



Best Management Practices for Construction and Development Projects Western Chicken Turtle

Deirochelys reticularia miaria

Common name • Western Chicken Turtle
Scientific name • *Deirochelys reticularia miaria*
Federal status • None
State status • Endangered

Purpose and Use

The information in this document is to be used to help avoid and minimize species impacts due to construction practices. It is not intended to be used as a guide to manage habitat for a given species. If that is the goal, please contact the Department of Conservation for habitat management information. Because every project and location differs, following the recommendations within this document does not ensure that impacts will not occur to the species and additional information might be required in certain instances. Following the recommendations within this document does not complete Endangered Species Act consultation that may be necessary for species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act; please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for more information.

Ecology

Western Chicken Turtles have an historic range that includes southeastern Missouri, the coastal plain of Arkansas, Louisiana west of the Mississippi River, eastern Texas and southeastern Oklahoma. In Missouri, these turtles are a bottomland, hardwood forest species that inhabit cypress-bordered shallow ponds, river sloughs, temporarily water-filled ditches and drainage ditches in spring and early summer. However, they spend considerable time on the forested lands, especially near wetlands. They are active on the forest floor from mid-March to late October and overwinter in the leaf litter soil of lowland forests. During spring and early summer, females lay 5-15 eggs in loose soil about 4 inches or so underground. Young turtles typically hatch in the late summer or early fall and may remain in the nest until the following spring. Western Chicken Turtles eat a variety of aquatic invertebrates.

Reasons for Decline

At one time, the Western Chicken Turtle was probably common in the swamps and associated bottomland forest of extreme southeastern Missouri. Now, this species is one of the rarest turtles in the state. Destruction of wetlands and swamps and conversion of bottomland forest for agriculture and urbanization projects has eliminated habitat for these turtles. In addition, degradation of remaining habitat because of

non-point source pollution continues to threaten the status of the Western Chicken Turtle in Missouri.

Specific Recommendations

Maintenance and restoration of wetlands and associated bottomland forest is critical for the survival of many species, including the Western Chicken Turtle. Due to the year-round requirement these animals have on wetlands for foraging and mating and forest for overwintering, impacts on these areas within the range of this species should be minimized.

- Avoid removing or destroying unique habitat features, such as downed trees, that provide habitat for the Western Chicken Turtle.
- Draining or destroying known wetland habitat should be avoided.
- Erosion and sediment controls should be implemented, maintained and monitored for the duration of the project.
- Disposal of wastes and garbage should be done in designated areas far from wetlands.
- Avoid altering water levels in wetlands where Western Chicken Turtles are present.
- Compaction and alteration of soil (vehicle and ATV use, disking, etc.) surrounding wetlands and swamps that support Western Chicken Turtles should be avoided.

General Recommendations

Refer to Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Wetlands and Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Streams and Rivers.

Refer also to Amphibian and Reptile Management Guidelines.

If your project involves the use of Federal Highway Administration transportation funds, these recommendations may not fulfill all contract requirements. Please contact the Missouri Department of Transportation at 573-526-4778 or www.modot.mo.gov/ehp/index.htm for additional information on recommendations.

Information Contacts

For further information regarding regulations for development in wetlands, rivers and streams, contact:

For species information:

[Missouri Department of Conservation](#)

Resource Science Division
P.O. Box 180
2901 W. Truman Blvd
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180
Telephone: 573/751-4115

For species information and Endangered Species Act
Coordination:

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)

Ecological Services
101 Park Deville Drive, Suite A
Columbia, Missouri 65203-0007
Telephone: 573-234-2132

For Clean Water Act Coordination:

[Missouri Department of Natural Resources](#)

Water Protection Program
P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0176
Telephone: 573/751-1300, 800/361-4827

[U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#)

Regulatory Branch
700 Federal Building
Kansas City, MO 64106-2896
Telephone: 816/983-3990

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#)

Water, Wetlands, and Pesticides Division
901 North 5th Street
Kansas City, KS 66101
Telephone: 913/551-7307

Disclaimer

These Best Management Practices were prepared by the Missouri Department of Conservation with assistance from state and federal agencies, contractors and others to provide guidance to those people who wish to voluntarily act to protect wildlife and habitat. Compliance with these Best Management Practices is not required by the Missouri wildlife and forestry law nor by any regulation of the Missouri Conservation Commission. Other federal laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, and state or local laws need to be considered for construction and development projects, and require permits and/or consultation with the appropriate agency. Following the recommendations provided in this document will help reduce and avoid project impacts to the species, but impacts may still occur. Please contact the appropriate agency for further coordination and to complete compliance requirements.