

USACE Natural Resource Management

Reptiles & Amphibians



Yellow-blotched Map Turtle

FAST FACTS

REASONS FOR LISTING STATUS: The yellow-blotched map turtle was listed as Threatened by the USFWS in January 1991. A final recovery plan was completed in 1993 with the most recent five year review completed in 2017. Found in Mississippi, within the Pascagoula and Escatawpa Rivers, several factors contributed to the listing of the species in 1991 and remain threats today.

Some notable threats include the impacts of nest predation on the yellow-blotched map turtle from both vertebrate and invertebrate predators of which fish crows were found to be the most significant nest predators. (USFWS) Additionally, boating and other recreational uses on the tributaries and the mainstem of the Pascagoula River during the summer months threaten basking turtles and turtle nests, as well as cause direct mortality through collisions with boats, especially in the lower Pascagoula River.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: To facilitate management and protection, standardized data collection is necessary to accurately determine population abundance, rather than document presence.

Further, management actions are necessary to reduce invasive exotic vegetation such as cogon grass and Chinese tallow tree as these species diminish the quantity and quality of yellow-blotched map turtle nesting habitat on sandbars. (USACE) The quality of basking sites are also degraded by the establishment of the invasive aquatic plants, water hyacinth and alligator weed. These species can cover snags used for basking which are then avoided by the turtles.

HABITAT NEEDS: Yellow-blotched map turtles are most abundant in large to medium-sized rivers that provide open canopies for sunlit basking opportunities.

- The species requires rivers wide enough to allow for several hours of basking sunshine daily.
- Preferred habitat for this species contains abundant deadwood snags and tangled tree roots for basking and foraging; and numerous sandbars for nesting. (USACE)

Description: The yellow-blotched map turtle is a small turtle getting its name from the distinctive yellow blotches on its carapace. The turtle has a greenish-black body covered with yellow stripes. The plastron is yellow to tan in color. Adult males have an average carapace length of 3.5 to 4.8 inches; while the normally larger females turtles have been observed with carapace length of 4.1 to 8.5 inches. Several prominent spine-like projections extend from the top of the carapace.

Photo: USFWS, National Geographic

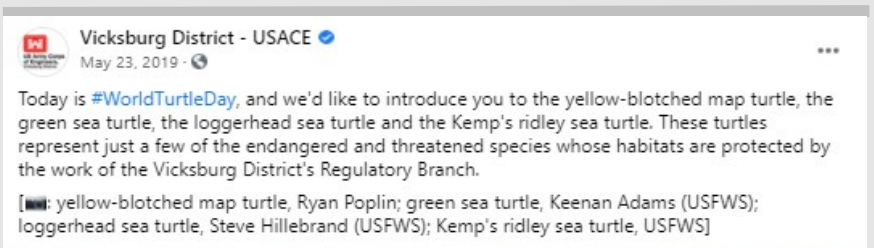
Natural Resource Management (NRM)

