

## Wood Turtle *Clemmys insculpta*

**Habitat Preference:** From November-April wood turtles use rivers and streams with sandy or gravel bottoms while from May-October they use grassland, lightly wooded areas, and agricultural field edges within 800 yards of river habitat. During summer, frequent trips to water are common, prompting movement through wooded or grassy corridors



Photograph by: Jeff Tamplin

### Threats:

- Wood turtles average only 8-11 eggs per year and may not reproduce every year. Wood turtles do not reach sexual maturity until they are approximately 14-18 years old. By taking one adult turtle you are removing a substantial component of a population's reproductive potential.
- Fragmentation of Iowa's natural systems requires wildlife to travel across roads and crop fields. These journeys leave wood turtles vulnerable to becoming road kill, or killed by farm equipment
- Wood turtles nest in sandy soil near river edges. Nests are shallow and commonly destroyed by raccoons, skunks, foxes and other predators who actively seek out turtle eggs.
- Wood turtles require flowing water in sandy and/or gravel streambeds. Significant reduction of winter water level may cause hibernating turtles to freeze. Woody invasion and conversion of prairie to cultivated ground reduce and fragment areas used by wood turtles during the summer.
- Illegal collection for pet trading.

### Habitat Improvement Guidelines:

- Open up wooded areas to allow sun light in. This should not be done between April 15 and October 1.
- Prescribed burn areas that have remaining native grassland. Burn on a 3-5 year rotation to keep woody species from invading the site. To insure that wood turtles are not killed, burning should be not be implemented until average nightly temperatures fall below freezing to insure that wood turtles have returned to water for the winter.
- Open up densely wooded areas to promote understory growth of grasses and forbs near river edges. Large-scale deforestation, burning, or mowing of areas likely to harbor wood turtles should not be done between April 15 and November 1.
- Plant prairie grasses to provide thick ground cover and wild fruits and berries to provide food.
- Establish thicket areas of willows, blackberries, grapes, and plums interspersed with grassland.