

Testimony in opposition to L.D. 57-An Act to Amend Maine's Endangered and Threatened Species List

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My name is John M. Glowa, Sr. I live in China, Maine. I have caught many turtles in my lifetime. I have been a MARAP contributor for some forty years and I largely wrote the chapter on spotted turtles in the first edition of the atlas. While growing up in Connecticut, I saw just three box turtles in more than twenty years. In recent years, I have documented and reported several wood turtle populations in Maine from York to Aroostook counties. I have never seen a box turtle in Maine but I have heard from several people who claim to have seen them in central Maine.

I am specifically addressing the portion of this bill which removes the eastern box turtle from the state endangered species list. This bill has no basis in science or the law. I am well aware that IFW's statutory mission does not even include the word science. Its mission does require IFW to "...preserve, protect and enhance the...wildlife resources of the state." This bill is clearly in violation of IFW's statutory mission.

It's time for a science lesson. Box turtles are native to Maine and any claims that Maine's box turtles are solely released captives has no basis in fact. Years ago former IFW employee Mark McCollough told me that the department had documented the presence of a number of box turtles in the state, but that in each instance only a solitary animal was located. I have news for IFW and for the committee. Box turtles are solitary animals. They are not like painted turtles that gather on rocks and logs. They are not like wood turtles that collectively hibernate on stream bottoms. Box turtles spend their entire lives, except for when they are mating-alone. A box turtle may never see another box turtle during its lifetime. This is precisely why they can live to one hundred years old and more. When they are lucky enough to find a turtle of the opposite sex, the sperm can remain viable inside the female and she can repeatedly nest for years from a single mating. This is nature's way of maintaining the species. It is a strategy that has worked for millions of years-until now.

The only ones who will benefit from removing box turtles from the state endangered species list are developers and those who destroy southern and central Maine wildlife habitat for profit. Rather than condemning this animal to probable extirpation as this bill does, the state of Maine should be responding to box turtle sightings and actively looking for box turtles-perhaps using trained dogs-collecting samples from box turtles for their DNA and radio tracking them so that they can be recaptured. Nesting females should be located and eggs should be incubated in captivity so that young box turtles will have a good chance at survival. Call on Maine's herpetologists and schoolchildren to volunteer their time and resources to incubate and head start box turtles-just as has been done successfully with Blandings turtles in Nova Scotia.

Maine has always been at the northern edge of box turtle range. No one is considering the positive effect of climate change on box turtles in Maine. Warmer winters will likely mean a northern expansion of suitable habitat for box turtles. Given any help at all, box turtles can expand their range and increase their numbers in southern and central Maine. Maine could be the best hope for box turtles as their numbers and habitat dwindle throughout their range. Preserving, protecting and enhancing Maine's wildlife populations is IFW's job. It's past time for IFW to step up to the plate and do its job.