



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Division of Law Enforcement
Office of Statewide Investigations/Intelligence

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Commercialization of Florida's Freshwater Turtles

DISSEMINATION: Public Law Enforcement Investigations Only Limited

CLASSIFICATION: Strategic Operational Tactical

Commercialization of Florida's Freshwater Turtles

NOTE: This bulletin was compiled for the purpose of summarizing general trends related to the commercialization of freshwater turtles in Florida. Specific subjects, suspects, confidential sources and businesses are not identified in this document. Release of sensitive and confidential information will be considered on a case-by-case basis when requested by a law enforcement official.

Contents	
Item	Page
Key Findings	2
Commercial Exports of freshwater Turtles (Image)	3
Freshwater Turtles Taken Out of Season by County (Map)	4
Freshwater Turtles Taken by Illegal Method by County (Map)	4
Possession of More Than 50 Freshwater Turtles Eggs by County (Map)	5
Cities of Residence – Known Violators by Charge Type (Map)	6
Recommendations for Rule Development in Florida	7
Top 13 US Cities Exporting freshwater Turtles (List)	8
Top Destination Cities for US Exported freshwater Turtles (List)	8
Freshwater Turtle Species Most Frequently Targeted (List)	9
Photographs	10
Sources and References	11



Key Findings

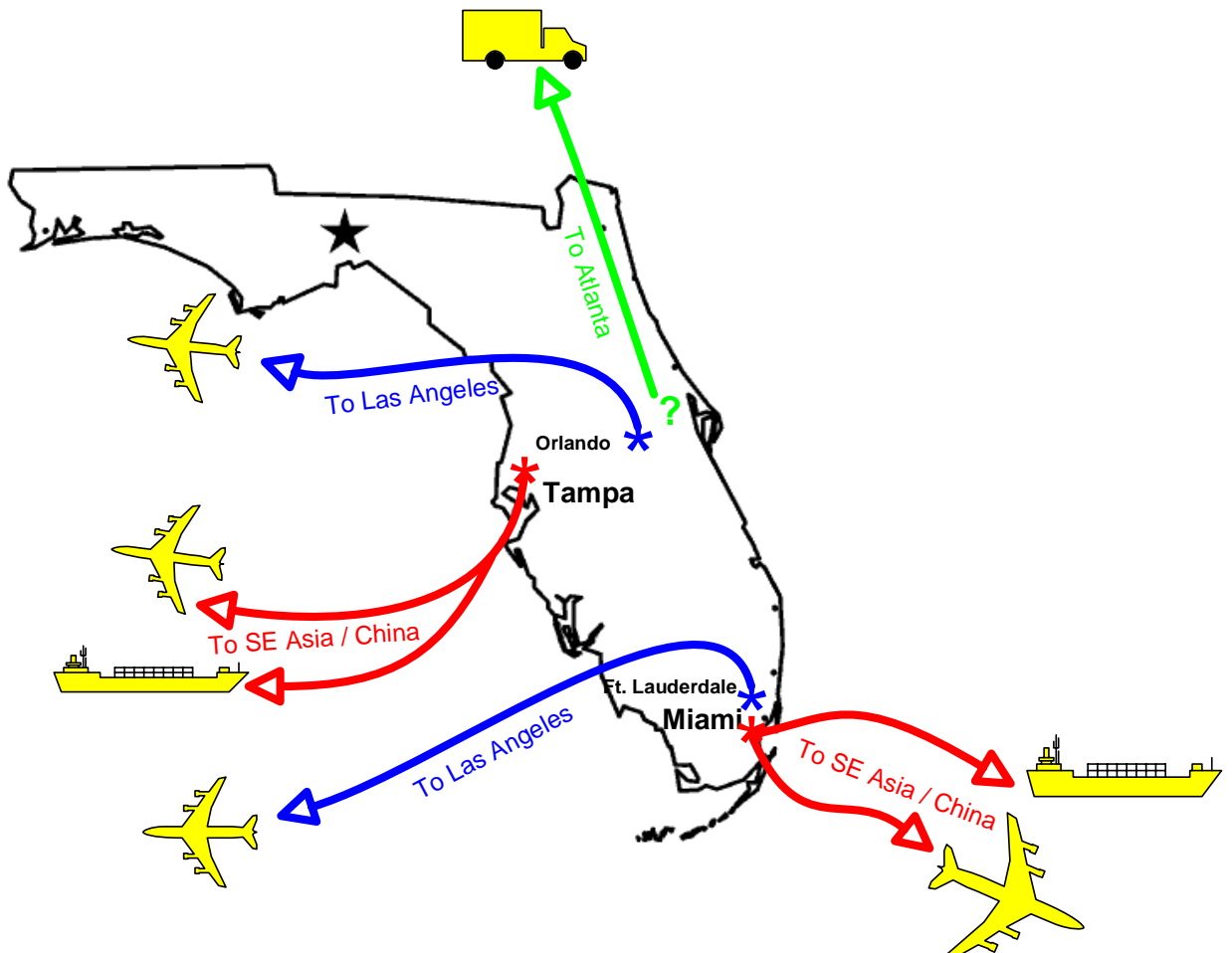
1. In 2005, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with state resource protection agencies in the southeast United States, determined that illegal trafficking in freshwater turtles is occurring with “virtually every turtle species found in the southeast [United States].”¹
2. Several Southern U.S. States have recently adopted laws to protect freshwater turtles
