

Conservation of the Alligator Snapping Turtle in Kansas

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Why does KDWP want to bring the Alligator Snapping Turtle back to Kansas?**

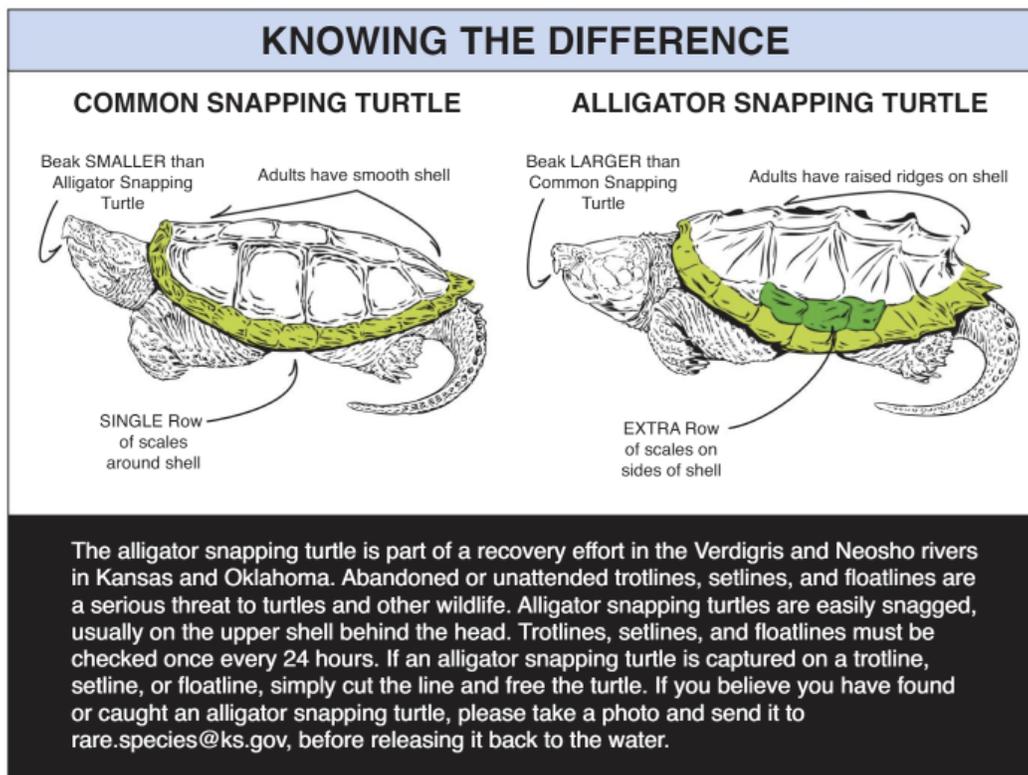
The department manages wildlife resources of the state for the benefit of the resources and citizens of Kansas. It is the mission of the KDWP to conserve and enhance Kansas' wildlife and habitats, ensuring current and future generations appreciate and enjoy these living resources. Alligator Snapping Turtles were very recently native to Kansas waters and play a vital role in aquatic ecosystems. While juvenile Alligator Snapping Turtles will occasionally prey on small fishes, adults are opportunistic omnivores that primarily feed on vegetation, carrion, other turtles, mussels, and occasionally small mammals. Snapping turtles are not known to have negative impacts on fish populations and are considered an integral part of aquatic ecosystems by dispersing seeds and disposing of carrion.

- **Aren't Alligator Snapping Turtles already in Kansas?**

No. The last known Alligator Snapping Turtle collected in Kansas was in 1991. Turtle community surveys in Kansas since then have not encountered an Alligator Snapping Turtle.

- **How do I tell the difference between an Alligator Snapping Turtle and a Common Snapping Turtle?**

At smaller sizes, these two species are often confused with one another. The Common Snapping Turtle, as its name suggests, is relatively common in rivers, reservoirs, and ponds across the state. Juvenile Common Snapping Turtles can be distinguished by white dots on the bottom of the shell (otherwise known as a plastron) and a single row of marginal scutes or scales around the outside edges of the shell. In contrast, juvenile Alligator Snapping Turtles will have a second row of marginal scutes and lack white spots on the bottom of the shell. For differences in adult specimens, see the graphic below.



- **Are Alligator Snapping Turtles native to Kansas?**

Yes. There are 19 historic collections of the species documented in Kansas, with most of those coming from the Verdigris and Neosho River watersheds.

- **Are Alligator Snapping Turtles protected?**

Yes. At the state level, Alligator Snapping Turtles are considered a SINC (species in need of conservation) species. This designation provides protections against killing, harming, or harassing the species under the Kansas Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act. At the federal level, the USFWS issued a 12-month finding with a proposed listing of Threatened. However, no final rule has yet been issued. Common Snapping Turtles can be harvested and are managed by creel and possession limits. See KDWP fishing regulations for more information.

- **Are Alligator Snapping Turtles dangerous?**

Adult Alligator Snapping Turtles can reach maximum sizes of over 300 lbs and can generate tremendous bite force. However, human interactions with the species are very rare. This species spends most of its life in deep water within complex habitat such as submerged trees and aquatic vegetation. Females will leave the water in late spring and early summer to dig nests and lay eggs. Nest construction often occurs very close to the water and is usually done in the middle of the night. After laying and burying eggs, the female will return to the water. There are no records of a turtle unintentionally biting a human. All bites are the result of humans attempting to handle the turtle.

- **What do I do if I find an Alligator Snapping Turtle?**

All Alligator Snapping Turtles that are released in 2024 will have an external tracking tag attached to the shell. If a live tagged Alligator Snapping Turtle is spotted, note the location of the turtle, and take a picture of the animal if possible while keeping a safe distance. Pictures and location information can be sent to rare.species@ks.gov or to Trevor Starks at trevor.starks@ks.gov. The same procedures should be followed if a deceased animal is found.

- **What do I do if I come across an Alligator Snapping Turtle while fishing?**

Alligator Snapping Turtles may be caught on trotlines, setlines, and conventional fishing tackle. Fatalities from trotlines and setlines can be minimized by checking lines every day. Fatalities from all gear can be reduced by immediately cutting the line and freeing any captured turtles.

- **How are these reintroductions being funded?**

Funding for the Alligator Snapping Turtle releases in 2024 and 2025 comes from a Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund Grant under Section 6 of the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. These grants support the development and implementation of conservation programs for the benefit of resident listed, candidate, and at-risk species on non-federal lands. To be eligible for grant program, states must fund at least 25% of the total estimated project cost, or 10% when two or more states implement a joint project. In the case of the planned Alligator Snapping Turtle releases, approximately 10.5% of the project was funded by KDWP by partnering with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation for a joint project.

- **How is KDWP able to work with federally listed or candidate species?**

Kansas was the first state in the nation to implement a statewide programmatic agreement to allow for reintroductions of listed species while providing protections for landowners who participate in the program. Through this agreement, participating non-federal landowners can obtain assurances against unintentional take of reintroduced species resulting from legal land-use practices (such as farming and ranching). In return for these protections, KDWP is allowed to stock and monitor reintroduced populations of listed species. For more information about the Kansas Aquatic Species Recovery Program and how you can get involved, click [here](#).