

# GUIDELINES FOR BOG TURTLE SURVEYS<sup>1</sup>

(revised April 2006)

## RATIONALE

A bog turtle survey (when conducted according to these guidelines) is an attempt to determine presence or probable absence of the species; it does not provide sufficient data to determine population size or structure. Following these guidelines will standardize survey procedures. It will help maximize the potential for detection of bog turtles at previously undocumented sites at a minimum acceptable level of effort. Although the detection of bog turtles confirms their presence, failure to detect them does not absolutely confirm their absence (likewise, bog turtles do not occur in all appropriate habitats and many seemingly suitable sites are devoid of the species). Surveys as extensive as outlined below are usually sufficient to detect bog turtles; however, there have been instances in which additional effort was necessary to detect bog turtles, especially when habitat was less than optimum, survey conditions were less than ideal, or turtle densities were low.

## PRIOR TO CONDUCTING ANY SURVEYS

If a project is proposed to occur in a county of known bog turtle occurrence (see attachment 1), contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) and/or the appropriate State wildlife agency (see attachment 2). They will determine whether or not any known bog turtle sites occur in or near the project area, and will determine the need for surveys.

- < If a wetland in or near the project area is *known* to support bog turtles, measures must be taken to avoid impacts to the species. The Service and State wildlife agency will work with federal, state and local regulatory agencies, permit applicants, and project proponents to ensure that adverse effects to bog turtles are avoided or minimized.
  
- < If wetlands in or adjacent to the project area are *not* known bog turtle habitat, conduct a bog turtle habitat survey (Phase 1 survey) if:
  1. The wetland(s) have an emergent and/or scrub-shrub wetland component, or are forested with suitable soils and hydrology (see below), *and*
  2. Direct and indirect adverse effects to the wetland(s) cannot be avoided.

See *Bog Turtle Conservation Zones*<sup>2</sup> for guidance regarding activities that may affect bog turtles and their habitat. In addition, consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service and/or appropriate State wildlife agency to definitively determine whether or not a Phase 1 survey will be necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines are a modification of those found in the final “Bog Turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), Northern Population, Recovery Plan” (dated May 15, 2001). Several minor revisions were made to facilitate survey efforts and increase searcher effectiveness. As additional information becomes available regarding survey techniques and effectiveness, these survey guidelines may be updated and revised. Contact the Fish and Wildlife Service or one of the state agencies listed in Attachment 1 for the most recent version of these guidelines.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A of the “Bog Turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), Northern Population, Recovery Plan” (dated May 15, 2001).

## **BOG TURTLE HABITAT SURVEY (= Phase 1 survey)**

The purpose of this survey is to determine whether or not the wetland(s) are *potential* bog turtle habitat. These surveys are performed by a recognized, qualified bog turtle surveyor (contact the Service or the appropriate State wildlife agency to receive a list of recognized, qualified bog turtle surveyors). The following conditions and information apply to habitat surveys.

- < Surveys can be performed any month of the year (except when significant snow and/or ice cover is present). This flexibility in conducting Phase 1 surveys allows efforts during the Phase 2 survey window to be spent on wetlands most likely to support bog turtles (*i.e.*, those that meet the criteria below).
  
- < Potential bog turtle habitat is recognized by three criteria (*not all of which may occur in the same portion of a particular wetland*):
  1. **Suitable hydrology.** Bog turtle wetlands are typically spring-fed with shallow surface water or saturated soils present year-round, although in summer the wet area(s) may be restricted to near spring head(s). Typically these wetlands are interspersed with dry and wet pockets. There is often subsurface flow. In addition, shallow rivulets (less than 4 inches deep) or pseudo-rivulets are often present.
  
  2. **Suitable soils.** Usually a bottom substrate of permanently saturated organic or mineral soils. These are often soft, mucky-like soils (this does not refer to a technical soil type); you will usually sink to your ankles (3-5 inches) or deeper in muck, although in degraded wetlands or summers of dry years this may be limited to areas near spring heads or drainage ditches. In some portions of the species' range, the soft substrate consists of scattered pockets of peat instead of muck.
  
