Media Contact:
Stephanie Haan-Amato
Communications Director
(575) 652-6957 | shaanamato@ARCProtects.org

Media Kit & Background Information | **Images & Logos**

Trafficking Crisis Compounds Challenges for Turtles at Risk of Extinction: Recently Appointed Turtle Conservation and Policy Director to Combat Underlying Issues

The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy Mounts Urgent Response to Illegal Trade

UNITED STATES, October 17, 2024 - The rampant illegal trade in turtles is compounding a worldwide conservation emergency, as more than half of all turtle species are already at risk of extinction. To address this crisis, the Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a national nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, appointed Dr. Brooke Talley as the new Turtle Conservation and Policy Director, a critical role focused on the urgent need to curb turtle trafficking.

Alongside a network of partners, Talley will spearhead initiatives aimed at reducing demand for illegally collected and exported turtles from the US, the global hotspot of turtle diversity.

Turtle trafficking has reached alarming and unsustainable levels. Tens of thousands of freshwater turtles have been confiscated by US law enforcement officials from traffickers attempting to illegally trade them (Easter et al. 2023). Of course, the number of US turtles poached and sold illegally is likely significantly larger because these data represent only turtles that were intercepted, not those that were successfully trafficked.

Among the most frequently targeted native species are the eastern box turtle, diamondback terrapin, alligator snapping turtle, and spotted turtle.

However, as Talley emphasized, "The illegal trade in turtles is not just a localized issue; it is a global conservation crisis." Because more than 50 percent of turtle species worldwide are facing extinction, the implications of this trade are profound and widespread.

Turtles have low reproductive rates, requiring decades to replace themselves. The illegal collection of breeding adults, particularly females, disrupts their ability to sustain populations and can lead to rapid declines.

To stem the illegal flow of turtles from the US across the world, Talley leads the efforts of a grassroots network of diverse partners. These collaborators include professionals from state and federal agencies,

tribal biologists, law enforcement, academia, and non-governmental organizations to tackle the multifaceted issues surrounding the illegal collection and trade of native turtle species.

Because the US has the highest turtle diversity, this network plays a key role in addressing this crisis. As the world witnesses steep declines in turtle populations, particularly in Asia, the demand has shifted towards native species in the US.

This high demand, from both domestic and international markets, is among just some of the complex factors driving the illegal turtle trade. Plus, trade not only occurs through traditional markets but has increasingly moved to online platforms, making it more challenging to combat. The combination of high demand, alongside the unique biological vulnerabilities of turtle species, creates a perfect storm for their decline.

Wildlife trafficking, a multi-billion-dollar industry, poses one of the largest organized crime challenges in the world. Under international agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), many turtle species receive some level of protection. However, effective enforcement remains a significant hurdle.

Talley's efforts will focus on strengthening these regulations and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to disrupt illegal trade networks. As she said, "Tackling the illegal turtle trade requires a multipronged approach. By increasing awareness, improving enforcement, and advocating for policy change, we can help ensure the survival of our native turtles."

About Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC)
Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, or ARC, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on identifying and conserving the highest priority places for amphibians and reptiles in the United States. We protect endangered amphibians and reptiles through a strategic, scientific, and passionate approach. We believe the conservation of amphibians, reptiles, and the habitats they depend on is vitally important. To learn more, visit ARCProtects.org.

###

Reference
Easter, T., Trautmann, J., Gore, M., & Carter, N. (2023). Media portrayal of the illegal trade in wildlife: The case of turtles in the US and implications for conservation. People and Nature, 5, 758–773. https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10448