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From the Baltimore Sun

On the Outdoors: Candus Thomson

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Fear for the turtle

When it comes to critters and whether we have enough of a particular brand, it's a good idea to err on the side of having a few too many.

Not like suburban white-tailed deer too many. More like, hope-we-have-enough-honey-roasted-peanuts-to-get-us-through-the-Ravens-game too many.

That's why DNR's diamondback terrapin emergency regulations seem a bit strange to me.

Tomorrow night the agency will have a little get-together at its [Annapolis](#) headquarters to talk about its turtle protection program. The agency doesn't really want to have this meeting or these regulations. The legislature forced the issue last session.

The proposal, which you can find on the agency's Web site (www.dnr.state.md.us), would expand the closed season, increase the minimum size and require turtle-catchers to have permits and report their catches.

Sounds pretty good. Yet, there's a disturbing sentence in the DNR proposal: "The status of the terrapin statewide is undetermined but is in decline in some areas."

Let's add what we do know:

- In 2001, the state Diamondback Terrapin Task Force issued a report, calling for "an immediate moratorium on the commercial harvest" of terrapins. DNR responded by promising "a three-pronged attack that includes [a] stock assessment," according to a Sun story.
- Last month, a top DNR official admitted in an interview with The Sun that the agency still doesn't know how many turtles are in the bay or how many are taken out.
- By some estimates, the terrapin harvest is estimated to have increased tenfold over the past three years because of demand from the Asian market.

- Last session's legislative protection bill noted: "The low reproductive potential of terrapins indicates that females must reproduce for many years in order for the population to grow or remain stable."
- DNR's proposed regulation does not cap the number of commercial permits nor does it limit the total harvest.

Protection? If that's what the terrapins need, perhaps they'd be better off asking the Mafia.

The little chit-chat starts at 7 p.m. If you can't make it, you can comment until July 17 by calling 410-260-8260, faxing 410-260-8278 or e-mailing swidman@dnr.state.md.us.

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