Understand how people affect and are affected by the turtle trade and apply evidence-based approaches to reduce illegal trade in an ethical and culturally sensitive manner.

GOAL 3

Build capacity and secure dedicated resources to accommodate confiscation and repatriation or permanent placement of turtles.

GOAL 4

Develop a model legal framework and resources to effectively combat the illegal trade in turtles.

GOAL 5

Strengthen support for effective enforcement of the illegal turtle trade through resource development, collaboration, and tailored training.

Goal 1: *Build and maintain strategic partnerships to support the CCITT's mission to address the illegal turtle trade.*

The CCITT is composed of a strong network of partners. We will strategically support and expand our network by engaging new constituencies to address the illegal turtle trade. Through these partnerships, we endeavor to secure funding, resources, and expertise to support priority initiatives and to demonstrate the relevance of our work for achieving member agency missions. We will strive to bring together varied interests and perspectives to create a robust network while also ensuring network continuity into the future.

Objective 1.1: Establish, maintain, and expand partnerships in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Partnerships and resource sharing are integral to effectively combat the illegal trade in turtles. A tri-national focus will allow us to leverage resources, including expertise, to support this work. Building relationships with and learning from those who we have not engaged with previously is a priority, including those who bring invaluable Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and expertise to the issue.

Supporting Actions:

- Survey existing members and partners to identify gaps, resource needs, and opportunities for strategic growth.
- Based on feedback, develop and disseminate resources to support member needs and a strategic response.
- Identify and track opportunities to increase visibility of the issue and of our network's response, and strategically recruit new members and partners.
- Continue to expand relationships with government partners in Canada.
- Explore and establish governmental partnerships in Mexico.
- Identify linguistic, cultural, and technical competency needs to support cooperation among partners and interest groups from different backgrounds.
- Work with the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Native American Liaisons, and others, to engage Indigenous, First Nation, and Tribal partners in addressing illegal turtle trade.

Objective 1.2: Establish, maintain, and expand international partnerships in transit and demand areas.

Turtle trafficking is a global issue, driven by demand in the U.S. and abroad. We will work with partners in both demand and transit areas to understand drivers of illegal trade and identify opportunities to collaborate.

Supporting Actions:

- Establish international liaison seats on the Leadership Board and Steering Committee.
- Identify and track opportunities to present and network with global partners.
- Build on existing network relationships to develop partnerships in transit and demand countries.
- Establish shared goals and priorities to co-develop priority actions with international partners.

- Identify linguistic, cultural, and technical competency needs to support cooperation among partners and interest groups from different backgrounds.
- Interface with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Technical Work Group, and the U.S. CITES Authorities to provide expertise that informs the CITES Animals Committee, Standing Committee, and Conference of the Parties.
- Establish connections with the International Consortium of Combating Wildlife Crime, Interpol's Forestry Crime Working Group, and the World Customs Organization (WCO).



CCITT leadership and partners at the World Congress of Herpetology in Kuching, Malaysia, August 2024. / USFWS.

Objective 1.3: Identify and secure sustained funding for network priorities.

The need for significant and sustained funding for nongame species has long been recognized as a barrier to conservation. We will strengthen national and international partnerships to diversify funding sources. The funding for actionable priorities should be commensurate with the scope of scale of the transnational crimes that make up this sector of the illegal wildlife trade.

Supporting Actions:

- Assess and prioritize needs based on network feedback.
- Write a white paper to document key barriers (e.g., funding, resources, expertise, etc.) to action and a strategy to overcome them.
- Identify suitable funding opportunities, including grant programs, foundation support, etc.
- Develop a strategy and supporting materials to communicate about this challenge and the need for resources with target audiences, including decision makers and funders.
- Leverage the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), particularly to expand focus and resources available for Mexico engagement.

Goal 2: *Understand how people affect and are affected by the turtle trade and apply evidence-based approaches to reduce illegal trade in an ethical and culturally sensitive manner.*

Wildlife trafficking is driven by and involves human behavior. We will take a holistic approach to combating the illegal turtle trade that integrates robust social science with ecological science to understand how people affect and are affected by the trade in turtles. We will engage with key audiences and interested parties to find solutions to reduce the illegal trade of turtles. In this work, we strive to find balance between protecting the well-being of people (e.g., livelihoods, cultural values) and of turtles (e.g., intrinsic value, ecological value).

