

ENDANGERED SPECIES ON FORT STEWART

Fort Stewart is home to 6 wildlife species and 1 plant protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Installation carries out programs to conserve and recover these species. Please help us ensure the future of wildlife for generations to come by obeying laws and regulations that are designed to conserve protected species and their habitat.

Violations of the ESA are punishable by fines of up to \$50,000 and imprisonment for up to one year.

Sportsmen are reminded that only game species may be taken. All other wildlife is protected, including non-venomous snakes.



The wood stork (*Mycteria americana*) is a large, white wading bird. The trailing edges of its wings are black, and its featherless head is gray. Storks are not known to nest on Fort Stewart, but they do nest nearby and are often seen foraging in the Installation's wetlands. Storks feed in shallow water by stirring up the bottom with their feet as they sweep their beak

through the water. When they feel a fish or frog touch their beak, they quickly snap it shut to capture their prey. Because of this specialized foraging behavior, storks depend on seasonal fluctuations in water levels that concentrate their prey in shallow pools.

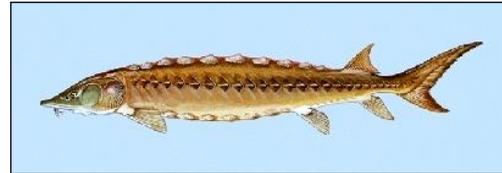


The wood stork is an endangered species management success story and was down-listed to threatened in 2014. The population reached a

low of 7,000 individuals in 1982, but has increased to over 20,000 birds today. The Georgia population has increased dramatically from 142 nesting pairs in 1975, to more than 2,000 nesting pairs today. If you see a wood stork, just leave it alone and enjoy watching this magnificent bird.

The shortnose and Atlantic sturgeons (*Acipenser brevirostrum* and *A. oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*) are endangered fish that occur on Fort Stewart. These long-lived fish are covered with bony plates called scutes and have shark-like tails. Their snouts have 4 "whiskers" or barbells dangling beneath. Shortnoses can attain lengths of up to 3 feet and spend most of their lives in freshwater. The

Atlantic sturgeon can grow to lengths of 14 feet and spend most of their lives in salt or brackish water, moving into freshwater only to spawn. Fort Stewart cooperates with Georgia DNR to learn more about the fish's population status, habitat preferences, movements, age structure, and growth rate in an attempt to conserve and enhance the Fort Stewart population.



Sturgeon populations have declined throughout their range due to degraded water quality, commercial fishing, dam construction, and degraded spawning habitat. They are found in the lower portions of the Canoochee and Ogeechee Rivers. These fish are bottom feeders and are not likely to be caught by hook and line; however, on occasion, boaters and anglers may see them jump many feet into the air, or be startled by a big splash as the fish fall back into the water. Throughout the world, sturgeons historically have been fished primarily for the roe, or eggs, more commonly referred to as caviar.

The frosted flatwoods salamander (*Ambystoma cingulatum*, threatened) occurs in poorly drained pine flatwoods, where they spend most of their lives in crayfish burrows and other underground retreats. They breed in grassy cypress ponds that dry down during the spring and summer. In the fall, these salamanders lay their eggs on the margins of dry ponds. The eggs hatch when the ponds are filled by fall and winter rains. In the spring, the salamanders mature and leave the ponds as they dry up.



There are several known frosted flatwoods salamander ponds on Fort Stewart, and efforts to identify other sites are on-going. Please do not dig or otherwise disturb habitat marked with this sign.



The Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW; *Picoides borealis*) was once common in the pine forests of the southeast, from New Jersey to Florida and westward to Texas and Oklahoma. Today, fewer than 20,000 RCWs live in the wild, and Fort Stewart has one of the largest remaining populations. RCWs construct cavities for roosting and nesting in mature, live pine trees (80 years old or older). They peck the tree trunk above and below the cavity and cause the sap to flow and coat the tree, which serves to keep climbing snakes from entering their cavities.



RCWs respond well to management and their prospects for recovery are good. Fort Stewart's population has grown from 100 pairs in 1994 to 461 pairs in 2016.

The eastern indigo snake (*Drymarchon couperi*, threatened) is the longest snake native to North America, reaching 8½ feet or more in length. Eastern indigo snakes are glossy blue-black in color, often with a patch of red or orange on the chin and sides of the head. Although their large size may make them appear frightening to some, **they are non-venomous and completely harmless.**



In southern Georgia, eastern indigo snakes spend the cooler months in dry, sandy longleaf pine

– turkey oak habitats called sandhills, where they shelter in gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows. During warmer months eastern indigo snakes spend most of their time in large swampy bottomlands. Males have rather large home ranges of >1000 acres. The eastern indigo snake's diet includes rats, frogs, and other snakes, including venomous snakes. Please leave snakes and gopher tortoises alone, and avoid damage to gopher tortoise burrows. Snake collecting is prohibited on Fort Stewart.



The smooth coneflower (*Echinacea laevigata*, endangered) has declined range-wide due to fire suppression and habitat destruction resulting from highway construction, residential and commercial development, and roadside and utility right-of-way maintenance



activities. The natural habitat of this flower is sunny openings in forested habitats, usually on calcium and magnesium rich soils. Collection of this plant, its flowers, or seeds is prohibited.

Fort Stewart's conservation program focuses on maintaining or restoring natural

habitat conditions. Prior to the arrival of settlers, the pine forests that dominate Fort Stewart's uplands were naturally



maintained by periodic fires caused by lightning during thunder storms. Longleaf pine forests recover rapidly after a spring fire. Deer browse tender wiregrass sprouts within a few weeks after a fire, and the grassy forest floor provides excellent bugging ground for turkey poults. Quail managers have long understood that fire is an essential tool for maintaining good quail habitat.

Today, the landscape is interrupted by roads and firebreaks, and natural fires cannot be allowed to burn for days as they did historically. Forest managers seek to mimic nature by lighting prescribed fires that reduce forest fuels and decrease the

risk of a catastrophic fire. Prescribed burns are conducted when weather conditions ensure a safe burn, and every effort is made to minimize smoke drifting towards highways or residential areas. Through these efforts, Fort Stewart personal strive to restore habitats to natural conditions.



Endangered species success stories include the American alligator and the bald

eagle, both of which occur on Fort Stewart. The American alligator, almost extinct from over hunting and poaching in the 1950's, is now abundant (de-listed in 1987). Bald eagle populations in the lower 48 states declined drastically in the 1950's and 1960's,

primarily from contamination by the pesticide DDT (now banned in the U.S.), which caused eagle's



eggshells to be too thin to support the weight of an incubating adult. Although de-listed in 2007, the bald eagle enjoys continued protection the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.