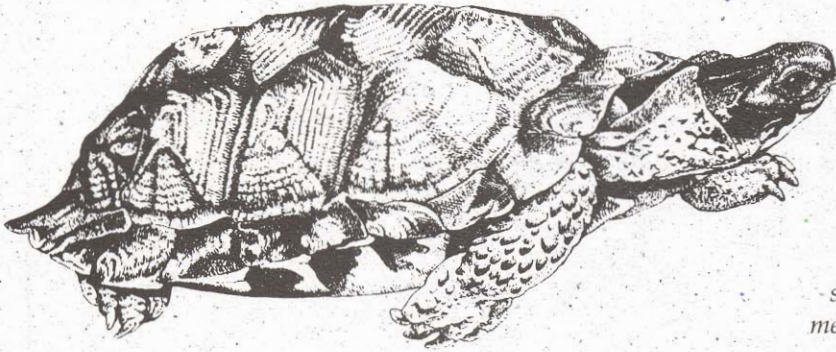


Vermont's Wildlife Heritage

Nongame and Natural Heritage Program

SPECIES AT RISK



Wood Turtle

Clemmys insculpta

The wood turtle is a moderately sized turtle with reddish-orange skin on portions of its neck and legs and a roughly textured, or sculpted shell. The adult's shell is about 7 to 8 inches long. It spends the winter on stream bottoms and most breeding occurs in streams. Although it regularly returns to streams throughout year, it may travel up to 1000 feet from the stream while foraging for food in hardwood forests or meadows.

Turtles are an ancient group of animals, originating many millions of years ago. Wood turtles have likely been in Vermont for the past 10,000 years, following the retreat of the last glacier. In spite of their long history of success, wood turtles have not fared well recently in the face of human development and use of the landscape. The wood turtle is a species of conservation concern in the northeastern states, including Vermont, due to its region-wide decline.

Human activities are the main cause of the turtles' decline. While it is rare that any person intentionally harms a wood turtle, the cumulative effect of our activities does have a negative impact. Although it is illegal to collect wood turtles in Vermont, people do remove them from the wild. Collection results in population decline and loss. A Connecticut wood turtle population was studied before and after a water supply area was opened to limited permit hiking. Wood turtle collection was the likely

cause of this population disappearing after only ten years.

We also harm turtles by transforming their habitat into housing or commercial building lots, clearing away stream-bank vegetation, and inadvertently hitting them with mowing machines or cars.

Adult wood turtles may live 60 years, but egg and hatchling survival is extremely low. Survival of adult wood turtles is key to maintaining this species. Mature turtles are important because they manage to produce the few offspring that will carry the population into the future.

TURTLE TIME TABLE

Early April - First emergence from water to stream bank. Initially, turtles stay near stream, then gradually move farther away.

Early June - Initial movements to summer foraging areas which may be 1000 feet from stream. These areas

consist of meadows, wetlands and woods.

Mid June - Females with eggs move to nesting area. Some females will travel over one-mile to nest. Return to foraging area within a few weeks

June through mid September - Turtles spend up to a month at a time foraging well away from stream, but return to the stream for short periods.

Late August through mid November - Breeding occurs in the stream, and also occurs to a lesser extent in the spring months.

November through April - Turtles stay underwater at wintering sites in streams where they absorb oxygen through their skin. Some movement may occur during this time, but the turtles are generally confined to protected pools.

(continued on back)

