

Habitat Management for Blanding's Turtles

Blanding's turtles have protected status (state and federal) in most of the 15 states and 3 Canadian provinces where they are found. They require a variety of wetland habitats, make frequent seasonal overland movements between wetlands, and therefore suffer mortality from direct wetland habitat loss and upland landscape fragmentation. Studies suggest the threats may warrant the need to provide federal protection for the species in the northeast. In an effort to conserve this species, the USFWS is establishing a new population of Blanding's turtles at Assabet River Refuge. Turtles in this population will need nearby nesting habitat in future years. In November and December 2011, the USFWS conducted habitat management to create 3.5 acres of high quality nesting habitat for Blanding's and other turtles on the north side of Assabet River Refuge, off Taylor Way. The project involved removing oak-pine forest (including stumps and branches) and scraping 3-4 inches of organic material from the surface. The location for this work was chosen based on a number of factors: 1) geographic proximity to wetland habitat which is favored by translocated Blanding's turtles, 2) presence of sandy, well-drained soils which are optimal for nesting turtles and, 3) amount of southern sun exposure. Although we do not expect to have breeding-aged Blanding's turtles at Assabet River Refuge for several more years, creating the habitat now allows Refuge biologists the opportunity to monitor the site annually for other nesting turtle species. This will provide a measure of success by indicating overall turtle nest site suitability. The photo's below show the site prior to, during, and immediately after management.

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