  3. **Suitable vegetation.** Dominant vegetation of low grasses and sedges (in emergent wetlands), often with a scrub-shrub wetland component. Common emergent vegetation includes, but is not limited to: tussock sedge (*Carex stricta*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), rice cut grass (*Leersia oryzoides*), sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*), tearthumbs (*Polygonum* spp.), jewelweeds (*Impatiens* spp.), arrowheads (*Sagittaria* spp.), skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), panic grasses (*Panicum* spp.), other sedges (*Carex* spp.), spike rushes (*Eleocharis* spp.), grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia glauca*), shrubby cinquefoil (*Dasiphora fruticosa*), sweet-flag (*Acorus calamus*), and in disturbed sites, reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) or purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*). Common scrub-shrub species include alder (*Alnus* spp.), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), willow (*Salix* spp.), tamarack (*Larix laricina*), and in disturbed sites, multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*). Some forested wetland habitats are suitable given hydrology, soils and/or historic land use. These forested wetlands include red maple, tamarack, and cedar swamps.

**Suitable hydrology and soils are the critical criteria (*i.e.*, the primary determinants of potentially suitable habitat).**

- < Suitable hydrology, soils and vegetation are necessary to provide the critical wintering sites (soft muck, peat, burrows, root systems of woody vegetation) and nesting habitats (open areas with tussocky or hummocky vegetation) for this species. It is very important to note,

however, that one or more of these criteria may be absent from portions of a wetland or wetland complex supporting bog turtles. Absence of one or more criteria does not preclude bog turtle use of these areas to meet important life functions, including foraging, shelter and dispersal.

- < If these criteria (suitable soils, vegetation and hydrology) are present in the *wetland*, then the *wetland* is considered to be potential bog turtle habitat, regardless of whether or not that portion of the wetland occurring within the project boundaries contains all three criteria. If the *wetland* is determined to be potential habitat and the project will directly or indirectly impact *any portion* of the wetland (see *Bog Turtle Conservation Zones*), then either:
  - < Completely avoid all direct and indirect effects to the wetland, in consultation with the Service and appropriate State wildlife agency, OR
  - < Conduct a Phase 2 survey to determine the presence of bog turtles.
- < The Service and appropriate State wildlife agency (see list) should be sent a copy of survey results for review and comment including: a USGS topographic map indicating location of site; project design map, including location of wetlands and stream and delineation of wetland type (PEM, PSS, PFO, POW) and “designated survey areas”<sup>3</sup>; color photographs of the site; surveyor's name; date of visit; opinion on potential/not potential habitat; a description of the hydrology, soils, and vegetation. A phase 1 report template and field form are available from the States and Service.

### **BOG TURTLE SURVEY (= Phase 2 survey)**

If the wetland(s) are identified as potential bog turtle habitat (see Phase 1 survey), and direct and indirect adverse effects cannot be avoided, conduct a bog turtle survey in accordance with the specifications below. Note that this is *not* a survey to estimate population size or structure; a long-term mark/recapture study would be required for that.

Prior to conducting the survey, contact the appropriate State agency (see attached list) to determine whether or not a scientific collector's permit valid for the location and period of the survey will be required.

The Phase 2 survey will focus on the areas of the wetland that meet the soils, hydrology and vegetation criteria, as defined under the Phase 1 survey guidelines. Those areas that meet the criteria are referred to as “designated survey areas” for Phase 2 and Phase 3 survey purposes.

1. Surveys should only be performed during the period from April 15-June 15. For the Lake Plain Recovery Unit (see Recovery Plan), surveys should only be performed during the period from May 1 to June 30. This coincides with the period of greatest annual turtle activity (spring emergence and breeding) and before vegetation gets too dense to accurately survey. While turtles may be found outside of these dates, a result of no turtles would be considered inconclusive. Surveys beyond June also have a higher likelihood of disruption or destruction of nests or newly hatched young.

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<sup>3</sup> “Designated survey areas” are those areas of the wetland that meet the soils, hydrology and vegetation criteria for potential bog turtle habitat. These areas may occur within the emergent, scrub-shrub or forested parts of the wetland.

