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MDC Needs Your Help to Solve Illegal Poaching of Turtles

APRIL 24TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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MDC NEEDS YOUR HELP TO SOLVE ILLEGAL POACHING CASE IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

News from the region: Southeast, Candice Davis

Hayti, Missouri- The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) asks for help to solve a wildlife crime. Hayti Fire Department personnel reported illegal poaching activity to Missouri Conservation Agent Brian Shelton last Thursday after discovering a dump site of dead turtles while fighting a wildfire. Agent Shelton determined the large pile of turtles included 161 red-eared sliders and two snapping turtles.

“This dump site is, without a doubt, the most egregious turtle poaching incident that I have seen in my career,” Shelton said. “I’m appalled that anyone would have this kind of disregard for our wildlife here in the Bootheel.”

Shelton said there appeared to be no reason for someone to kill the turtles, which left him with more questions than answers.

A red-eared slider is a common semi-aquatic turtle in Missouri. A distinct red or orange stripe is normally present on each side of the head behind the eye. The name “slider” comes from their habit of sliding quickly into the water from their basking spots. They become active in March and remain active until mid-October. The snapping turtle is a

large aquatic turtle with a big pointed head, long thick tail, and small lower shell. Both turtle species help to keep the populations of many aquatic animals and plants in check.

This case comes at a time MDC is actively reminding drivers to watch for turtles in the road, indicating turtles are already at a disadvantage this time of year, when they tend to travel. Spring rains and warmer weather encourage turtles to emerge from their burrows and begin to search for food and mates, which sometimes leads them across roadways. Although there is regulated hunting of some turtle species, Shelton said this is a case of wanton waste.

“It is illegal to intentionally leave or abandon any portion of any wildlife that is commonly used as human food,” Shelton said. “The amount of wasted wildlife here is shocking and I look forward to learning more about this case.”

Information about this incident can be shared anonymously through the Operation Game Thief Hotline at 1-800-392-1111. Agent Shelton may be reached directly at (573)757-8357. Information leading to an arrest may lead to an award of up to \$1,000. For more information about Operation Game Thief and The Wildlife Code of Missouri, go online to mdc.mo.gov.

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