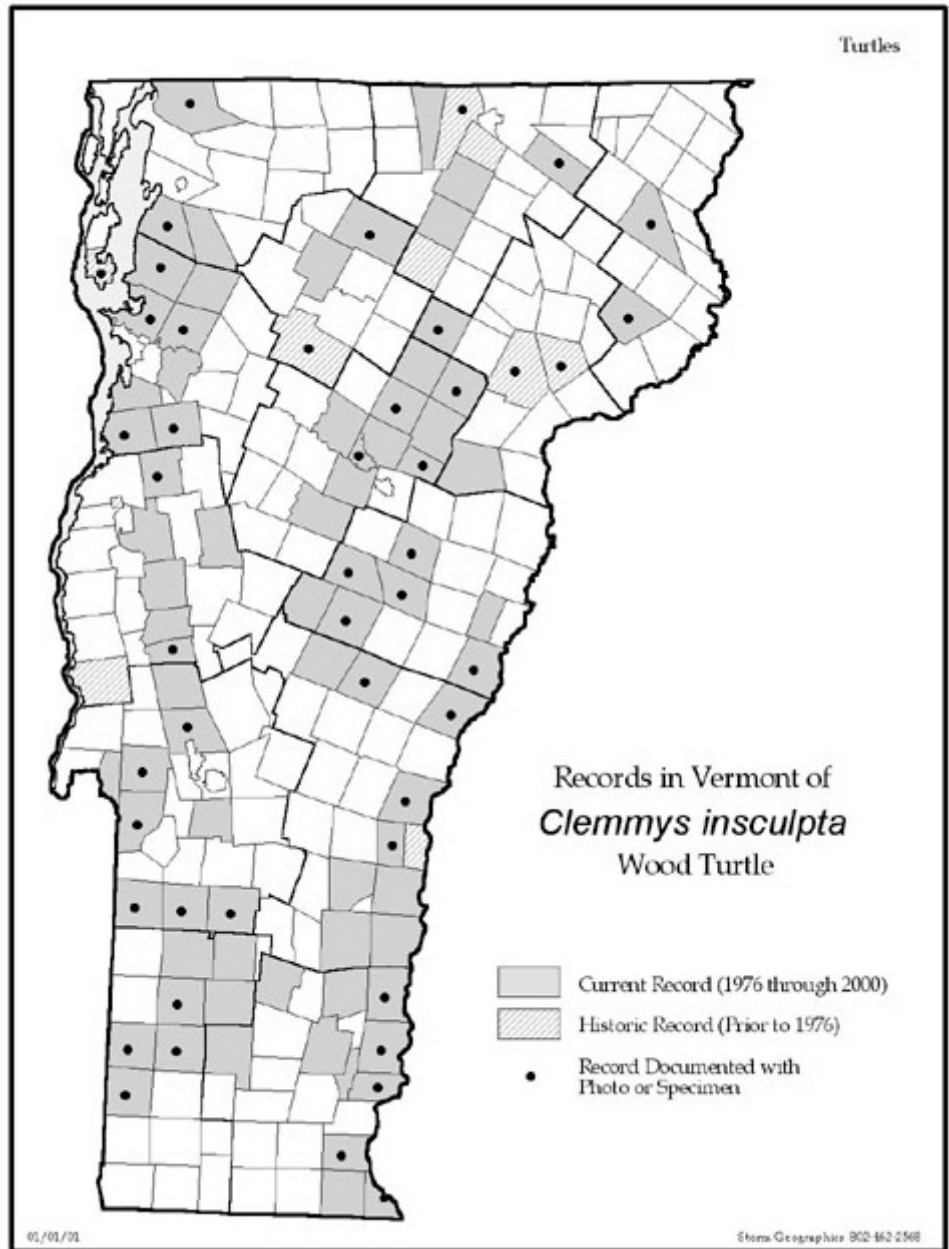
The Nongame and Natural Heritage Program (NNHP) is responsible for managing and enhancing Vermont's native plants, natural communities, and animals that are not hunted or fished (nongame species). A unit within the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, the NNHP's mission includes the preservation of Vermont's rich and varied natural heritage for present and future generations.

THREATS

- ✓ Habitat loss and alteration
- ✓ Road mortality
- ✓ Impacts from mowing machines
- ✓ Commercial collection for pet trade
- ✓ Casual collection when encountered
- ✓ Isolation of populations
- ✓ Turtle and egg predators such as raccoons and skunks

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Locate roads more than 1000 feet from large streams and rivers.
- ✓ Locate housing and commercial development away from streams, rivers, and wetlands.
- ✓ Maintain natural vegetation along waterways.
- ✓ Route recreation paths away from streams, never along the channel.
- ✓ Teach children to respect wildlife. Leave wildlife in the wild.
- ✓ Encourage friends and neighbors to protect stream corridors.
- ✓ Promote town plans and ordinances that protect naturally vegetated stream corridors and discourage stream alterations.
- ✓ If possible, avoid mowing meadows until late September.
- ✓ If mowing May-September set mowing bar to 5 inches.
- ✓ Learn more about the natural world.
- ✓ Report collection of turtles to your local game warden.
- ✓ Report unauthorized stream alterations to the Agency of Natural Resources (Winooski River watershed and north: 751-0129; White River watershed and south: 786-5906).
- ✓ Contribute to the Nongame Wildlife Fund on your Vermont income tax form.
- ✓ Display a Vermont Conservation Plate on your car - and watch out for turtles crossing the road!



Map courtesy of Vermont Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Project. For more information contact: Jim Andrews, Biology Department, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT 05753.

For more information contact:

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Wood Turtle recovery efforts in Vermont, including this fact sheet, are funded by contributions to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. Created by the legislature in 1986, the fund enables people to voluntarily contribute to programs on behalf of Vermont's nongame species. These tax-deductible gifts are used by the Nongame and Natural Heritage Program to inventory, monitor, and manage species and their habitats and to provide planning assistance and educational programs. Direct gifts are accepted, payable to:

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