Objective 2.1: Support developing and implementing evidence-based behavior change strategies, while prioritizing demand reduction of illegally sourced live North American turtles in domestic and international trade.

Human actions are largely responsible for declines in turtle populations, including land development, land-use change, and illegal collection, and that demand for live turtles is a key driver of a growing illegal trade that accelerates turtle population declines. Thus, we need an evidence-based approach that reduces demand for illegally traded turtles and encourages people to value keeping wild turtles in their natural habitats.

Supporting Actions:

- Build a network of collaborative partners, including researchers and organizations, and locate funding opportunities for projects related to research needs.
- Review existing knowledge and identify information gaps to inform actions (e.g., literature review, expert consultation, gap analysis).
- Identify behavior change methods to develop evidence-based, culturally appropriate, and ethical demand reduction efforts. Using interdisciplinary research approaches based in social and behavioral sciences, this may include:
 - Research characterizing domestic and international market trends, including supply and demand
 - Research identifying key audiences, interested parties, and other participants and their characteristics
 - Develop a monitoring and evaluation plan for interventions.



Virginia DWR biologist J.D. Kleopfer holds a record-sized common snapping turtle. / J.D. Kleopfer. Virginia DWR.



Confiscated spotted turtles photographed as evidence. / USFWS.

Objective 2.2: Develop and implement science-based communications initiatives and outreach tools to foster support and action to reduce the illegal trade, including by raising awareness about its ecological, economic, and cultural impacts.

Communication is fundamental to any initiative to reduce illegal wildlife trade, whether briefing decision makers who can direct resources to the effort, or informing consumers about sustainable alternatives. To be effective, communication must be strategic – driven by specific goals, tailored to the needs of key audiences, and informed by evidence from behavioral and cognitive science on the most effective approaches.

Supporting Actions:

- Identify key audiences, desired outcomes (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioral), salient messages, trusted messengers, and preferred communication channels/mediums (e.g., online, in-person).
- Develop a communications strategy that outlines audiences, goals, timelines, metrics for success, and resources, including funding and staffing.
 - Example: Develop a framework for promoting network accomplishments (e.g., successful law enforcement cases, research outcomes, and partnership success stories).
- Identify strategic communications liaisons.
- Develop and share a template for communicating turtle regulations to the public in a way that increases awareness and promotes compliance.
- Survey the CCITT network to understand and prioritize outreach needs and develop resources to meet those needs (e.g., lesson plans, posters, and infographics).
- Develop and implement outreach campaigns, such as Wild Turtle Week, for social platforms.

Goal 3: *Build capacity and secure dedicated resources to accommodate confiscation and repatriation or permanent placement of turtles.*

In the United States, law enforcement agencies are currently hindered in their ability to seize live turtles due to a lack of dedicated facilities and funding to support care. We will work to better understand capacity needs for turtle seizures and expand the current network of facilities. To ensure there are appropriate holding facilities and dedicated space available, we will pursue resources to support care. We will provide information and decision tools to inform the feasibility of repatriation (returning confiscated turtles to the wild) or facilitate permanent placement in captivity.

Objective 3.1: Develop a network of dedicated facilities with sufficient resources to care for confiscated turtles.

Currently, there is a small network of facilities that can take a limited number of confiscated turtles, but these facilities often lack sufficient space, resources, and capacity to meet the long-term care needs and high volume of turtles. Improving facility resources can support law enforcement's ability to seize turtles.

Supporting Actions:

- Assess facilities network capacity needs through annual surveys.
- Identify an information manager who is responsible for coordinating, compiling and managing survey information.
- Designate point of contact/coordinator for agencies to contact for housing needs.
- Develop a database/dashboard platform of facilities that can take confiscated turtles (e.g., contact, species, numbers, quarantine capacity, amount of time they can be held) that is continuously updated and share this with agencies and partners.
- Maintain and foster existing facility partnerships and identify and engage new facilities to participate in the network.
- Leverage partners and their networks to secure dedicated funding to pay for transportation, care, equipment, and disease/genetic testing to facilitate placement.
- Identify and address regulatory barriers for moving confiscated turtles across jurisdictional boundaries (e.g., state lines).
- Identify and work to reduce barriers to receive confiscated North American turtles from overseas.