 - a. In 2007 Texas adopted Texas §65.331 prohibiting commercial take of all nongame on public lands in an effort to protect freshwater turtles
 - b. South Carolina has proposed two bills, H.3275 and H.4392, one similar to Texas’ statute the other prohibiting export of freshwater turtles
3. Since March of January 2004, the FWC Division of Law Enforcement has documented more than thirty (30) freshwater turtle related arrests.²
 - a. Primarily
 - i. Taking freshwater Turtles by Illegal Method FAC 68A-25.002(6)
 - ii. Taking of freshwater Turtles During the Closed Season FAC 68A-25.002(7)
 - iii. Possession of More Than 50 Turtle Eggs FAC 68A-25.002(8)
4. Wild Florida freshwater Turtles are commercially harvested and used to sustain three (3) primary markets.
 - a. Southeast Asian/Chinese food markets (Immediate consumption)
 - b. Chinese turtle farms for stocking/breeding markets (for later use as food)
 - c. International commercial pet trade and domestic ethnic food markets
5. The two species of freshwater turtle most commonly targeted in Florida
 - a. Florida Soft Shell (*Apalone ferox*)
 - b. Red Eared Slide (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)
6. Freshwater turtles are sold for anywhere between \$0.45 and \$15.00 each depending on species, quantity and size.
7. Chinese “turtle brokers” regularly advance tens of thousands of dollars to licensed Florida wholesale dealers to purchase freshwater turtles, mullet row and several species of saltwater fish.
8. Use of the internet to purchase commercial quantities of freshwater turtles for both the commercial food trade and the pet trade is increasing rapidly.
9. Commercial quantities of freshwater turtles are shipped from Florida to international destinations using two maritime ports.
 - a. Miami
 - b. Tampa