2. Ambient air temperature at the surface in the shade should be  $\geq 55^{\circ}$  F.
3. Surveys should be done during the day, at least one hour after sunrise and no later than one hour before sunset.
4. Surveys may be done when it is sunny or cloudy. In addition, surveys may be conducted during and after light rain, provided air temperatures are  $\geq 65^{\circ}$  F.
5. At least one surveyor must be a recognized qualified bog turtle surveyor<sup>4</sup>, and the others should have some previous experience successfully conducting bog turtle surveys or herpetological surveys in wetlands. To maintain survey effort consistency and increase the probability of encountering turtles, the same surveyors should be used for each wetland.
6. A minimum of four (4) surveys per wetland site are needed to adequately assess the site for presence of bog turtles. At least two of these surveys must be performed in May. From April 15 to April 30, surveys should be separated by six or more days. From May 1 to June 15, surveys should be separated by three or more days. The shorter period between surveys during May and June is needed to ensure that surveys are carried out during the optimum window of time (*i.e.*, before wetland vegetation becomes too thick).

Note that bog turtles are more likely to be encountered by spreading the surveys out over a longer period. For example, erroneous survey results could be obtained if surveys were conducted on four successive days in late April due to possible late spring emergence, or during periods of extreme weather because turtles may be buried in mud and difficult to find.

Because this is solely a presence/absence survey, survey efforts at a particular wetland may cease once a bog turtle has been found.

7. Survey time should be at least four (4) to six (6) person-hours per acre of designated survey area per visit. Additional survey time may be warranted in wetlands that are difficult to survey or that have high quality potential habitat. The designated survey area includes all areas of the wetland where soft, mucky-like soils are present, regardless of vegetative cover type. This includes emergent, scrub-shrub, and forested areas of the wetland.

If the cover is too thick to effectively survey using Phase 2 survey techniques alone (*e.g.*, dominated by multiflora rose, reed canary grass, *Phragmites*), contact the Service and State wildlife agency for guidance on Phase 3 survey techniques (trapping) to supplement the Phase 2 effort. In addition, Phase 3 (trapping) surveys may also be warranted if the site is in the Lake Plain-Prairie Peninsula Recovery Unit. Check with the Service or State wildlife agency for further guidance.

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<sup>4</sup> Searching for bog turtles and recognizing their habitat is a skill that can take many months or years of field work to develop. This level of expertise is necessary when conducting searches in order to ensure that surveys are effective and turtles are not harmed during the survey (*e.g.*, by stepping on nests). Many individuals that have been recognized as qualified to conduct bog turtle surveys obtained their experience through graduate degree research or employment by a state wildlife agency. Others have spent many years actively surveying for bog turtles as amateur herpetologists or consultants.

8. Walk quietly through the wetland. Bog turtles will bask on herbaceous vegetation and bare ground, or be half-buried in shallow water or rivulets. Walking noisily through the wetland will often cause the turtles to submerge before they can be observed. Be sure to search areas where turtles may not be visible, including under mats of dead vegetation, shallow pools, underground springs, open mud areas, vole runways and under tussocks. Do not step on the tops of tussocks or hummocks because turtle nests, eggs and nesting microhabitat may be destroyed. Both random opportunistic searching and transect surveys should be used at each wetland.

The following survey sequence is recommended to optimize detection of bog turtles:

- Semi-rapid walk through the designated survey area using visual encounter techniques.
  - If no bog turtles are found during visual survey, while walking through site identify highest quality habitat patches. Within these highest quality patches, begin looking under live and dead vegetation using muddling and probing techniques.
  - If still no bog turtles are found, the rest of the designated survey area should be surveyed using visual encounter surveys, muddling and probing techniques.
9. Photo-documentation of each bog turtle located will be required; a macro lens is highly recommended. The photos should be in color and of sufficient detail and clarity to identify the bog turtle to species and individual. Therefore, photographs of the carapace, plastron, and face/neck markings should be taken of each individual turtle. Do not harass the turtle in an attempt to get photos of the face/neck markings; if gently placed on the ground, most turtles will slowly extend their necks if not harassed. If shell notching is conducted, do the photo-documentation after the notching is done.
  10. The following information should be collected for each bog turtle: sex, carapace length-straight line and maximum length, carapace width, weight, and details about scars/injuries. Maximum plastron length information should also be collected to differentiate juveniles from adults as well as to obtain additional information on recruitment, growth, and demography.
  11. Each bog turtle should be marked (*e.g.*, notched, PIT tagged) in a manner consistent with the requirements of the appropriate State agency and/or Service. Contact the appropriate State wildlife agency prior to conducting the survey to determine what type of marking system, if any, should be used.
  12. All bog turtles must be returned to the point of capture as soon as possible on the same day as capture. They should only be held long enough to identify, measure, weigh, and photograph them, during which time their exposure to high temperatures must be avoided. No bog turtles may be removed from the wetland without permission from the Service and appropriate State agency.
  13. The Fish and Wildlife Service and appropriate State agency should be sent a copy of survey results for review and concurrence, including the following: dates of site visits; time spent