Eastern box turtle inside its carapace. / Rhode Island DEM.

Objective 3.2: Provide support for agencies to streamline the confiscation process and to garner support for internal resources and infrastructure to respond to confiscations.

In the U.S., very few states have a formal or defined process for responding to confiscations. Staff, resources, and dedicated funding for equipment, care, disease screening, and genetic screening are other areas of need. The development of standard operating procedures and decision processes for responding to confiscations and abandonments of turtles is of high importance.

Supporting Actions:

- Support agency confiscation planning with iterative development, feedback, and sharing of a template confiscation plan and supporting resources.
- Facilitate the development of protocols that inform post-confiscation decision making (e.g., a health assessment protocol to help inform suitability of release back to the wild and post-release monitoring).
- Build partnerships that support the implementation of the confiscation plan (e.g., securing funding, developing an MOU with a facility(s) for care, identifying universities to work on research needs, identifying facilities for permanent placement, etc.).
- Assist as requested with agency decision-making to support the final outcome of animals.



Desert tortoise. / Roy C. Averill-Murray. USFWS.

Objective 3.3: Improve our ability to use health assessments and geographic genetic assignments to aid in decisions of potential repatriation of confiscated turtles.

Place of origin and the risk of disease introduction are the main considerations when deciding on whether to release confiscated turtles back to the wild. There is a need to better understand disease prevalence in wild and confiscated turtles, which pathogens to screen for and how often, and how to interpret results. There is also a need to obtain geographic genetic assignments that can probabilistically predict the region of origin of confiscated turtles of unknown provenance.

Supporting Actions:

- Work with Association of Zoos and Aquariums Turtle SAFE veterinarians to finalize a health assessment protocol to evaluate the release suitability of confiscated turtles. This assessment will elucidate how we interpret results from pathogen screening and health assessments.
- Support agencies to incorporate resources and to conduct baseline disease screening in the wild to inform suitability of recipient sites.
- Conduct a structured decision-making workshop that will improve agencies' abilities to determine objectives and actions for genetic testing for different species.
- Incorporate USGS risk modeling results into CCITT tools to inform agencies' decision-making and determine existing gaps.

Goal 4: *Develop a model legal framework and resources to effectively combat the illegal trade in turtles.*

Through a process of reviewing, drafting, and soliciting feedback, we will develop legal and policy models that provide jurisdictions with options for effective, practical, and enforceable legal frameworks that better protect our native turtle species from exploitation. To maximize the probability of successful implementation of these new frameworks, we will support the formation of a coalition of motivated stakeholders that are positioned to advance new laws and policies within their jurisdictions. Simultaneously, we will work to create an accessible and referenceable policy product that provides monetary values for turtles lost and taken from the wild.

Objective 4.1: Assemble a team of policy experts and practitioners to develop a roadmap for a comprehensive, practical, and functional legal and policy framework.

There is a clear need for a substantive change to the legal framework that governs the collection, commercialization, and trade of our native turtles. By building a multi-disciplinary team of professionals that understand the strengths and shortcomings of the current legal approach, we will formulate a bold, potentially transformative, model framework that advances us towards a more optimal future that is biologically sustainable, respects livelihoods, and is legally functional.

Supporting Actions:

- Assemble a team of policy professionals (e.g., legal counsel, social scientists, legislative liaisons) and wildlife conservation practitioners (e.g., wildlife biologists, conservation law enforcement, wildlife administrators and chiefs) that encompass the range of expertise and experience needed to develop a comprehensive model legal framework; ensure that jurisdictional representation is sufficient and crosscutting.
- Assess current legal models, with emphasis on identifying enforcement shortcomings and legal loopholes.
- In coordination with the coalition identified in Objective 4.2, obtain support from relevant state/provincial or Tribal/Indigenous authorities before pursuing any policy revisions, both to ensure that cultural, historical, spiritual, recreational, and other equities are identified, and to ensure that resulting changes are beneficial across all stages of investigation, enforcement, prosecution, and penalty/sanction.
- Draft model legal framework and policy examples designed for different jurisdictional levels.
- Identify resources (e.g., funding, infrastructure, and staff) for implementation of effective legal and policy frameworks.
- Explore the option for a sustainable certification program for all turtles entering trade that incorporates viewpoints of consumers, commercial breeders, etc. Determine whether this certification is most viable as part of new legislation or on an incentivized, but voluntary basis.



