

FWC Bans Commercial Harvesting of Turtles on Freshwater Rivers and Lakes.

On June 17, 2009, after the final public hearing, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission voted unanimously to ban the commercial harvesting of turtles on Florida freshwater waterways. This FWC Rule also bans the commercial transportation of turtles or turtle eggs unless the carrier has received a special permit from FWC for scientific purposes or can prove that the turtles were grown in a private aquaculture operation.



Burt Eno, President of Rainbow River Conservation, and four other members of RRC spoke in favor of instituting the rule at the Public Hearing along with 40 other citizens and public interest groups. Numerous reports of night time harvesting of turtles on the Rainbow and Withlacoochee Rivers have helped to explain the dramatic decline in basking turtles observed during kayak or tubing trips.

FWC Rule 68-25.002 does allow individual taking of one turtle a day per person of non-protected species. It also allows for permits to be issued to collect a limited number of turtles to produce breeding stock for aquaculture turtle farms that will supply turtle meat in the future. The demand from the Asian market had created fear that this valuable natural resource of Florida would be seriously impacted if harvesting were not banned.

FWC Officers will be monitoring boating activity to insure enforcement of this rule. If you observe commercial harvesting of turtles on any Florida river or lake you can report it 24 hours a day by calling FWC's REWARD line at **888-404-FWCC (3922)**.