

Pond Sliders and the Department of Defense



Picture by Paul Block

The Pond Slider (*Trachemys scripta*) is a conspicuous aquatic turtle that is often seen basking on logs. Due to numerous introductions (both intentional and accidental), it has become one of the most widely distributed reptiles in the world. When disturbed, it “slides” off its perch into the water, hence its name. It is the traditional “pet turtle” sold for decades at pet stores.

Description: Pond Sliders are moderately large, robust, aquatic turtles that attain a maximum carapace (top shell) length of about 11.5 inches (27.5 cm). The carapace is rounded to slightly oval, has a relatively high dome, may become slightly rougher and/or thicker in older individuals, and is olive green to black. The chin and neck have broad stripes.

Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 139 military properties (27 Air Force; 57 Army; 9 Marine Corps; and 46 Navy).	Up to an additional 109 military properties (33 Air Force; 31 Army; 6 Marine Corps and 39 Navy).



Range: This species’ natural range extends from the mid-Atlantic coast and Michigan to extreme northeastern Mexico, but it has been introduced in many areas outside the native range, including Florida, New York, and Hawaii, as well as various parts of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and Latin America. Three subspecies are recognized.

Habitat: Pond Sliders occur in a wide variety of permanently aquatic habits, but are generally most abundant in lakes, ponds, and sluggish rivers.

Behavior: Pond Sliders are omnivorous and consume a wide variety of plant and animal matter. Maximum longevity is about 30 years. Females may move some distance from water in search of suitable nesting sites, and produce up to three clutches of 5-20 eggs per year. Incubation takes 60-91 days.

Military Interactions: The second most common turtle species on DoD properties (including several to which it has been introduced). This turtle may be encountered both in military training and housing areas, wherever suitable water bodies occur.

Conservation Status: The Pond Slider has no federal conservation status. The Pond Slider is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in four states at the periphery of its range. It has a NatureServe Raking of G5-Secure, and is listed as Least Concern by the IUCN Red list.

Threats/Planning Considerations: This species adapts well to human activity, and threats are few. In fact, it is considered an “invasive” and potentially harmful species in many places to which it has been introduced. A habitat management practice to benefit this species within its native range is to retain “snags” or exposed logs along shorelines, which are important for basking.

