



Management Guidelines for Wood Turtles

(*Glyptemys insculpta*)

Nesting Areas
Agricultural Land
Forest Land
Roads

Managing Forests

Forest management activities have the potential to both kill Wood Turtles and degrade habitat. However, if applied carefully, timber harvesting can be compatible with Wood Turtle habitat conservation and enhancement.

Guidelines for managing forests:

1. Restrict all logging operations within 300 ft of Wood Turtle streams during the active period: April–October.
2. Minimize harvests within 300 ft of all Wood Turtle streams and within 1000 ft of *regionally significant** streams.
3. *If early-successional habitats are completely absent*: small group selection cuts (top image) created during the inactive period may enhance habitat.
4. Discontinue logging road use after harvests are complete.

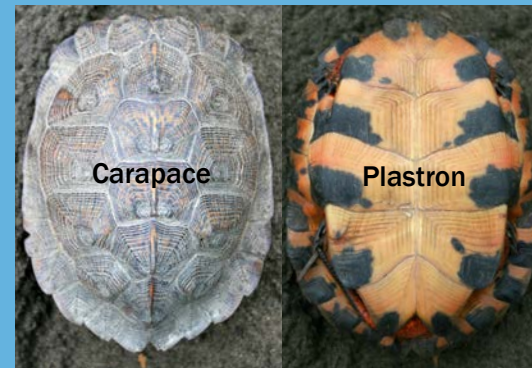
*Regionally significant streams are streams identified as critical to Wood Turtle conservation in the Northeast. Contact your state wildlife agency if you are uncertain about the status of a stream.

Wood Turtle Habitat

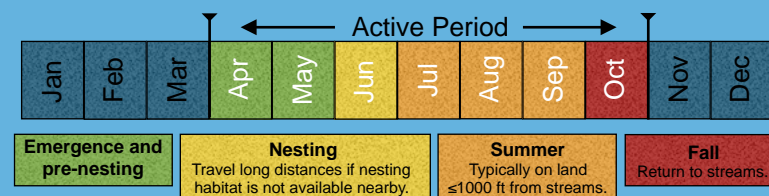
Wood Turtles live in and around cool, clean, slow-moving streams and rivers from Virginia to southern Canada. These semiaquatic turtles overwinter and mate in streams, but spend much of the warmer months roaming the surrounding landscape. They utilize a wide range of upland habitats from fields and shrublands to mature forest.

Found a Wood Turtle?

If you find a Wood Turtle, please **take pictures, note the location, and alert your state agency to your discovery**. It is always best to leave turtles where you find them unless they are directly in harm's way (such as on a road), in which case the traveling turtle should be moved and released in the direction that it was headed.



Active Period



www.americanturtles.org

www.parcplace.org



Supported by: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Competitive State Wildlife Grants



Creating Nesting Areas

Wood Turtles require open, well-drained, elevated, and exposed areas of sand and/or gravel for nesting. These conditions occur naturally in the form of sand/gravel bars, beaches, and cutbanks. Wood Turtles also make use of anthropogenic features for nesting such as gravel pits, boat ramps, powerline corridors, and roadsides.

Considerations for managing nesting habitat:

1. Survey and map natural streamside nesting areas using ground surveys and aerial photographs.
2. Manage natural streamside nesting habitat by clearing vegetation during the **inactive** season.
3. If natural streamside nesting features are not available, evaluate existing anthropogenic nesting habitat and protect, manage, and/or augment as necessary. Create nesting habitat during winter.

Creating nesting habitat:

Clear land to expose mixed poorly-graded sand and gravel, or build mound(s) of sand in open areas near streams (≤ 200 ft). Avoid placing nesting areas near roads and, if possible, disperse nesting areas to decrease the chance of depredation. Suggested dimensions for nesting mounds: 60 x 25 x 5 ft.



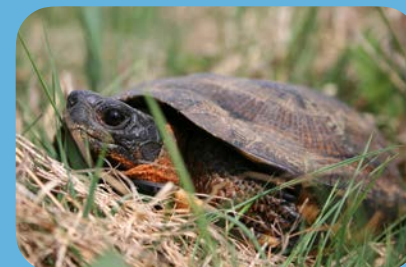
Managing Agricultural Land

Agricultural land can be attractive and beneficial for Wood Turtles **if properly managed**. Unfortunately, agricultural machinery can also kill Wood Turtles and harm local populations.



Guidelines for managing agricultural land:

1. Establish unfragmented and unmanaged riparian/upland buffers of ≥ 300 ft around all Wood Turtle streams and buffers of ≥ 1000 ft around *regionally significant** streams.
2. Manage fields during the inactive period (Nov 1–Mar 31). If warm season management is necessary, leave unmanaged buffers >35 ft at the streamside edge of fields and maintain them during winter.
3. Use crop varieties that can be harvested in October.
4. Implement grazing or off-season burning. Exclude livestock from the riparian corridor.
5. Use sickle bar mowers and raise blade height >6 inches when possible.
6. Conduct systematic surveys to identify heavily used turtle areas (e.g., early summer nesting congregations in fields).



*See Managing Forests

Minimizing Road Mortalities

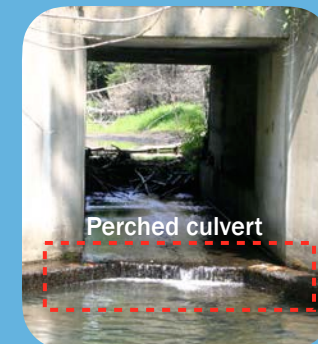


Photo: Tom Hodgman

Road mortalities are one of the major factors contributing to the decline of Wood Turtles. Roads that run parallel to Wood Turtle streams, especially within 300 ft, are particularly harmful for nearby populations. **The most effective way to protect Wood Turtles is to restrict the construction of new roads near important habitat.**

Guidelines for minimizing road mortalities:

1. Prohibit road construction within 300 ft of all Wood Turtle streams and where feasible within 1000 ft of *regionally significant** streams.
2. Culverts and crossings should be avoided whenever possible near Wood Turtle streams.
3. If a road crossing is necessary, it is critical that:
 - A. The culvert or bridge allows turtles to pass below (e.g., is not **perched** or **undersized****).
 - B. The road surfaces and side slopes are not attractive to Wood Turtles (e.g., avoid creating nesting or early-successional habitat).
4. Minimize road construction up to 3.5 miles from *regionally significant** streams.



*See Managing Forests **See Stream Crossing Standards