

MAINTAINING WETLANDS FOR BOG TURTLES



Bog Turtle *Glyptemys muhlenbergii*

Size: No more than 4 inches long (along its shell)

Field Notes: Bog Turtles inhabit wetlands including bogs, marshes, swamps and wet pastures. They eat berries, slugs, tadpoles, snails, worms, insects and plant shoots. The Bog Turtle's carapace (upper shell) is light brown to mahogany. Its large scutes (bony plates on the shell) sometimes have a tinge of yellow or red in the center. Its plastron (lower shell or "belly") is brown or black with yellow along the middle. The head is black and marked with a yellow, orange or red blotch on each side.

Did you Know? The Bog Turtle was the first turtle to be placed on the Pennsylvania List of Endangered Species. It only appears in isolated populations, and loss of habitat is the biggest factor in its decline. The Bog Turtle is a secretive and shy turtle, which makes it difficult to study. It is active from April through mid-October. A Bog Turtle may bury itself in mud or vegetative debris during periods of extremely hot weather, and it hibernates during the coldest winter months, deeply buried in mud with flowing springs.



With brush cutters and gardening loppers, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and Mid-Atlantic Center for Herpetology and Conservation recently trimmed their way through some precious and rare wetland habitats in Pennsylvania. Shrub and tree overgrowth in wetlands limits suitable habitat for Bog Turtles.

A spring-fed meadow with low sedges, shrubs and soft mud makes a great home for the Bog Turtle, North America's smallest turtle. It needs mud to burrow in and, as a reptile, the ability to move in and out of the sun for temperature regulation. Sunlight is critical for growth, disease prevention and incubating eggs.

When the woody vegetation is cut, this gives the tiny turtle the right combination of sun and mucky soil to thrive. Without this management practice, eventually the habitat will become overgrown and change from an open wetland to forest.

"If the habitat is not great, they may hang on for a while but can't successfully reproduce. Some populations we currently see are only older ones," said Josh Brown, PFBC biologist.

This work is part of a 5-year multistate grant with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service aimed at recovering the Bog Turtle through habitat restoration, management and protection. Ultimately, the goal is to remove the Bog Turtle from the Pennsylvania List of Endangered Species.

Along the way, PFBC biologists and partners are also surveying habitats to better understand the impacts of the management practice and provide more support to Bog Turtles for the future.

Bog Turtles are illegal to possess. So, please don't pick them up or take them home. If a turtle is on the road, move it across the road in the direction it's headed. You, too, can make a difference in Pennsylvania wetlands. ☑

World Turtle Day May 23:



worldturtleday.org/