per designated survey area per wetland per visit; names of surveyors; a site map including wetlands and delineations of designated survey areas; a table indicating the size of each wetland, the designated survey area within each wetland, and the survey effort per visit; a description of the wetlands within the project area (*e.g.*, acreage, vegetation, soils, hydrology); an explanation of which wetlands or portions of wetlands were or were not surveyed, and why; survey methodology; weather per visit at beginning and end of survey (air temperature, wind, and precipitation); presence or absence of bog turtles, including number of turtles found and date, and information and measurements specified in item 10 above; and other reptile and amphibian species found and date.

## **ADDITIONAL SURVEYS / STUDIES**

Proper implementation of the Phase 2 survey protocol is usually adequate to determine species presence or probable absence, especially in small wetlands lacking invasive plant species.

Additional surveys, however, may be necessary to determine whether or not bog turtles are using a particular wetland, especially if the Phase 2 survey results are negative but the quality and quantity of habitat are good and in a watershed of known occurrence. In this case, additional surveys (Phase 2 and/or Phase 3 (trapping) surveys), possibly extending into the following field season, may be recommended by the Service or appropriate State agency.

If bog turtles are documented to occur at a site, additional surveys/studies may be necessary to characterize the population (*e.g.*, number, density, population structure, recruitment), identify nesting and hibernating areas, and/or identify and assess adverse impacts to the species and its habitat, particularly if project activities are proposed to occur in, or within 300 feet of, wetlands occupied by the species.

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**CONTACT AGENCIES – BY STATE***(January 2012)*

| STATE         | FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE   | STATE AGENCY  |
|---------------|---|---|
| Connecticut   | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>New England Field Office<br>22 Bridge Street, Unit #1<br>Concord, NH 03301                | Department of Environmental Protection<br>Env. & Geographic Information Center<br>79 Elm Street, Store Floor, Hartford, CT 06106<br><i>(info about presence of bog turtles in or near a project area)</i><br><br>Department of Environmental Protection<br>Wildlife Division, Sixth Floor<br>79 Elm Street, Store Floor, Hartford, CT 06106<br><i>(to get a Scientific Collectors Permit or determine what type of marking system to use)</i> |
| Delaware      | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>Chesapeake Bay Field Office<br>177 Admiral Cochrane Drive<br>Annapolis, MD 21401          | Nongame & Endangered Species Program<br>Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife<br>4876 Hay Point Landing Road<br>Smyrna, DE 19977   |
| Maryland      | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>Chesapeake Bay Field Office<br>177 Admiral Cochrane Drive<br>Annapolis, MD 21401          | Maryland Department of Natural Resources<br>Wildlife & Heritage Division<br>PO Box 68, Main Street<br>Wye Mills, MD 21679   |
| Massachusetts | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>New England Field Office<br>22 Bridge Street, Unit #1<br>Concord, NH 03301                | Division of Fisheries and Wildlife<br>Dept. Fisheries, Wildlife and Env Law<br>Enforcement<br>Rt. 135<br>Westboro, MA 01581   |
| New Jersey    | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>New Jersey Field Office<br>927 North Main Street, Bldg. D-1<br>Pleasantville, NJ 08232    | New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife<br>Endangered and Nongame Species Program<br>1 Van Syckles Road<br>Clinton, NJ 08809   |
| New York      | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>3817 Luker Road<br>Cortland, NY 13045   | New York Natural Heritage Program<br>Department of Environmental Conservation<br>700 Troy-Schenectady Road<br>Latham, NY 12110-2400<br><i>(info about presence of bog turtles in or near a project area)</i><br>NY Department of Environmental Conservation<br>Special Licenses Unit<br>50 Wolf Road, Albany, NY 12233<br><i>(for endangered species permit applications)</i>   |
| Pennsylvania  | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>Pennsylvania Field Office<br>315 South Allen Street, Suite 322<br>State College, PA 16801 | Natural Diversity Section<br>Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission<br>450 Robinson Lane<br>Bellefonte, PA 16823   |