A wood turtle emerging from a stream in spring. / Tyler DeVos. Rhode Island DEM.

Objective 4.2: Build a coalition of relevant stakeholders from representative jurisdictions to increase feasibility, buy in, and public support for a policy roadmap.

Strong and unambiguous laws and policies around wildlife collection and trade are of preeminent importance. Many jurisdictions could benefit from making changes to their laws and policies, but accomplishing this takes sustained support from individuals and organizations willing to engage and champion such efforts. To this end, we will build a coalition of stakeholders and jurisdictions to generate support for the implementation of improved legal and policy frameworks.

Supporting Actions:

- Convene meetings to facilitate coordination among coalition members, prioritize supporting actions, develop periodic work plans, and monitor progress toward supporting actions and fulfillment of the goal.
- Provide feedback to the team identified in Objective 4.1 so that they can better assess existing gaps, shortcomings, and enforcement difficulties with the model legal and policy roadmap, and to complement additional non-regulatory resources needed for an improved policy framework.
- Identify target audiences to communicate coalition findings.
- Develop messaging themes, awareness campaigns, and legislative and/or regulatory strategies to promote action in fulfillment of identified needs.
- Collaborate with government affairs professionals in partner organizations to assess the viability of legislative or regulatory proposals and develop plans for legislative/agency outreach.
- Communicate updates to relevant subject matter committees, and receive input, at national conferences of target audiences.

Objective 4.3: Develop restitution guidance for native turtle species.

There is a need to ensure that adequate legal framework is accessible and referenceable to jurisdictions regarding the importance of turtles in wild and native ecosystems. By developing cost guidance measures we will ensure that jurisdictions have the ability to make wise policies and decisions regarding the monetary values of turtles taken or lost from the wild. Further, the establishment of economic and ecological impact values, which can include restitution and/or replacement costs, provides jurisdictions potential legislative mechanisms for additional enforcement capabilities.



Midland painted turtle. / Grayson Smith. USFWS.

Supporting Actions:

- Establish the distinction and understand the differences between restitution and replacement costs for proper use.
- Develop restitution guidance that may include replacement costs, economic, ecological, cultural, minimum wildlife values, and market values.
- Encourage jurisdictions to consider the economic and ecological impact value of wild turtles.
- Maintain updated economic and ecological values and make those values accessible and obtainable to jurisdictions.

Goal 5: *Strengthen support for effective enforcement of the illegal turtle trade through resource development, collaboration, and tailored training.*

Wildlife trafficking, specifically the illegal trade of North America's tortoises and freshwater turtles, is widespread and under-recognized within the criminal justice system due, in part, to many competing priorities of wildlife law enforcement agencies. We will support law enforcement personnel by providing access to resources, training, and education. There is a further need to facilitate networking and communication among law enforcement and interdisciplinary partners. We will enable law enforcement to be informed on how to target species, individuals, and methods of trafficking turtles.

Objective 5.1: Develop and provide law enforcement with interdisciplinary tools and resources.

The challenges of wildlife law enforcement and wildlife inspection can be dizzying in their complexity and diversity. Ensuring that there is timely access to the appropriate and best information for the situation at hand is an enduring challenge. By getting the best informational tools to the practitioners that need them, we will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of agencies tasked with confronting the illegal trade in turtles.



Suwannee alligator snapping turtle. / Renee Bodine. USFWS.

Supporting Actions:

- Assess, collate, and make accessible existing informational references and develop new references and tools, as needed, to identify turtle species and key biological information for species found in trade to meet various law enforcement needs.
- Develop best practices for safe handling and transportation of turtles that encompass disease risk, human safety, and animal welfare.
- Develop a broad reference guide or tool for applicable laws and regulations.
- Provide agency contact information for jurisdictions and law enforcement departments.
- Develop reliable information and maintain an expert witnesses contact list to utilize for investigation and prosecution.

