

## California Bans Import of Frogs and Turtles for Food

LOS ANGELES (March 5) — Californians who want to rustle up some frog's legs or turtle soup will have to start settling for the local varieties.

The state Fish and Game Commission voted this week to ban the import of non-native turtles and frogs as food — a staple in some Asian grocery stores — capping a 16-year battle by animal rights activists to halt the practice.

“It was a long-fought war, and it is not over,” said Susan Tellem, co-founder of American Tortoise Rescue, who pushed for the ban. “Next on the agenda is banning all non-native aquatic turtles and frogs, which many states have already done.”

Tellem said the length of the fight was due to “political pressure from the Asian community, especially in San Francisco, where the lawmakers revolted at the ban.”

In a blog posting to supporters, Wayne Pacelle, president of the Humane Society of the United States, hailed the vote as “a great outcome, and another step in the process to halt this cruelty globally.” He urged activists “to build on this momentum.”

Activists have long sought the ban on

grounds that many of the animals are kept in inhumane conditions and suffer painful deaths, including being pan-fried while still alive.

That argument never got very far with the state Fish and Game Commission, however. But the activists changed tactics and began challenging the import of the animals on grounds that many get released into the wild, where they pose a threat to indigenous plant and animals species.

That argument worked. The commission vote for the ban Wednesday in a unanimous vote.

The ban affects frogs and turtles imported from other states, not from overseas; that activity is regulated by the federal government. The state initially was looking at a broader restriction, but the adopted regulation applies only to creatures brought into the state for food, not as pets, for research or for high-end collectors, said Andrew Wyatt, president of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers, which lobbied against the more restrictive ban.

Wyatt, who testified before the commission, said the ban won't affect his

organization's members, who raise reptiles and amphibians for high-end collectors, zoos, museums and research purposes. But other proposals to ban all trafficking in the creatures are still on the table, he said, and could be devastating to the industry.

One proposal "would add frogs and turtles to the restricted species list, which would basically shut down just about everything," he said.

That would be just fine with Tellem. "They are killing our native pond turtle," she said.

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