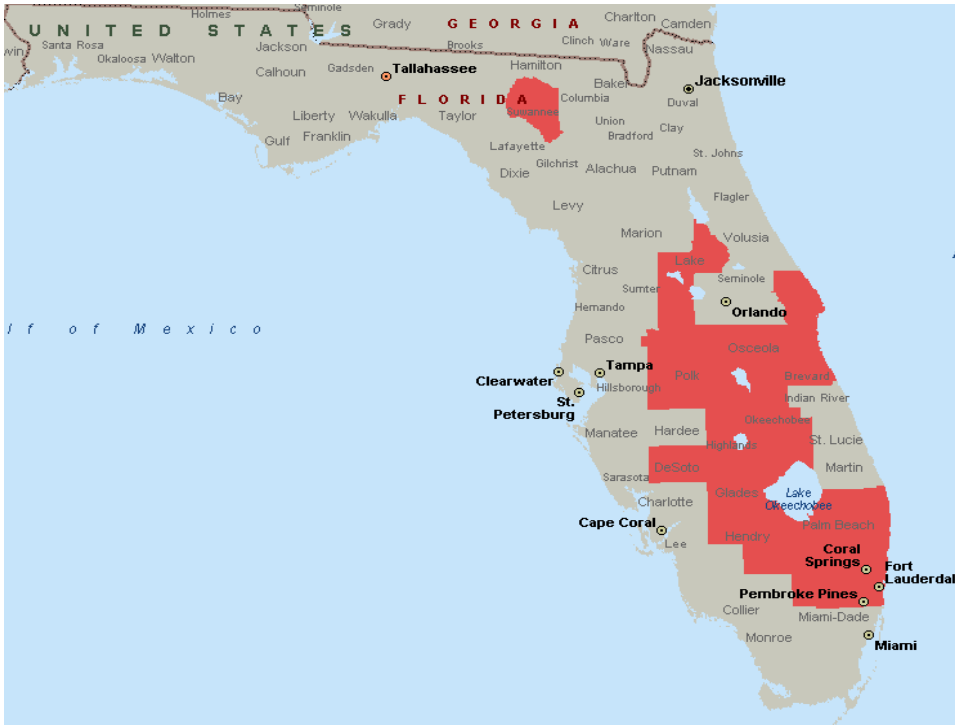
10. Commercial quantities of freshwater turtles are shipped from Florida to at least two (2) domestic transshipment locations.
 - a. Los Angeles, Ca
 - b. Atlanta, GA

11. Commercial quantities of freshwater turtles are shipped via vehicle, container vessel and airplane to domestic transshipment centers.
 - a. Tampa International Airport has reported that 1600-3000lbs of live freshwater turtles are shipped to California on a weekly basis (destined for Asia)
 - b. Sources advise similar shipments from Orlando, Miami and Ft. Lauderdale Airports
 - c. Florida DOACS has reported trucks being inspected at Florida Agricultural Inspection Stations (North bound I-95) loaded with multiple cases of freshwater turtles

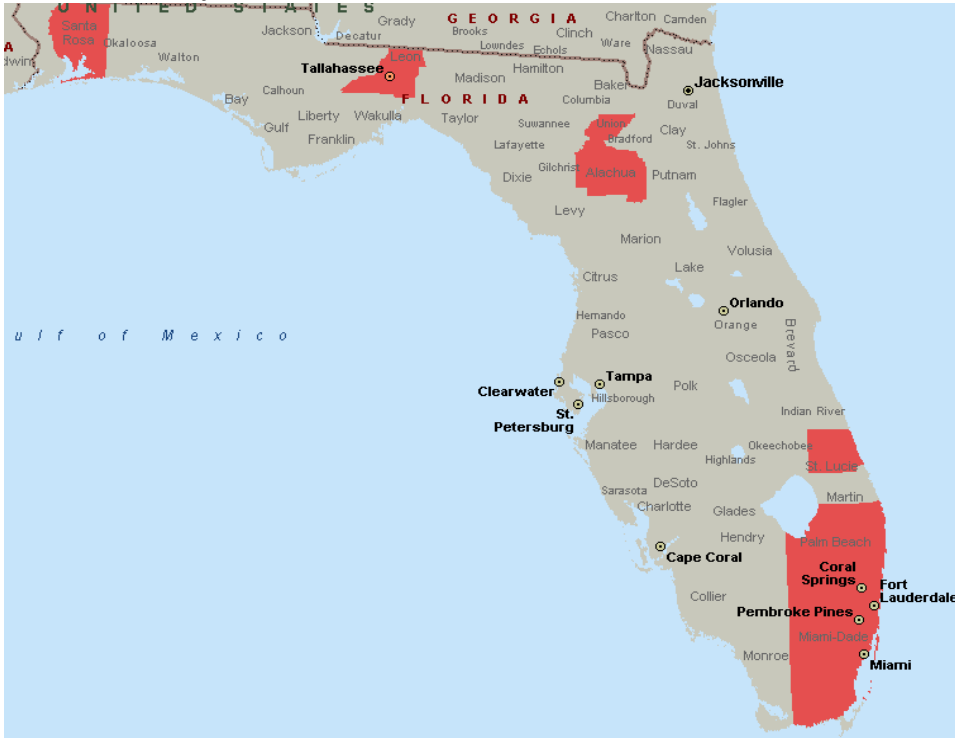
Commercial Exports of Freshwater Turtles



