

# Snapping Turtles and the Department of Defense



Picture by: Paul Block

The Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) is a large, aquatic, North American turtle. The Snapping Turtle has been documented on more Department of Defense properties than any other turtle species.

**Description:** Adults average 8-14 inches (20-36 cm) in length, but may reach nearly 20 inches (50 cm), with a black to brown carapace (top shell) that is saw-toothed on the rear edge. The plastron (bottom shell) is small and cross-shaped. Adults average 10-35 pounds (4.5-15.9 kg), but may weigh up to 75 pounds (34 kg).

**Range:** The Snapping Turtle is native to eastern North America from the Great Lakes region and Nova Scotia, south to Florida and central Texas. In addition, they have been introduced into the western U.S., particularly California and Arizona.



Source: A Field Guide to the Western Reptiles and Amphibians (Third Edition), Robert C. Stebbins

**Habitat:** This species occupies a variety of freshwater habitats (streams, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, marshes, swamps), especially those with soft mud bottoms and abundant aquatic vegetation or submerged brush and logs. Hibernation occurs singly or in small groups in streams, lakes, ponds, or marshes in bottom mud, in or under submerged logs or debris, under overhanging banks, or in muskrat tunnels.

**Behavior:** Snapping Turtles feed on a wide variety of animal and plant matter, and undergo extensive scavenging activities. Nesting occurs in soft soil in open areas. Clutch size averages 20-35, sometimes exceeds 100. This species exhibits temperature-dependent sex determination (eggs hatch into females at higher incubation temperatures, and males at lower incubation temperatures). It may take females 10-20 years to become sexually mature in the northern parts of its range.

**Conservation Status:** The Snapping Turtle has no federal- or state-listing status. It has a NatureServe conservation ranking of G5-Secure and the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists the Snapping Turtle as Least Concern.

**Threats:** Habitat loss, road mortality, and intentional killing are threats to this species. In addition, they are widely collected for commercial trade for local, national, and international consumption. Many states in the U.S. have regulations prohibiting or limiting the collection of this species from the wild.

## Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 146 military installations across its natural range and introduced on 2 military installations in CA.	Up to an additional 102 military installations across its range.

