Best Management Practices for Construction and Development Projects Alligator Snapping Turtle

Macrochelys temminckii

Common name • Alligator Snapping Turtle
Scientific name • *Macrochelys temminckii*
Federal status • Proposed Threatened
State status • None

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 as a guide to manage habitat for a given species. Please contact the Department of Conservation if habitat management information is needed. Because every project and location differ, following the recommendations in this document does not guarantee impacts will not occur to the species and additional information may be required in certain instances. Following the recommendations in 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

Alligator Snapping Turtles are a species of conservation concern. They are confined to river systems flowing south into the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to eastern Texas and Oklahoma and north to Missouri and Illinois. They are mainly found in sloughs, oxbow lakes and deep, muddy pools of large rivers in southeast Missouri, as well as along the Mississippi River and large reservoirs in southern Missouri. Because Alligator Snapping Turtles are mainly aquatic, movement patterns are linear within the river system. They are known to travel up to 10 river miles within a few weeks, but most of their time is spent hiding in root snags or among submerged logs. Females are occasionally observed on land while laying approximately 16 to 52 eggs during May or June. Hatching typically takes place in late summer. Alligator Snapping Turtles consume a variety of foods (e.g. fruits, nuts, crayfish, snakes, turtles, etc.), but fish are the main prey. They are the largest freshwater turtle species in the world and can reach shell lengths up to 26 inches and weigh over 100 pounds.

Reasons for Decline

At one time, the Alligator Snapping Turtle was probably common in riverine systems of extreme southern and southeastern Missouri. The primary threat is loss of sloughs and oxbows and alteration (e.g., channelization, removal of woody debris, etc.) of rivers. However, the species has expanded into reservoirs in southern Missouri. In addition, degradation of remaining habitat because of non-point source pollution continues to threaten the status of the Alligator Snapping Turtle. Other threats include illegal harvest for meat and turtle trade, as well as incidental drowning on anchored lines (trotlines, limb lines, jug line, etc.) and hoop nets.

Specific Recommendations

Maintenance and restoration of sloughs and oxbow lakes, as well as riparian corridors along the rivers are critical for the survival of many species, including the Alligator Snapping Turtle.

- Avoid removing or destroying unique aquatic habitat features, such as downed trees, submerged logs, or root snags that provide habitat for the Alligator Snapping Turtle.
- Draining or destroying known wetland, sloughs and oxbow habitat or channelizing rivers 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.
- If application of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers in or near seasonal wetlands is necessary, carefully follow all label directions and consider application of more wildlife and wetland friendly herbicides and pesticides.

General Recommendations

Refer to Refer to *Best Management Practices for Construction and Development Projects Affecting Missouri Rivers and Streams.*

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 the Missouri Department of Transportation Environmental Studies webpage for additional information on recommendations.

Information Contacts

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

For species information:

Missouri Department of Conservation

Science Branch
P.O. Box 180
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, MO 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: 816-389-3990

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
EPA Region 7 Water Division
11201 Renner Boulevard
Lenexa, KS 66219
Telephone: 913-551-7977

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 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. 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.