



## Statement of Opposition to HB 1603-FN and Amendment 2026-0518h

February 15, 2026

New Hampshire Turtle Rescue strongly opposes HB 1603-FN and Amendment 2026-0518h. This legislation, as amended, would further roll back the already-meager protections for threatened and endangered New Hampshire wildlife and the habitats they rely on, force the disposal of millions of dollars of existing data, and require millions of additional taxpayer dollars to create a new database and re-collect existing ecologically valid data in order to satisfy statutory obligations.

The amendment to HB 1603-FN, which was never afforded a public hearing, requires the Executive Director of Fish and Game to adopt new rules for *verifying the accuracy of threatened and endangered wildlife records* and for ensuring *written landowner permission is obtained* before collecting site-specific species location data.

The bill's narrow emphasis on "verifiable evidence" and regulating the "age of data," as outlined in the amendment, is incompatible with the biology and ecology of the long-lived, low-detectability turtle species native to New Hampshire. These turtles use the same habitat for decades, and the absence of recent sightings does not indicate absence in reality. Restricting the use of older occurrence records weakens the scientific basis for habitat protections that are essential for these species' survival.

Similarly, requiring written landowner permission before gathering species location data may appear straightforward, but in effect would further enable developers to turn a blind eye to threatened and endangered wildlife that may be further imperiled by their actions. Many of New Hampshire's most threatened turtles live and nest on private property – they have no concept of public and private lands. This change would degrade the quality and completeness of New Hampshire's wildlife database at a moment when accurate information is most urgently needed to keep these at-risk populations from disappearing forever.

This bill seeks to alter the criteria for valid observations in such an extreme manner that almost all the population surveys of threatened and endangered turtles conducted on New Hampshire public lands would become invalid. The surveys carried out for threatened and endangered turtles alone over the last 20 years amount to millions of dollars' worth of resources that would be rendered useless after this bill's passage. Throwing away valid and valuable data is not just bad science, it's bad policy.

Threatened and endangered wildlife in New Hampshire desperately need more protections, not fewer. For these reasons, we oppose the passage of this bill and its amendment.

Signed,

The New Hampshire Turtle Rescue Board of Directors