



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Headquarters

2901 West Truman Boulevard, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102-0180
Telephone: 573-751-4115 ▲ www.MissouriConservation.org

SARA PARKER PAULEY, Director

April 17, 2024

Mr. Tyler Schwartz, Executive Director
Conservation Federation of Missouri
728 W. Main Street
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Mr. Schwartz:

The resolutions that pertain to the Missouri Department of Conservation (Department), adopted at the 2024 annual meeting of the Conservation Federation of Missouri (CFM), have been considered by staff. In response, we submit the following comments:

RESOLUTION #2024-1: Increase Multi-Stakeholder Support for Show-Me Green Schools. CFM encourages state agencies and CFM Affiliates to begin or expand their support for Show-Me Green Schools.

RESPONSE: Department team members from Education Branch met with Missouri Environmental Education Association/Show-Me Green Schools leadership during the proposal development process and participated in the CFM Resolution discussion. The Department supports the proposal. The Department is already a member of the Show-Me Green Schools Partner network, where the Discover Nature Schools program is highlighted. Department staff plan to meet with Show-Me Green Schools leadership in early May 2024. We have already discussed opportunities to promote the Missouri Green Schools program through our Discover Nature School newsletter, which is sent to over 13,000 educators each quarter. At this time, we have not committed to mentors or additional financial support but that will be part of the discussion in May.

RESOLUTION #2024-2: Encourage Awareness of Microplastic Pollution in Missouri Streams. CFM encourages the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Division of Environmental Quality to develop and disseminate educational materials that raise awareness about microplastics in Missouri waters and promote solutions.

RESPONSE: Presently, there are no EPA regulations or guidance about microplastics in the environment. There is a science-based consensus forming that microplastics pose a risk to human and environmental health for fish and wildlife. A fact sheet from the Department and the Stream Team Educational Series of publications includes one publication concerning microplastics:

<https://mostreamteam.org/assets/factsheet31.pdf>

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Staff will continue to provide education materials through Stream Team resources and other communication methods to provide facts and research findings about the impacts of microplastics on the fish, forest, and wildlife resources of Missouri.

RESOLUTION #2024-4: Support Ethical Box Turtle Racing. CFM recommends that the Missouri Department of Conservation develop and implement regulations that allow for the continuation of ethical turtle races while curtailing those that abuse wildlife.

RESPONSE: Turtle racing has been a traditional pastime event for children at county fairs, festivals, and other events throughout the Midwest, including Missouri. Turtles used for these events are generally either long-term pet turtles or short-term collections of which many likely originated from the wild. If such turtles are collected from the wild for education purposes, the following regulations exist:

- A maximum of five (5) specimens of any native species not listed as venomous snakes, game wildlife, endangered species, and other select imperiled wildlife may be taken and possessed alive by a resident of Missouri.
- These individuals or their parts (bones, skins, shells, etc.) cannot be bought or sold.
- They cannot be transported (or shipped) from the state of Missouri.
- They cannot be taken from public lands, without additional wildlife collector's permits.
- They cannot be used for propagation (breeding).
- They cannot be used for commercial financial gain.
- They cannot be permanently marked or intentionally killed.

Missouri is one of the Midwestern states that supports strong populations of box turtles, especially throughout the expansive habitat of the Ozark Highlands. Undoubtedly, local population declines will occur for turtles and many other wildlife due to habitat loss, especially within urban landscapes. Annual road mortalities result in 100's if not 1,000's of turtle deaths, especially box turtles, on Missouri highways. Also, management tools, such as prescribed fire, to maintain the desired terrestrial habitat, can impact terrestrial turtles and other wildlife if conducted in late spring during their overwintering emergence. Therefore, the Department works with Missouri Department of Transportation and land agency managers to minimize impacts and to ensure the long-term persistence of box turtles in Missouri.

The Department has always promoted awareness of wildlife treatment, including turtles, throughout our educational outlets (*Missouri Conservationist* articles, on-line websites, media releases, care guidelines etc.). Information is provided to citizens to keep a watchful eye for turtles on roads, to allow wildlife to persist in the wild, and if legally collected from the wild, to maximize survival by returning them to the original place of capture. Several national organizations, represented by many managing agencies including Missouri, are discussing standard guidelines for many turtle concerns (e.g., roads, commercial harvest, sportfish harvest, competitive races, illegal trade, etc.).

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We will continue to raise awareness of wildlife treatment throughout Department educational and media outlets, as well as work with national organizations on effective guidelines on competitive races. If *Wildlife Code of Missouri* violations occur related to turtle races, please report to the local conservation agent.

Sincerely,



SARA PARKER PAULEY
DIRECTOR

c: Conservation Commission
Deputy Director Aaron Jeffries
Deputy Director Jason Sumners
Interim Deputy Director Andrew Bond
Commission Secretary