Bog turtle
Clemmys muhlenbergii

Bog turtle, USFWS

Status: Threatened due to similarity of appearance

Description: The bog turtle is the smallest turtle in North America, rarely exceeding three or four inches in length and weighing only about four ounces. Its orange to yellow patch on either side of the neck easily distinguishes it from other turtles.

Bog turtles emerge from their muddy hibernation in early to mid-April and by early May are actively seeking a mate. Adults are sexually mature at five to eight years of age. In June or July, the female lays a clutch of one to six small white elliptical eggs in a shallow "nest" she digs in a clump of sphagnum moss or tuft of grass above the water line. After seven or eight weeks of being incubated by the sun, the inch-long hatchlings emerge. Because they are born so late in the year, the hatchlings often spend their first winter near the nest.

Habitat: Bog turtles live in the mud, grass and sphagnum moss of bogs, swamps, and marshy meadows. These wetlands are usually fed by cool springs flowing slowly over the land, creating the wet, muddy soil needed by the turtles.

Range: There are two distinct populations of the bog turtle separated by about 250 miles. The northern population is found from New York and Massachusetts south to Maryland. The southern population extends from southwestern Virginia south through eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northwestern South Carolina to northern Georgia. Throughout their range they have been found from near sea level to as high as 4,500 feet above sea level.

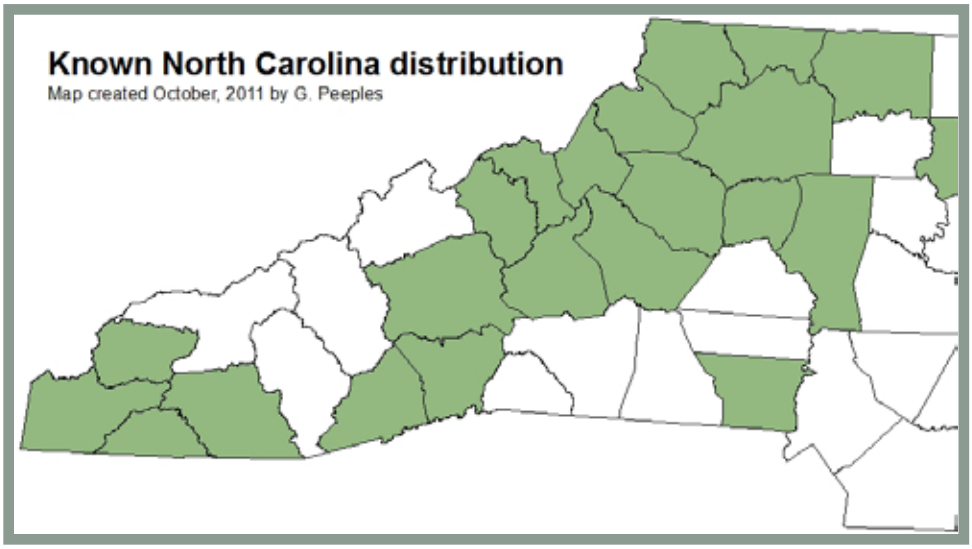
Listing: Threatened due to similarity of appearance, November 4, 1997. 62 FR 59605 59623
Though the southern population had not experienced the extent of habitat loss that the northern population had, the Service listed it as "threatened due to similarity of appearance." Because individuals from the northern and southern populations are almost identical, a poacher could claim that a turtle he collected from the threatened northern populations was taken from the South. In order to eliminate such confusion for law enforcement personnel, the southern populations was designated as "threatened due to similarity of appearance," which makes the poaching of bog turtles a federal offense anywhere within the species' range. The southern population of the species is not subject to section seven consultations requirements under the Endangered Species Act.

Critical habitat: None designated

Threats: The bog turtle was first described in 1801 and has never been known to be abundant. There are two major threats to its continued existence – habitat loss due to the draining and filling of wetlands for farming and development, including housing, roads, and golf courses; and the illegal collection of wild bog turtles for the pet trade.

Why should we be concerned about the loss of species? Extinction is a natural process that has been occurring since long before the appearance of humans. Normally, new species develop through a process known as speciation, at about the same rate other species become extinct. However, because of air and water pollution, forest clearing, loss of wetlands, and other man-induced environmental changes, extinctions are now occurring at a rate that far exceeds the speciation rate.

All living things are part of a complex and interconnected network. We depend on the diversity of plant and animal life for our recreation, nourishment, many of our lifesaving medicines, and the ecological functions they provide. One-quarter of all the



prescriptions written in the United States today contain chemicals that were originally discovered in plants and animals. Industry and agriculture are increasingly making use of wild plants, seeking out the remaining wild strain of many common crops, such as wheat and corn, to produce new hybrids that are more resistant to disease, pests, and marginal climatic conditions. Our food crops depend on insects and other animals for pollination.

Healthy forests clean the air and provide oxygen for us to breathe. Wetlands clean water and help minimize the impacts of floods. These services are the foundation of life and depend on a diversity of plants and animals working in concert. Each time a species disappears, we lose not only those benefits we know it provided but other benefits that we have yet to realize.

What you can do to help
Tread lightly and stay on designated trails.

Visit arboretums, botanical gardens, and parks and learn all you can about endangered species and the causes of their declines.

Never buy pets collected from the wild.

Participate in the protection of our remaining wild lands and the restoration of damaged ecosystems.

Support wetland protection efforts at local, state, and national levels.

Establish and maintain forested stream-side buffers. Several federal, state, and private programs are available to assist landowners, both technically and financially, with restoring and protecting stream-side buffers and eroding streams.

Implement and maintain measures for controlling erosion and storm water during and after land-clearing and disturbance activities. Excess soil in our streams from erosion is one of the greatest water pollution problems we have today.

Be careful with the use and disposal of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals. Remember, what you put on your land or dump down the drain may eventually wind up in nearby water.

Support local, state and national clean water legislation.

Report illegal dumping activities, erosion, and sedimentation problems. These activities affect the quality of our water, for drinking, fishing, and swimming.

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