



BOG TURTLE

BACKFROMTHEBRINK.ORG

America's Tiniest Turtle

The bog turtle is so small that it can fit in the palm of your hand. Given that most of its remaining populations are on private lands, its future is indeed in our hands. And with its habitat increasingly rare, it doesn't help at all that the little guy is part of an illegal international pet trade.

At-Risk Story

The decline in bog turtle populations is symptomatic of the change in lifestyle and land use in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. Bog turtle habitat—wet meadows and other shallow, sunny wetlands—is fast disappearing as farm pastures are swallowed up by development and encroaching vegetation. With the curtailment of normal farm activities (where lands had been grazed by animals for decades), invasive plants and trees have been allowed to take over and shade out the wetlands so vital to many wildlife specimens, rare and otherwise. In all cases, it's bad news for bog turtles, but there's good news, too: prime opportunities for bog turtle conservation remain on surviving farms where moderate grazing by livestock can help restore and maintain bog turtle habitat.

Characteristics

This smallest U.S. turtle is typically 3-3.5 inches in length and weighs approximately 4 ounces. Its head features a yellow or orange patch. Its maximum life expectancy is over 40 years.

Habitat and Range

Bog turtles are found from New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts to Maryland with a separate southeastern population in Virginia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee and northern Georgia. Our work with the turtles is focused on the threatened turtles in the North and mid-Atlantic, where they remain in fewer than 500 known and historic sites. Without habitat restoration and management, many of these locations will no longer be able to support healthy populations.

Threats to Survival

Bog turtles in northern states have declined by 50% over the past two decades due primarily to a loss of habitat from development and the encroachment of native and non-native vegetation. In addition, poachers take some turtles for the illegal international pet trade.

ESA Listing

Effective November 4, 1997, the bog turtle was listed as a threatened species in northern states (Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania), and threatened due to "similarity of appearance" for the turtle's southern population (Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia).



The Situation Today

Bog turtles are still found throughout most of their historic range, but their habitat of wet meadows and other shallow, sunny wetlands is fast disappearing due to a lack of disturbance necessary to keep trees and invasive plants from taking over and shading out their needed wetland. As farms have stopped operating in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, the farm animals have vanished from the habitat and with them, the turtles.

Our 10-Year Vision

Our goal is to work together with partners and landowners to see that enough habitat is enhanced and restored to stop the loss of important turtle populations in the core of its range: Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. We want to further ensure that more than 70% of the habitat needed to recover the bog turtle is being managed for the foreseeable future.

Restoration Needed

- Fencing and prescribed grazing to control invasive species
- Incentives to keep farmers and their animals on the landscape
- Management of hydrology when development threatens to drown or dry out wetlands
- Manual control/removal of trees to keep shallow, sunny wetlands from becoming forested
- Restoration of some forested wetlands to an open canopy and productive wetland habitat

Acres/Landowners Needed

1,000 acres of habitat and an additional 2,000 acres as corridors and buffers, and approximately 400 landowners

Cost of Recovery

Environmental Defense believes significant progress toward recovery can be made with a modest amount of money if it is targeted to specific areas and activities. Over the next 10 years, we will work to direct more than \$1.8 million to on-the-ground restoration projects that will help bring the bog turtle Back from the Brink.

Every Dollar Counts

\$25 will pay to put a goat to work, grazing invasive species.

\$10 will buy beetles to use in bio-control of the invasive purple loosestrife plant.

\$100 will fund an assessment of a small wetland and its management needs.

\$500 will fund initial restoration of a ¼-acre wetland that might be home to up to ten turtles.

\$1,000 will cover the costs to fence a small wetland so that prescribed grazing can be carefully used for the long-term control of invasive weeds and trees.