Eastern Spiny Softshell - Apalone spinifera spinifera

Abundance: Rare

Status: NSS2 (Ba) NatureServe: G5 S4

Population Status: Vulnerable, restricted habitat and range. Habitat is severely decreasing and populations have dramatically declined in areas.

Limiting Factor: Habitat: Restricted to low elevation habitats within the Missouri River drainage.

Comment: NSS status changed from NSS4 to NSS2 due to declining populations and increasing threats. Scientific name changed from Apalone spiniferus hartwegi. Common name changed from Western Spiny Softshell to Eastern Spiny Softshell.

Introduction

The Eastern Spiny Softshell can be found at lower elevations in the eastern and northern counties including the Bighorn Basin (Baxter and Stone 1985). Wyoming Game and Fish personnel have observed this species in all major river drainages within these regions. The Eastern Spiny Softshell typically becomes active in April or May. Nesting season for this species may last from May-August, but most nesting behavior occurs in June and July (Ernst et al 1994). In Wyoming, hatchlings appear in August and September (Baxter and Stone 1985). Females typically lay 20 eggs in loose sand near water. Eggs are often deposited in full sun in sand or gravel bars. Eastern Spiny Softshells are primarily carnivorous and feed on fish, amphibians, and invertebrates. This species is highly aquatic and spends its daylight hours foraging, floating on the surface, or buried in soft aquatic substrates with only its head and neck protruding (Ernst et al 1994). Riverine and open water habitats are preferred. Eastern Spiny Softshells may also be observed basking on sand bars, gravel bars, floating debris, and mud banks. These turtles typically enter hibernation by the end of October and overwinter in soft substrates in deep pools.

Habitat

Eastern Spiny Softshells prefer permanent lakes, rivers, and larger streams below 6000 feet.

Problems

- Lack of basic information on the species presence, distribution, and ecology in Wyoming.
- Reductions in permanent water availability are likely to impact populations of this species.

Conservation Actions

- Develop management recommendations based on resulting data.
- Survey and monitor population distribution, status, and habitat assocations.

Monitoring/Research

Conduct baseline surveys to gain better understanding of species distribution within the state.

Recent Developments

Baseline reptile and amphibian surveys were conducted in southeast Wyoming in 2011 and 2012 (Snoberger and Walker 2013, 2014) and in northern Wyoming in 2013 and 2014. Several Eastern Spiny Softshells were documented during these surveys in southeast Wyoming and detailed habitat data was collected at these locations (Snoberger and Walker 2013, 2014). Reptiles have received increased attention within Wyoming. Incidental observations are encouraged to be reported to the herpetology program.

References

Ernst, C.H., J.E. Lovich, and R.W. Barbour. 1994. Turtles of the United States and Canada. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington and London. 578pp.

Baxter, G.T. and M.D. Stone. 1985. Amphibians and Reptiles of Wyoming. Second Edition. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Cheyenne. 137pp.

Snoberger, C.E. and Z.J. Walker. 2013. Southeast Wyoming reptile and amphibian surveys 2011-2012. Wyoming Game and Fish Department Administrative Report. Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Snoberger, C.E. and Z.J. Walker. 2014. Reptile and amphibian habitat associations in southeast Wyoming. Wyoming Game and Fish Department Administrative Report. Cheyenne, Wyoming.

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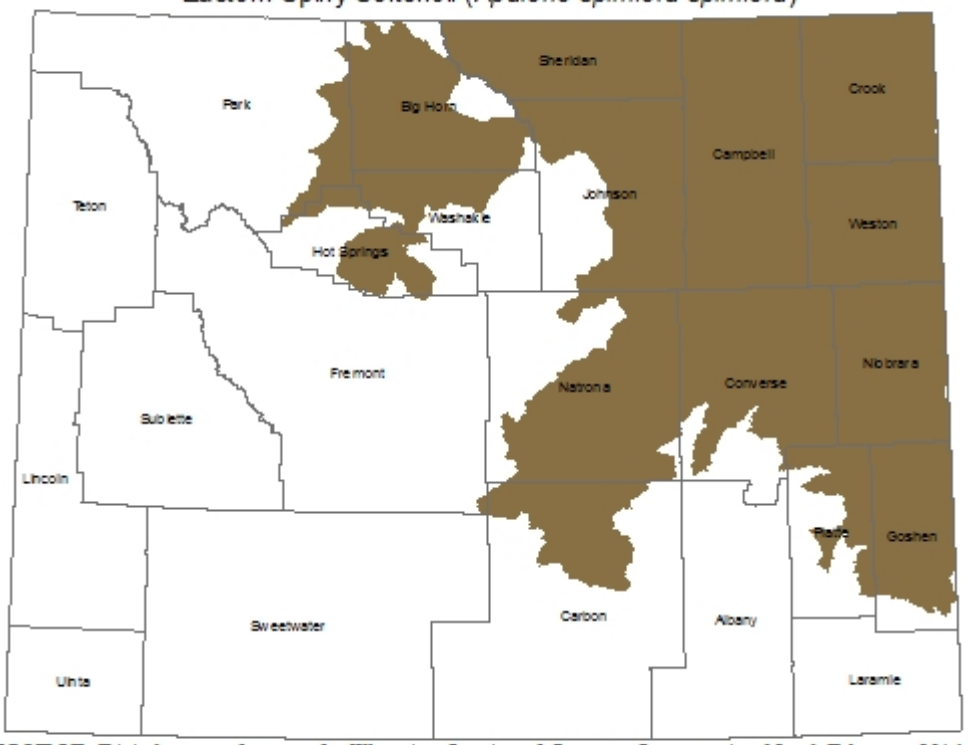

SOURCE: Digital maps of ranges for Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need: February 2016. Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Note that brown indicates the current known range of the species.