

Western Chicken Turtle

Deirochelys reticularia miaria

Best Management Practices

Missouri Department of
Conservation

Common name ▪ Western Chicken Turtle

Scientific name ▪ *Deirochelys reticularia miaria*

State status ▪ Endangered

Federal status ▪ None

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 inhabit cypress-bordered shallow ponds, river sloughs, temporarily water-filled ditches and drainage ditches. They prefer areas heavily shaded by vegetation. They also spend time on land near wetlands and may be observed in wetlands sunning on downed trees. They are active from mid-March to late-October and overwinter in the 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 hatch in the late summer or early fall. Western chicken turtles eat a variety of aquatic invertebrates and tadpoles.

Reasons for Decline

At one time, the western chicken turtle was probably common in the swamps of extreme southeastern Missouri. Now, this species is one of the rarest turtles in the

state. Destruction of wetlands and swamps 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.

Recommendations

Protection and restoration of wetlands is critical for the survival of many species, including the western chicken turtle. Due to the year-round requirement these animals have on wetlands, impacts on these areas within the range of this species should be minimized.



Beneficial Practices

- 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.
- Develop and maintain mating and feeding areas such as shallow wetlands (4 feet or less) with dense overstory vegetation.

Adverse Practices

- Removing or destroying unique habitat features, such as downed

trees, that provide habitat for the western chicken turtle.

- Draining or destroying known wetland habitat.
- Altering water levels in wetlands where western chicken turtles are present.
- Application of herbicides that eliminate aquatic vegetation and insecticides that kill prey.

Information Contacts

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

Missouri Department of Conservation
Policy Coordination Section
P.O. Box 180
2901 W. Truman Blvd
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180
Telephone: 573/751-4115

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Division of Environmental Quality
P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0176
Telephone: 573/526-3315

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: 973/551-7307

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Ecological Services Field Office
101 Park DeVille Dr., Suite A
Columbia, MO 65203
Telephone: 573/234-2132

Legal Issues

These Best Management Practices were prepared by the Missouri Department of Conservation with assistance from other state agencies, contractors, and others to

provide guidance to those people who wish to voluntarily act to protect wildlife and habitat.

Compliance with Best Management Practices is not required by the Missouri wildlife and forestry law nor by any regulation of the Missouri Conservation Commission. Other federal, state or local laws may affect construction practices.

“State Endangered Status” is determined by the Missouri Conservation Commission under constitutional authority, and specific requirements for impacts to such species are expressed in the Missouri Wildlife Code, rule 3CSR10-4.111.