

## Western Spiny Softshell - *Apalone spinifera hartwegi*

Abundance: Rare

Status: NSS4 (Bc)

NatureServe: G5 S4

Population Status: Vulnerable due to restricted distribution, but extirpation is not eminent.

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

Comment: Scientific name changed from *Trionyx spiniferus hartwegi*.

### Introduction

The Western Spiny Softshell can be found at lower elevations in the eastern and northern counties including the Big Horn Basin (Baxter and Stone 1985). Wyoming Game and Fish personnel have observed this species in all major river drainages within these regions. The Western 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. Western 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. 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

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

### Problems

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

### Conservation Actions

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

### Monitoring/Research

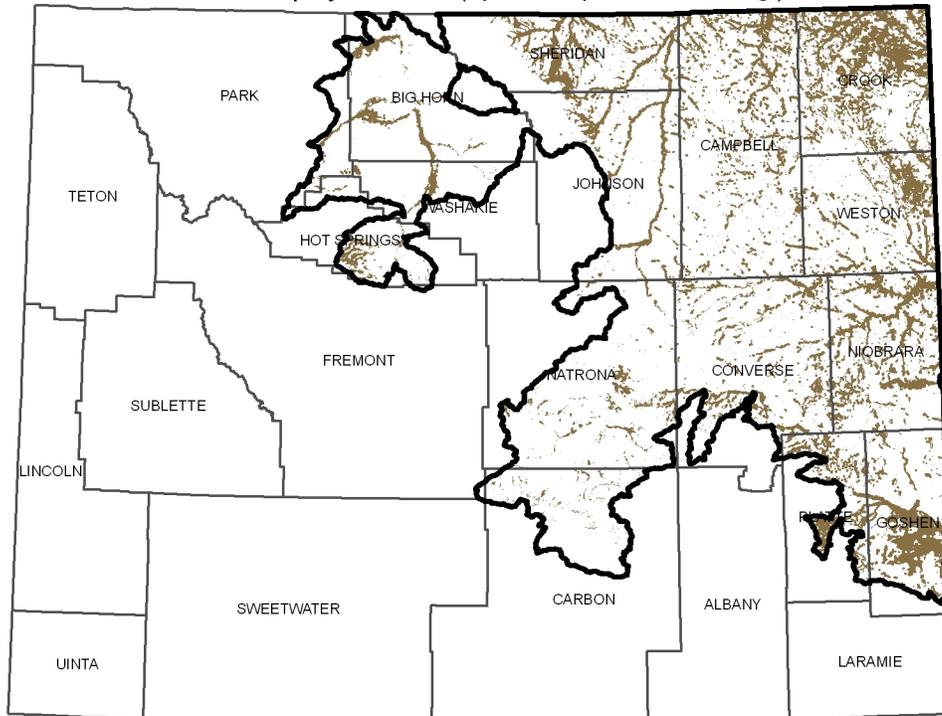
Conduct baseline surveys to gain better understanding of species distribution within the state.

### Recent Developments

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.

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SOURCE: Digital maps of ranges and predicted distributions for Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need: April 2010. Wyoming Natural Diversity Database. University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming. Note that brown indicates the predicted distribution of the species; heavy black lines indicate outermost boundaries of possible occurrence.