**BOG TURTLE COUNTIES OF OCCURRENCE OR LIKELY OCCURRENCE<sup>1</sup>**  
*(April 2006)*

| STATE         | COUNTY   |   |
|---------------|--|---|
| Connecticut   | Fairfield  | Litchfield  |
| Delaware      | New Castle   |   |
| Maryland      | Baltimore<br>Carroll   | Cecil<br>Harford  |
| Massachusetts | Berkshire  |   |
| New Jersey    | Burlington<br>Gloucester<br>Hunterdon<br>Middlesex<br>Monmouth<br>Morris | Ocean<br>Salem<br>Somerset<br>Sussex<br>Union<br>Warren                                     |
| New York      | Albany<br>Columbia<br>Dutchess<br>Genesee<br>Orange<br>Oswego<br>Putnam  | Seneca<br>Sullivan<br>Ulster<br>Wayne<br>Westchester  |
| Pennsylvania  | Adams<br>Berks<br>Bucks<br>Chester<br>Cumberland<br>Delaware<br>Franklin | Lancaster<br>Lebanon<br>Lehigh<br>Monroe<br>Montgomery<br>Northampton<br>Schuylkill<br>York |

<sup>1</sup> *This list is valid for one year from the date indicated. It may, however, be revised more frequently if new counties of occurrence are documented. Updates to this list are available from the Service upon request.*

# BOG TURTLE CONSERVATION ZONES<sup>1</sup>

(revised April 18, 2001)

Projects in and adjacent to bog turtle habitat can cause habitat destruction, degradation and fragmentation. Of critical importance is evaluating the potential direct and indirect effects of activities that occur in or are proposed for upland areas adjacent to bog turtle habitat. Even if the wetland impacts from an activity are avoided (i.e., the activity does not result in encroachment into the wetland), activities in adjacent upland areas can seriously compromise wetland habitat quality, fragment travel corridors, and alter wetland hydrology, thereby adversely affecting bog turtles.

The following bog turtle conservation zones have been designated with the intent of protecting and recovering known bog turtle populations within the northern range of this species. The conservation suggestions for each zone are meant to guide the evaluation of activities that may affect high-potential bog turtle habitat, potential travel corridors, and adjacent upland habitat that may serve to buffer bog turtles from indirect effects. *Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that consultations and project reviews will continue to be conducted on a case-by-case basis, taking into account site- and project-specific characteristics.*

## Zone 1

This zone includes the wetland and visible spring seeps occupied by bog turtles. Bog turtles rely upon different portions of the wetland at different times of year to fulfill various needs; therefore, this zone includes the entire wetland (the delineation of which will be scientifically based), not just those portions that have been identified as, or appear to be, optimal for nesting, basking or hibernating. In this zone, bog turtles and their habitat are most vulnerable to disturbance, therefore, the greatest degree of protection is necessary.

Within this zone, the following activities are likely to result in habitat destruction or degradation and should be avoided. These activities (not in priority order) include:

- development (e.g., roads, sewer lines, utility lines, storm water or sedimentation basins, residences, driveways, parking lots, and other structures)
- wetland draining, ditching, tiling, filling, excavation, stream diversion and construction of impoundments
- heavy grazing
- herbicide, pesticide or fertilizer application<sup>2</sup>
- mowing or cutting of vegetation<sup>2</sup>
- mining
- delineation of lot lines (e.g., for development, even if the proposed building or structure will not be in the wetland)

Some activities within this zone may be compatible with bog turtle conservation but warrant careful evaluation on a case-by-case basis:

- light to moderate grazing
- non-motorized recreational use (e.g., hiking, hunting, fishing)

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines are taken directly from the final “Bog Turtle (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*), Northern Population, Recovery Plan” (dated May 15, 2001).

## Zone 2

The boundary of this zone extends at least 300 feet from the edge of Zone 1 and includes upland areas adjacent to Zone 1. Activities in this zone could indirectly destroy or degrade wetland habitat over the short or long-term, thereby adversely affecting bog turtles. In addition, activities in this zone have the potential to cut off travel corridors between wetlands occupied or likely to be occupied by bog turtles, thereby isolating or dividing populations and increasing the risk of turtles being killed while attempting to disperse. Some of the indirect effects to wetlands resulting from activities in the adjacent uplands include: changes in hydrology (e.g., from roads, detention basins, irrigation, increases in impervious surfaces, sand and gravel mining); degradation of water quality (e.g., due to herbicides, pesticides, oil and salt from various sources including roads, agricultural fields, parking lots and residential developments); acceleration of succession (e.g., from fertilizer runoff); and introduction of exotic plants (e.g., due to soil disturbance and roads). This zone acts as a filter and buffer, preventing or minimizing the effects of land-use activities on bog turtles and their habitat. This zone is also likely to include at least a portion of the groundwater recharge/supply area for the wetland.

