

MEMORANDUM



To: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commissioners

From: Dr. Thomas Eason, Director, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation

Date: July 10, 2017

Subject: Consent Agenda, Listing Status of 3 species of Alligator Snapping Turtle

Purpose:

Staff will provide the Biological Status Report, listing recommendation, and associated rule nomenclature updates for three species of alligator snapping turtle, pursuant to Chapter 68A-27, F.A.C.

Summary:

In 2010, as part of the updated listing process for state listed species, species underwent status reviews (Chapter 68A-27, F.A.C). The alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*) did not meet the listing criteria, and a Species Action Plan was prepared to ensure that the species would not require listing in the future. In 2014, new research divided the alligator snapping turtle into three species: the Suwannee alligator snapping turtle (*M. suwanniensis*), the Apalachicola alligator snapping turtle (*M. apalachicola*), and the alligator snapping turtle (*M. temminckii*). In 2015, staff recommended and the Commission approved maintaining the alligator snapping turtle on the Species of Special Concern list and initiating the Biological Status Review (BSR) of all three species.

A Biological Review Group (BRG) was convened in late 2015, and determined that the Suwannee alligator snapping turtle and the alligator snapping turtle met at least one listing criteria; the Apalachicola alligator snapping turtle did not meet any criteria. Staff concurred with the BRG on both the Apalachicola and Suwannee species, but felt the criteria did not accurately reflect the biological status of *M. temminckii*. The alligator snapping turtle (*M. temminckii*) is at the edge of its range in Florida, and is protected from take throughout its range. The BSR recommends that the Suwannee alligator snapping turtle be designated as a state Threatened species. Listing is not recommended for the alligator snapping turtle or the Apalachicola alligator snapping turtle. The BSR was reviewed by seven independent scientists, concurring with the listing recommendations. Staff also recommend clarifying Rule 68A-27.005, F.A.C. to reflect that the rule covers all 3 alligator snapping turtle species until rule changes implementing the Commission's listing decisions are enacted. With direction from the Commission, staff will revise the Species Action Plan to address all 3 species. It will be brought before the Commission in the summer of 2018.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the listing recommendations, clarification of the SSC rule to include the three alligator snapping turtle species, and direction on revision of the Species Action Plan. If approved, staff will publish the draft rule and then file the final rule for adoption as soon as possible unless a hearing is requested.

Staff Contact and/or Presenter:

Brad Gruver, Section Leader, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation