“Alligator Snapping Turtle Headstart Program”

The Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*) has experienced significant population declines throughout its range due to multiple factors, including harvest pressures (Sloan and Lovich 1995). Recently, *Macrochelys temminckii* has been split into 3 species: *M. suwanniensis, M. apalachicolae,* and *M. temminckii*. Alligator snapping turtles in Louisiana are still considered *M. temminckii* (Thomas et al. 2014). *Macrochelys temminckii* is listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN and is listed under Appendix III of CITES (CITES 2006, IUCN 2007). The Alligator Snapping Turtle is a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (S3) in the state of Louisiana (LNHP 2014), as identified in the 2015 Louisiana Wildlife Action Plan (WAP; Holcomb et al. 2015).

A determination of whether or not to list the Alligator Snapping Turtle as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act is scheduled for 2017 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Efforts are currently underway in Louisiana to gather sufficient data to preclude listing. Commercial harvest of this species has been banned since 2004 in Louisiana, although recreational take is still allowed. It appears that the greatest threat to Alligator Snapping Turtle populations in the state is the lack of juvenile recruitment. This is in large part due to predation of nests and hatchlings, primarily by red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) and raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) (Holcomb and Carr 2011, Holcomb and Carr 2013).

This grant funds the operation of the LDWF Alligator Snapping Turtle headstart facility in Monroe, LA. The headstart program was started in 2012, to produce headstarted turtles for release. Such releases are an effective means of supplementing wild populations, helping to compensate for low observed levels of natural recruitment. The goal of producing at least 50 turtles per year for release has been set.

(**Abstract excerpted from**: *“Alligator Snapping Turtle Headstart Program”* SWG Proposal; 2014, Gregory et al.).