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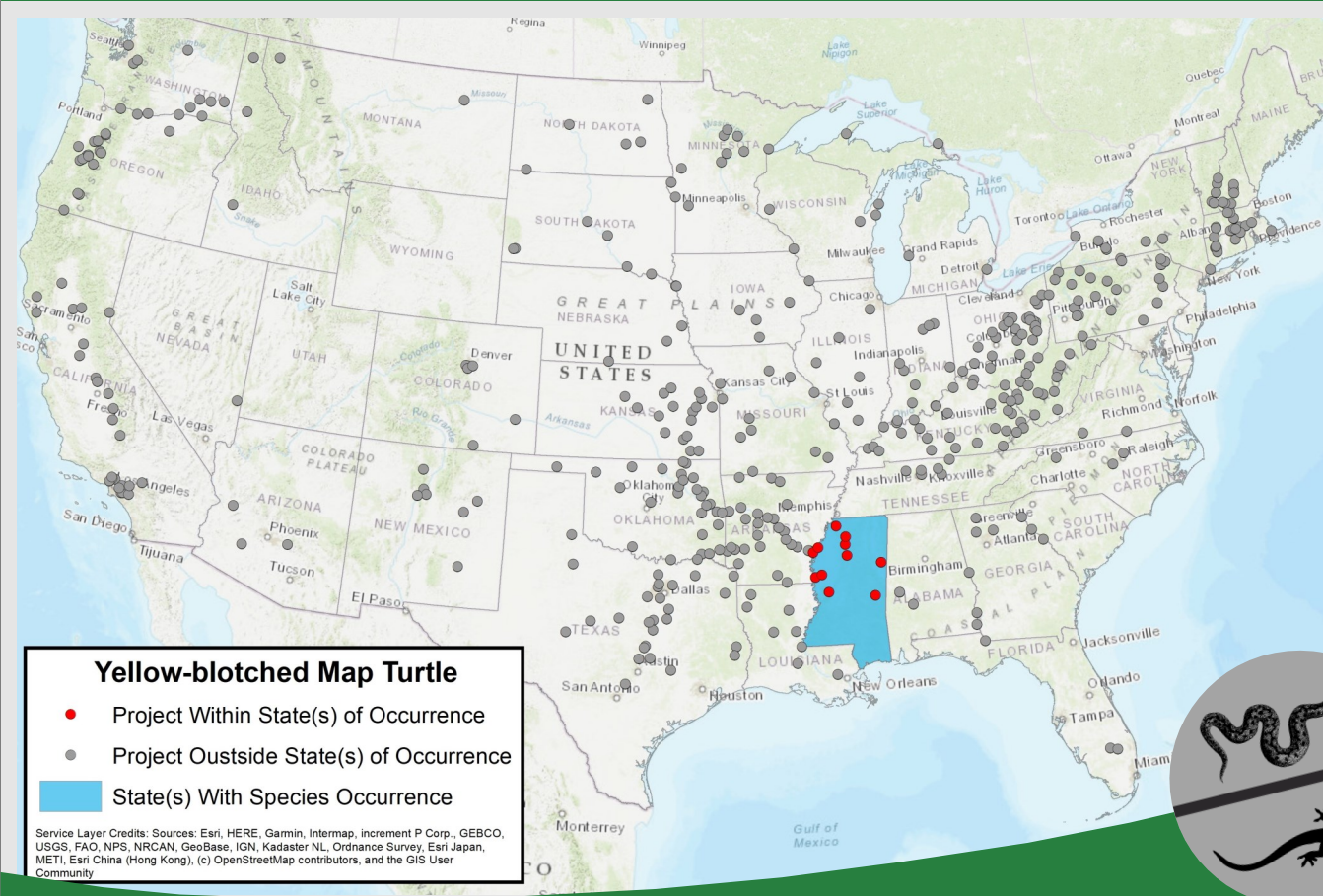
USACE ROLE: Following the species' federal listing, the USACE acquired habitat along the lower Pascagoula River. This became the Ward Bayou WMA. The USACE also developed a management plan for the yellow-blotched map turtles on the site.

Photo: Screen capture of USACE's Vicksburg District Facebook page which promotes the education of various turtle species including the yellow-blotched map turtle.



WHAT IS USACE NRM DOING: USACE operates several projects within the range of the yellow-blotched map turtle such as Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Mitigation Area where occasional occurrence of the species has been noted. The USACE operates this project using guidance from a biological opinion with the USFWS.

Recreation impacts (e.g., ATV use, tent camping, etc.) are mitigated by USACE and other land managers by limiting and prohibiting sandbar access throughout the year, or at least during the critical nesting season (May 1 – October 31). Additionally, invasive species that impact sandbar nesting habitat (e.g., cogon grass, cocklebur, Chinese tallow tree, etc.) and basking habitat (e.g., water hyacinth and alligator weed) are managed and controlled on publicly owned lands such as USACE's within the turtle's range.



Yellow-blotched Map Turtle

- Project Within State(s) of Occurrence
- Project Outside State(s) of Occurrence
- State(s) With Species Occurrence

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 Source: Map provided by Ashleigh Boss, ONISE Fellowship, Institute for Water Resources

