

# Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center

Testimony presented to the Committee on Agriculture for HB 2479

Dennis Dinwiddie – January 27, 2022

Chairman Rahjes and members of the Committee I thank you for this opportunity to be heard on **HB 2479**, regarding Ornate box turtles.

We believe that ornate box turtles, our official state reptile, should be protected for future generations of Kansans to see and enjoy.

Across the state of Kansas, as in states around us, we have experienced an alarming reduction in the number of ornate box turtles in our state. Because box turtles have unique and colorful markings, they are collected from the wild and sold overseas through the illegal pet trade.

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks has discovered and documented multiple cases of individuals sending ornate box turtles, collected from the wild in Kansas, to overseas locations. We feel that poaching these turtles from the wild to send overseas has become the greatest threat they face. We feel it is the primary cause for their significant losses from the wild.

KAR 115-20-2 states that reptiles, except common snapping turtles and soft-shelled turtles, may be taken from the wild for personal use on a noncommercial basis by an individual who possesses a Kansas hunting license. This provides a legal means for individuals to capture and remove up to five ornate box turtles, from the wild in Kansas.

The current law provides a loophole that allows individuals that participate in the illegal wildlife trade to collect ornate box turtles in large numbers so long as they are not caught with more than five individuals of the species in their possession at any given time. We can stop individuals from illegally shipping ornate box turtles out of our state and country, if we stop them from having a legal means of collecting them from the wild in large numbers.

This bill provides a logical step to stopping the illegal exportation and collection of ornate box turtles in Kansas. We respectfully request that this action be taken to add ornate box turtles as one of the species that can no longer be captured, collected, or removed from the wild in Kansas.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard on HB 2479. I will stand for questions.

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