Activities that should be avoided in this zone due to their potential for adverse effects to bog turtles and their habitat include:

- development (e.g., roads, sewer lines, utility lines, storm water or sedimentation basins, residences, driveways, parking lots, and other structures)
- mining
- herbicide application<sup>2</sup>
- pesticide or fertilizer application
- farming (with the exception of light to moderate grazing - see below)
- certain types of stream-bank stabilization techniques (e.g., rip-rapping)
- delineation of lot lines (e.g., for development, even if the proposed building or structure will not be in the wetland)

Careful evaluation of proposed activities on a case-by-case basis will reveal the manner in which, and degree to which activities in this zone would affect bog turtles and their habitat. Assuming impacts within Zone 1 have been avoided, evaluation of proposed activities within Zone 2 will often require an assessment of anticipated impacts on wetland hydrology, water quality, and habitat continuity.

Activities that are likely to be compatible with bog turtle conservation, but that should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis within this zone include:

- light to moderate grazing
- non-motorized recreational use (e.g., hiking, hunting, fishing)
- mowing or cutting of vegetation

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<sup>2</sup> Except when conducted as part of a bog turtle habitat management plan approved by the Fish and Wildlife Service or State wildlife agency.

### Zone 3

This zone includes upland, wetland, and riparian areas extending either to the geomorphic edge of the drainage basin or at least one-half mile beyond the boundary of Zone 2. Despite the distance from Zone 1, activities in these areas have the potential to adversely affect bog turtles and their habitat. This particularly applies to activities affecting wetlands or streams connected to or contiguous with Zone 1, because these areas may support undocumented occurrences of bog turtles and/or provide travel corridors. In addition, some activities (e.g., roads, groundwater withdrawal, water/stream diversions, mining, impoundments, dams, “pump-and-treat” activities) far beyond Zone 1 have the potential to alter the hydrology of bog turtle habitat, therefore, another purpose of Zone 3 is to protect the ground and surface water recharge zones for bog turtle wetlands. Where the integrity of Zone 2 has been compromised (e.g., through increases in impervious surfaces, heavy grazing, channelization of stormwater runoff), there is also a higher risk of activities in Zone 3 altering the water chemistry of bog turtle wetlands (e.g., via nutrient loading, sedimentation, and contaminants).

Activities occurring in this zone should be carefully assessed in consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service and/or appropriate State wildlife agency to determine their potential for adverse effects to bog turtles and their habitat. Prior to conducting activities that may directly or indirectly affect wetlands, bog turtles and/or bog turtle habitat surveys should be conducted in accordance with accepted survey guidelines.

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**RECOMMENDED COORDINATION PROCEDURES FOR  
BOG TURTLE SURVEYS IN NEW JERSEY  
May 2009**

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Bog turtles (*Clemmys muhlenbergii*) may be assumed present and surveys are likely unnecessary if the wetlands in question are known to support bog turtles (according to the State Landscape Project mapping and/or correspondence from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection [NJDEP] or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [Service]), or are contiguous with an area known to support bog turtles. Contact the Service to develop appropriate site-specific conservation measures prior to any activities that may affect<sup>1</sup> bog turtles or their habitat; see the document *Bog Turtle Conservation Zones* for more information and examples of activities that may affect this species. The Service will work cooperatively with project proponents to determine the need for consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or a Habitat Conservation Plan under Section 10 of the ESA.

Some areas of New Jersey have not been thoroughly surveyed for endangered and threatened species. If present in the action area<sup>2</sup> of a proposed activity, bog turtles could be adversely affected by any impacts to wetlands (temporary or permanent, direct or indirect) including clearing, filling, draining, shading, and changes in erosion, sedimentation, water quality, or surface or groundwater hydrology. Therefore, the Service or the NJDEP may request surveys to determine the presence or absence of suitable habitat and/or bog turtles. This document provides recommended procedures for coordinating survey efforts with the Service to ensure reliable results.