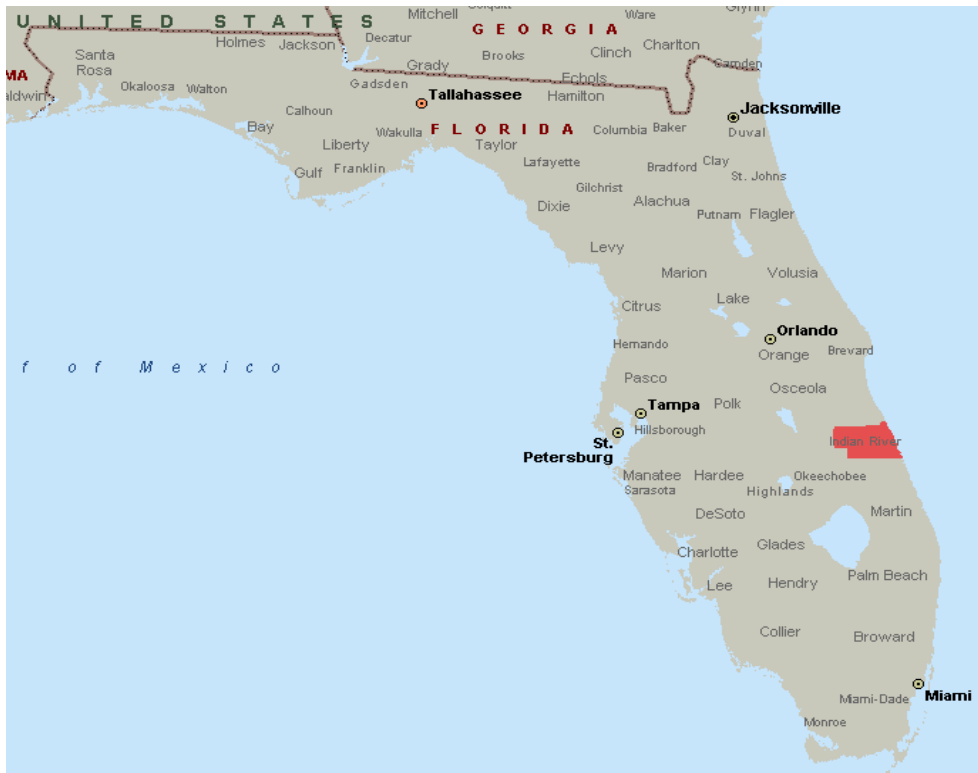
**“Freshwater Turtles Taken Out of Season” by County
Violations of FAC 68A-25.002(7)
Jan 2004 – July 2007 (Last Record)**



**“Freshwater Turtles Taken by Illegal Method” by County
Violations of FAC 68A-25.002(6)
Jan 2004 – July 2007 (Last Record)**