Objective 5.2: Increase intelligence, information sharing, networking, and training related to turtle trafficking.

One of the foundational motivations of the CCITT is to broaden and strengthen the network of conservation professionals working to confront the crisis of the illegal collection and trade of North America's native turtles. Prioritizing a robust approach to increased information sharing among law enforcement agencies will serve to enhance their ability to identify perpetrators, make cases, and enforce existing laws.

Supporting Actions:

- Host regional workshops designed for information sharing and networking opportunities. Workshops will prioritize expert information sharing (e.g., trade routes, market trends and price, demand and supply chains, forms of criminality, prior cases, and deconfliction resources) and closed sessions for law enforcement personnel, as needed.
- Inform law enforcement of existing resources and develop strategies to make them more accessible.
- Create easily accessible online training resources.
- Develop a mechanism to quickly share timely and sensitive intelligence (e.g., a law enforcement sensitive bulletin).
- Create fact sheets to summarize domestic and global trends and data on turtles and their trade.
- Evaluate the feasibility of a coordinated enforcement “blitz”.



Eastern mud turtle. / Patrick Randall. CC by NC SA.

Objective 5.3. Understand how wildlife trafficking overlaps with other criminal activities (crime convergence) and how it may be applicable to turtle trafficking.

There is mounting evidence that international criminal organizations traffic in a wide variety of wildlife. Because wildlife trafficking generates high proceeds, it funds and facilitates other criminal activities such as terrorism, money laundering, narcotic, human, and weapon trafficking. Understanding the relevancy of crime convergence and turtle trafficking will help elevate the role and importance of wildlife crime in facilitating other major crimes.

Supporting Actions:

- Research prior instances of criminal convergence that intersect with wildlife trafficking.
- Identify current trends in crime convergence that involve wildlife trafficking.
- Create resource briefs and other materials that communicate crime convergence as it relates to wildlife trafficking, with emphasis on turtle illegal collection and trade.

List of all Strategic Goals and Objectives



GOAL 1: BUILD AND MAINTAIN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT THE CCITT'S MISSION TO ADDRESS THE ILLEGAL TURTLE TRADE.

Objectives:

- | | |
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| 1.1 Establish, maintain, and expand partnerships in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. | 1.6 Develop a partnership and communication strategy for non-CCITT members (interested individuals and groups). |
| 1.2 Establish, maintain, and expand international partnerships in transit and demand areas. | 1.7 Build capacity to meet needs for partnership development. |
| 1.3 Identify and secure sustained funding for network priorities. | 1.8 Build and maintain CCITT member agency/group support. |
| 1.4 Establish representation on regional, national, and international committees. | 1.9 Complete strategic planning processes to ensure succession planning, training to sustain future organizational leadership, and building support among partner organizations. |
| 1.5 Identify potential key partners, including the hobbyist community to find conservation champions. | 1.10 Engage public audiences and key conservation organizations. |

GOAL 2: UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE AFFECT AND ARE AFFECTED BY THE TURTLE TRADE AND APPLY EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO REDUCE ILLEGAL TRADE IN AN ETHICAL AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE MANNER.

Objectives:

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| <p>2.1 Support developing and implementing evidence-based behavior change strategies, while prioritizing demand reduction of illegally sourced live North American turtles in domestic and international trade.</p> <p>2.2 Develop and implement science-based communications initiatives and outreach tools to foster support and action to reduce the illegal trade, including by raising awareness about its ecological, economic, and cultural impacts.</p> | <p>2.3 Develop and host engagement sessions with hobbyist audiences and commercial breeders to promote legal compliance and identify shared conservation values that can be highlighted in outreach efforts.</p> <p>2.4 Support developing and implementing science-based initiatives to reduce access and opportunity for illegal activity.</p> <p>2.5 Assess governance context and identify opportunities for improvement based on good governance principles.</p> |
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GOAL 3: BUILD CAPACITY AND SECURE DEDICATED RESOURCES TO ACCOMMODATE CONFISCATION AND REPATRIATION OR PERMANENT PLACEMENT OF TURTLES.

