STATE OF NEW YORK

6621

2025-2026 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

March 18, 2025

Introduced by Sen. HARCKHAM -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Environmental Conservation

AN ACT to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to prohibiting the breeding, sale, trade, purchase, importation, and exportation of red-eared slider turtles

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. Legislative intent. 1. New York is a significant participant in the global marketplace for the red-eared slider turtle, one of the world's 100 most invasive species, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

2. Though native only in U.S. southern states, the red-eared slider is now considered invasive on every continent except Antarctica due to the global pet trade.

3. Because red-eared sliders can live up to 40 years in captivity and will continue to grow during that time, pet owners often release them into the wild, or the turtles escape enclosures, which has led to the national and international proliferation of the species.

4. Due to their long life, resistance to disease, and voracious foraging, red-eared sliders outcompete other species, disrupt habitats and pose a grave threat to biodiversity wherever they reside outside their natural range.

5. Although it is illegal for a pet owner to release a red-eared slider into the wild in New York, the regulation is unenforceable, and the commerce in red-eared sliders is unabated, resulting in the continuing spread of red-eared sliders in waters ranging from Buffalo to New York City's parks.

6. New York's participation in the international marketplace for red-eared slider turtles has made the state and its people unwitting participants in the global spread of one of the most invasive species on the planet.

EXPLANATION--Matter in *italics* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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7. It is in the best interest of the state that the breeding, sale, trade, purchase, importation, and exportation of red-eared slider turtles be prohibited, and that the state use its authority to assist in all efforts to prevent further introduction of red-eared slider turtles statewide, nationally, and internationally.

§ 2. The environmental conservation law is amended by adding a new section 11-0541 to read as follows:

§ 11-0541. Breeding and sale of red-eared slider turtles prohibited.

1. For the purposes of this section, "red-eared slider turtles" shall mean the species trachemys scripta elegans.

2. No person, firm, partnership, corporation, or government entity shall knowingly breed, sell, purchase, import, export, distribute, transport or otherwise trade red-eared slider turtles.

3. This section shall not apply to:

(a) zoological parks and aquariums accredited by the association of zoos and aquariums;

(b) wildlife sanctuaries, as defined by subdivision thirty-two of section 11-0103 of this article;

(c) research facilities, as defined by the Animal Welfare Act, 7 USC. Section 2132(e), licensed by the United States secretary of agriculture;

(d) licensed veterinarians and incorporated humane societies, animal shelters, societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and animal welfare organizations in temporary possession of wild animals;

(e) state universities, private colleges or universities, and state agencies working with wild animals;

(f) wildlife rehabilitators licensed pursuant to the provisions of subdivision three of section 11-0515 of this title who are tending to sick, injured, or abandoned wild animals;

(g) a person having custody of a wild animal solely for the purpose of transporting it to a licensed veterinarian, wildlife rehabilitator, humane society, or other entity authorized to handle or treat wild animals pursuant to this section; and

(h) nature centers engaged in bona fide environmental or conservation education and research, as determined by the department.

4. The department may adopt rules and regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this section.

§ 3. This act shall take effect on the sixtieth day after it shall have become a law.