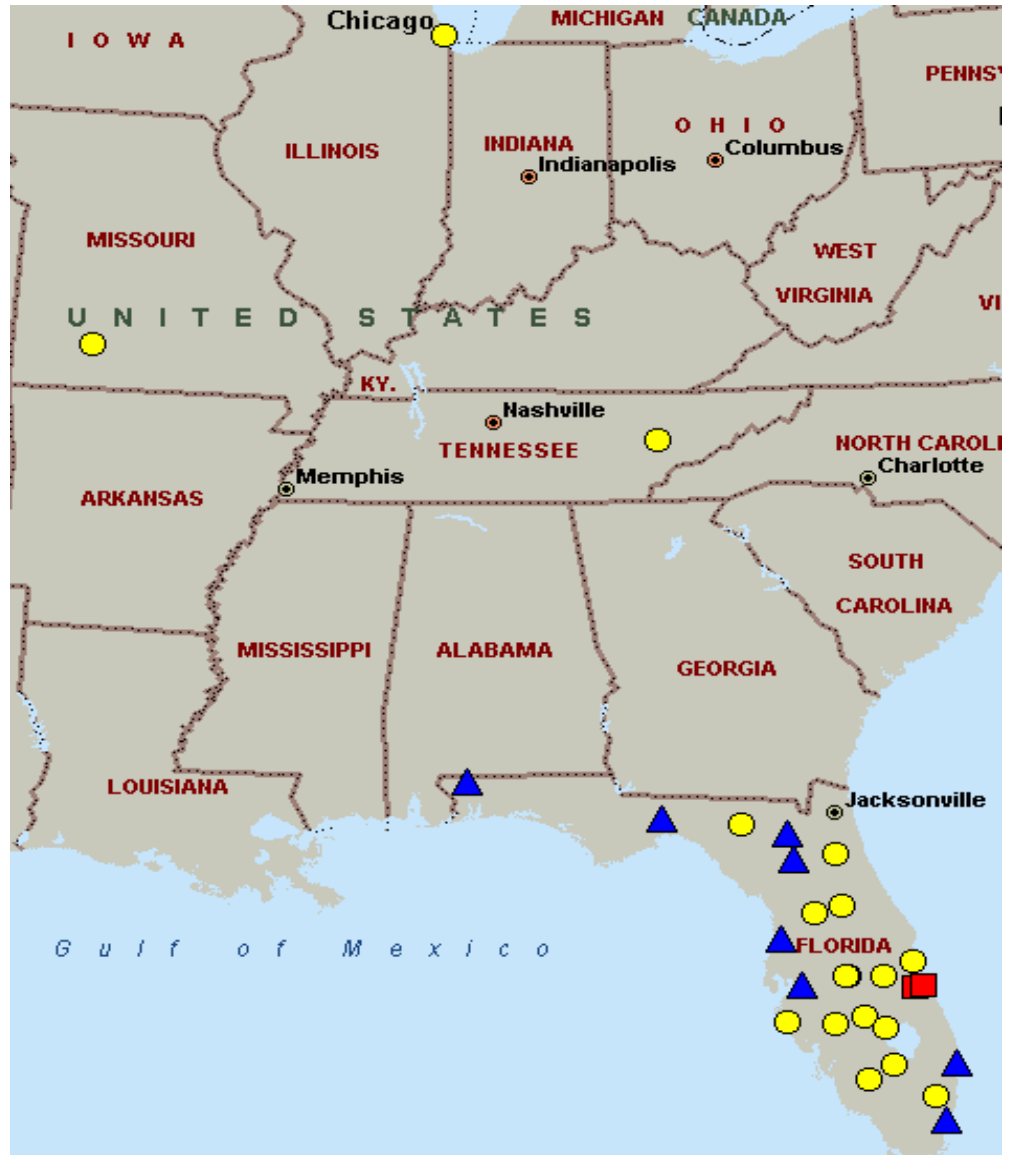


**“Possession of More Than 50 Freshwater Turtles Eggs” by County
Violations of FAC 68A-25.002(8)
Jan 2004 – July 2007 (Last Record)**