1. A Phase 1 (habitat) survey may be requested to determine the presence or absence of suitable habitat within the action area if scrub/shrub or emergent wetlands may be directly or indirectly affected by a proposed activity. Phase 1 surveys should be performed in accordance with the Service's *Guidelines for Bog Turtle Surveys* by a recognized, qualified surveyor (a list of recognized, qualified surveyors is available from the Service). Surveyors must avoid stepping on the tops of hummocks because this can destroy turtle nests and eggs. The results of any survey, whether showing presence or absence of bog turtle habitat, must be forwarded to the Service for review; please include photographs and the relevant qualifications of all members of the survey team.

Phase 1 surveys may be performed prior to initiating coordination with the Service. However, Service review of a draft Phase 1 survey work plan is recommended if (a) scrub/shrub or emergent wetlands in the action area exceed two acres, extend off the project site, or include atypical cover types or hydrologic conditions (*e.g.*, invasive or woody vegetation, mainly surface water hydrologic sources); (b) the full extent of the action area is not clear; and/or (c) the survey team does not include a recognized, qualified surveyor.

2. Upon submission of a negative Phase 1 survey finding (*i.e.*, no suitable habitat within the action area), no activities should proceed that may affect the wetlands in question until the Service concurs in writing (usually within 30 days).

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<sup>1</sup> "May affect" is a preliminary determination when a proposed action may pose any effects, adverse or beneficial, on listed species. When a "may affect" situation exists, further coordination with the Service is needed to determine the need for consultation under Section 7 or a Habitat Conservation Plan under Section 10 of the ESA.

<sup>2</sup> The "action area" includes all areas to be affected directly or indirectly by a proposed action, not merely the immediate area ("footprint") involved in the action.

3. Submission of a positive Phase 1 survey finding (*i.e.*, suitable habitat within the action area) should be accompanied by either:

- indication of the project proponent's desire to assume bog turtles are present and develop necessary conservation measures in cooperation with the Service,

OR

- a draft work plan for a Phase 2 (visual) survey to determine the presence or absence of bog turtles.

The draft Phase 2 survey work plan should include:

- name(s) of the recognized, qualified surveyor(s) and proposed role of such individual(s) in personally overseeing the survey effort;
- relevant qualifications of all members of the survey team, including valid Scientific Collecting Permits for bog turtles (recognized, qualified surveyors DO NOT need to resubmit a full resume or CV);
- estimated survey dates, hours, and methods consistent with the Service's *Guidelines for Bog Turtle Surveys*;
- a map showing the locations and acreages of the action area, the Phase 1 survey area, the total area of suitable habitat (on and off the project site), and the proposed Phase 2 survey area;
- a proposal for handling any contiguous, suitable habitat that extends off the project site; and
- indication if a Phase 3 (trapping) effort may be necessary due to the size or characteristics of the habitat, proximity to a known site, and/or the presence of inaccessible habitat extending off the project site.

Phase 2 surveys may commence prior to receiving Service concurrence with the draft survey work plan (usually issued within 30 days) ONLY IF:

- proceeding with a Phase 2 survey is necessary to meet the survey windows in the Service's *Guidelines for Bog Turtle Surveys*;
- the Phase 2 survey will be personally overseen by a recognized, qualified surveyor and performed in accordance with the Service's *Guidelines for Bog Turtle Surveys*;
- the survey area is two acres or less;
- all suitable habitat extending off the project site is included in the survey area; and
- no need for a Phase 3 (trapping) survey is anticipated.

4. No Phase 3 (trapping) effort should commence until the Service has concurred in writing with a draft survey work plan. The Service may be contacted for draft trapping guidance. Phase 2 and 3 survey work plans should be submitted concurrently for Service review if visual and trapping efforts may be carried out during the same field season.

The draft Phase 3 survey work plan should include:

- reasons why trapping is or may be necessary;
- name(s) of the recognized, qualified surveyor(s) and proposed role of such individual(s) in personally overseeing the trapping effort;
- qualifications of all members of the survey team relevant to trapping, including valid Scientific Collecting Permits for trapping bog turtles;
- estimated survey dates, hours, and methods consistent with the Service's draft guidelines;  
and
- a map showing the proposed Phase 3 survey area.