Objectives:

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| <p>3.1 Develop a network of dedicated facilities with sufficient resources to care for confiscated turtles.</p> <p>3.2 Provide support for agencies to streamline the confiscation process and to garner support for internal resources and infrastructure to respond to confiscations.</p> | <p>3.3 Improve our ability to use health assessments and geographic genetic assignments to aid in decisions of potential repatriation of confiscated turtles.</p> <p>3.4 Explore the feasibility of establishing an information sharing network to facilitate data collection, data sharing, and resource sharing in confiscation and repatriation efforts.</p> |
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- 3.5 Identify funding for care, housing, veterinarian care, disease screening, genetic testing, and repatriation.
- 3.6 Prioritize expedient turtle repatriation, when appropriate.
- 3.7 Establish process for communications between law enforcement and holding facilities.
- 3.8 Identify and address regulatory barriers for moving turtles across state lines and international borders for care and repatriation.
- 3.9 Document species, numbers, locations, disposition, disease and genetic information, etc., in confiscations database.
- 3.10 Evaluate and apply appropriate research, keeping up with new techniques for genetics, disease considerations, and long-term monitoring.
- 3.11 Assist with confiscation and repatriation plans for states, with special consideration to regional and taxa needs.
- 3.12 Consider if/how to repatriate North American turtles confiscated abroad.
- 3.13 Foster agency support for transparent decision-making processes as related to repatriation.

GOAL 4: DEVELOP A MODEL LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND RESOURCES TO EFFECTIVELY COMBAT THE ILLEGAL TRADE IN TURTLES.

Objectives:

- 4.1 Assemble a team of policy experts and practitioners to develop a roadmap for a comprehensive, practical, and functional legal and policy framework.
- 4.2 Build a coalition of relevant interested parties from representative jurisdictions to increase feasibility, buy-in, and public support for a policy roadmap.
- 4.3 Develop restitution guidance for native turtle species.
- 4.4 Assess current regulations, loopholes, and enforceability.
- 4.5 Identify resources (funding, infrastructure, staff, etc.) to implement and sustain a new legal framework.
- 4.6 Ensure state, Tribal/Indigenous, judiciary, provincial awareness and engagement.
- 4.7 Explore and develop a consumer-centered certification program.
- 4.8 Develop possible mechanisms to employ in model legislation that would improve enforcement capabilities.
- 4.9 Draft model legislation.
- 4.10 Encourage/consider compliance – identify and eliminate barriers.

GOAL 5: STRENGTHEN SUPPORT FOR EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT OF THE ILLEGAL TURTLE TRADE THROUGH RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT, COLLABORATION, AND TAILORED TRAINING.

Objectives:

- 5.1 Develop and provide law enforcement with interdisciplinary tools and resources.
- 5.2 Increase intelligence, information sharing, networking, and training related to turtle trafficking.
- 5.3 Evaluate crime convergence as it relates to turtle trafficking.
- 5.4 Mobilize tools/research to inform law enforcement actions/judicial processes.
- 5.5 Evaluate enforceability of applicable laws and regulations.
- 5.6 Develop protocols for handling animals to ensure safety among sworn personnel and develop best practices related to temporary animal placement.
- 5.7 Evaluate capacity to receive and act on tips from the public.
- 5.8 Facilitate efficient and effective coordination across jurisdictions (i.e., state/federal/Tribal) and agencies.
- 5.9 Assess, fund, and maintain shared databases (e.g., databases pertaining to PIT tags, genetics, confiscations, etc.).
- 5.10 Provide biosecurity training, protocols, and resources.
- 5.11 Develop top-down support for initiatives that confront the illegal trade in turtles (i.e., judiciary, prosecutorial, law enforcement, and agency heads).
- 5.12 Work across CCITT working groups to ensure interdisciplinary exchange and productive relationships.
- 5.13 Increase intelligence capacity to engage in proactive enforcement strategies, like predicting market trends.



Bog turtle. / Stephen Badger. Maryland DNR.

For more information about the CCITT, please visit our website:

<https://parcplace.org/species/collaborative-to-combat-the-illegal-trade-in-turtles/>