“Cities of Residence – Known Violators” by Charge Type
Violations of FAC 68A-25.002(8)
Jan 2004 – July 2007 (Last Record)

State	City
FL	SEBASTIAN
FL	FELLSMERE
FL	PORT ST. LUCIE
FL	ARCADIA
FL	LAKE PLACID
FL	BOYNTON BEACH
FL	GAINESVILLE
FL	PALATKA
FL	LAKE WALES
FL	SPRING HILL
FL	RIVERVIEW
IL	CHICAGO
FL	UMATILLA
FL	TALLAHASSEE
FL	SARASOTA
MO	SPRINGFIELD
FL	OKEECHOBEE
FL	BELLE GLADE
FL	IMMOKALEE
FL	MIAMI
FL	LAKE BUTLER
FL	WILDWOOD
FL	OKEECHOBEE
FL	OKEECHOBEE
FL	LAKE WALES
FL	LIVE OAK
FL	PEMBROKE PINES
FL	MELBOURNE
FL	KENANSVILLE
FL	JAY



- POSSESSION OF >50 FRESHWATER TURTLE EGGS
- POSSESSION OF SOFTSHELL TURTLE IN CLOSED SEASON
- ▲ TAKING FRESHWATER TURTLE BY ILLEGAL METHOD



Recommendations for Rule Development in Florida From FWC Field Personnel

1. Require all that are taking turtles or tortoises for commercial purposes to possess a license issued under 372.921.
2. Clarify 372.921 as to include take or possession of commercial quantities of non-game species.
3. Develop rules that define commercial and recreational quantities of non-game species.
4. Create a new statute requiring a license to take non-game species from the wild statewide.
5. Evaluate rules relating to the possession of species that are currently restricted to personal possession limits. Determine if prohibition of possession would be appropriate for these species.
6. Current laws addressing freshwater turtles and tortoises:
 - a. 68-5 – possession and importation of certain species.
 - b. 68A-6 – caging and enclosure requirements.
 - c. 68A-15 – Management area regulations.
 - d. 68A-23.003 – Commercial fishing devices.
 - e. 68A-23.012 – Lake Okeechobee regulations.
 - f. 68A-25.002 – possession and restricted take of certain species.
 - g. 68A-27.003 – Endangered species.
 - h. 68A-27.004 – Threatened species.
 - i. 68A-27.005 – Species of Special Concern.



**Top 13 US Cities Exporting Freshwater Turtles between Dates 11/4/2002-11/4/2005
(Does not include turtles transshipped domestically) ³**

City of Export	Total Shipments
Atlanta, GA	357 shipments to 21 countries
Boston, MA	7 shipments to 1 country
Chicago, IL	393 shipments to 8 countries
Denver, CO	1 shipment to 1 country
Dallas / Fort Worth, TX	1,919 shipments to 22 countries
Houston, TX	26 shipments to 4 countries
Los Angeles, CA	1139 shipments 17 countries
Miami, FL	1,413 shipments to 29 countries
New Orleans, LA	2,067 shipments to 19 countries
New York, NY	35 shipments to 6 countries
Seattle, WA	1 shipment to 1 county
San Francisco, CA	1,429 shipments to 12 countries
Tampa, FL	23 shipments to 5 countries

Top Destination Cities for US Exported Freshwater Turtles ³

Country	Total Shipments	Total Animals
Hong Kong	1,392	13,625,673
Taiwan	465	6,238,300
Mexico	464	3,478,257
Japan	2,222	1,527,771
China	129	1,365,687
Singapore	82	945,257
Italy	341	858,971
Spain	359	596,965
Belgium	132	298,269
Netherlands	217	297,968
Czech Republic*	142	288,673
Germany	999	287,023
Malaysia	39	239,798
Korea	343	237,654
France	329	219,346
Turkey	23	191,004
Portugal	89	178,960
Russia	17	153,000
Chile	23	77,010
Hungary*	93	64,119
Indonesia	44	59,228
Romania	19	57,300
Great Britain	347	44,145
Croatia	18	31,900
Honduras	15	17,050
Denmark	61	13,916
Panama	19	13,440
Poland	22	13,111
Austria	35	12,892
Sweden	26	9,331
Switzerland	57	7,919
Argentina	36	1,554
El Salvador	13	974
Canada	18	678
All Other Countries	234	362,298
World Total	8,828	31,813,887



