



DEQ and VDGIF Require Surveys for the State Threatened Wood Turtle in Virginia

The survey season for the wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpata*) is coming up soon. The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries are requiring habitat surveys and/or species-specific surveys in counties where the wood turtle is known or likely to occur. According to the Virginia Fish and Wildlife Information Service (VAFWIS) there are known occurrences in Fairfax, Frederick, Loudoun, Page, Rockingham, Shenandoah, and Warren counties, as well as the City of Alexandria. Likely occurrences are in the cities of Fairfax, Falls Church, Harrisonburg, and Winchester, as well as Clarke County.



Wood turtles in Virginia are found primarily in and near clear brooks and streams in deciduous woodlands but have also been found in woodland bogs, and marshy fields at more northerly sites. Wood turtles are generally terrestrial during the warmer months and may wander alone over land foraging or searching for nesting sites. They tend to return to the creek in the fall when nighttime air temperatures are consistently near freezing. Hibernation may occur in a variety of places including deep pools or under the mud or sand bottom of waterways, or under the overhanging roots of trees along the bank. In Virginia mating behavior occurs year-round with the greatest frequency of observations occurring shortly after wood turtles return to the streams in the fall. Nests are most often excavated on sandy-gravel banks of streams, but have also been observed in fields, along roadsides, in gravel pits, and manure piles. Incubation takes 70-80 days with known emergence dates in Virginia from July 30 to October 2.

While habitat surveys can be completed at any time during the year, specific surveys should be completed during cold weather months starting at the end of October through early March. This corresponds with the wood turtles congregating at the streams in mating groups and the return of the turtles to their hibernacula. Any impacts to perennial streams within the range of the wood turtle may result in a request for a habitat survey and possibly a species-specific survey. Due to the timing of species-specific surveys, agency requests for species-specific surveys could lead to potential delays in permit issuance, permit suspension, and/or significant project delays.

WEG has experienced professionals available to assist you with surveys or any issues that may arise regarding this or any other listed species in Virginia. For more information, please contact your WEG Project Manager at any of our offices: Williamsburg (757) 220-6869, Richmond (804) 267-3474, Herndon (703) 437-3096 or Fredericksburg (540) 785-5544.