Freshwater Turtle Species Most Frequently Targeted by Commercial Trade ³

Scientific Name	Common Name
<i>Apalone sp.</i>	Soft-shell
<i>Apalone ferox</i>	Florida soft-shell Turtle
<i>Apalone mutica</i>	Smooth soft-shell Turtle
<i>Apalone spinifera</i>	Spiny soft-shell Turtle
<i>Chelydra serpentina (osceola)</i>	Common Snapping Turtle
<i>Chrysemys sp.</i>	Painted Turtle
<i>Chrysemys picta (bellii)</i>	Western Painted Turtle
<i>Clemmys sp.</i>	Pond Turtle
<i>Clemmys guttata</i>	Spotted Turtle
<i>Clemmys insculpta (Glyptemys insculpta)</i>	Wood Turtle
<i>Clemmys marmorata (Actinemys marmorata)</i>	Pacific Pond Turtle
<i>Deirochelys reticularia</i>	Chicken Turtle
<i>Emydoidea blandingii (Emys blandingii)</i>	Blanding's Turtle
<i>Graptemys sp.</i>	Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys barbouri</i>	Barbour's Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys caglei</i>	Cagle's Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys geographica</i>	Common Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys gibbonsi</i>	Pascagoula Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys nigrinoda</i>	Black-knobbed Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys ouachitensis</i>	Ouachita Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys pseudogeographica</i>	False Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys pseudogeographica kohni</i>	Mississippi Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys pulchra</i>	Alabama Map Turtle
<i>Graptemys versa</i>	Texas Map Turtle
<i>Kinosternon sp.</i>	Mud Turtle
<i>Kinosternon baurii</i>	Striped Mud Turtle
<i>Kinosternon flavescens</i>	Yellow Mud Turtle
<i>Kinosternon scorpioides</i>	Scorpion Mud Turtle
<i>Kinosternon subrubrum</i>	Common Mud Turtle
<i>Macrochelys (Macrochelys) temminckii</i>	Alligator Snapping Turtle
<i>Malaclemys terrapin</i>	Diamond-back Terrapin
<i>Pseudemys sp.</i>	Cooter Turtle
<i>Pseudemys alabamensis</i>	Alabama Redbelly Turtle
<i>Pseudemys concinna</i>	River Cooter Turtle
<i>Pseudemys floridiana</i>	Florida Cooter
<i>Pseudemys gorzugi</i>	Rio Grande River Cooter
<i>Pseudemys nelsoni</i>	Florida Redbelly Turtle
<i>Pseudemys peninsularis</i>	Peninsula Cooter
<i>Pseudemys rubriventris</i>	American Redbelly Turtle
<i>Sternotherus sp.</i>	Musk Turtle
<i>Sternotherus carinatus</i>	Keelbacked Musk Turtle
<i>Sternotherus minor</i>	Loggerhead Musk Turtle
<i>Sternotherus odoratus</i>	Common Musk Turtle
<i>Trachemys sp.</i>	Slider Turtle
<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>	Red-eared Slider Turtle
<i>Trachemys scripta gaigeae</i>	Big Bend Slider
<i>Trachemys scripta scripta</i>	Yellowbelly Slider
<i>Trachemys scripta troostii</i>	Cumberland Slider





Baited Trotline (FWC)



Turtles in Sacks (FWC)



Turtles in Sacks (FWC)



Turtles Released by FWC



Red Eared Slider on Trotline



Turtles in Asian Market





Turtles in Asian Market



Turtles in Asian Market

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