



Preliminary Investigation of Snapping Turtles

The Hudson River Trustee Agencies— assessing and restoring your natural resources

Past and continuing discharges of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) have contaminated Hudson River natural resources. While the U.S. EPA is continuing with cleanup plans, federal and state trustee agencies are conducting a natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) to assess and restore natural resources injured by PCBs.

This factsheet provides information about a preliminary investigation of PCB impacts to reptiles being implemented under the NRDA.

The Hudson River and its surrounding habitat support many species of reptiles. These animals spend a large part of their lives in contact with potentially contaminated substances—water, sediment, and soil—and consume potentially contaminated prey.

Snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina serpentina*), a particular reptile species, are an important part of the Hudson River food web. Snapping turtles consume vegetation and a wide variety of animal matter including insects, crustaceans, clams, earthworms, fish frogs, snakes, small turtles, birds, and small mammals. Young snapping turtles and turtle eggs are also prey for skunks, snakes, birds, and other wildlife.

PCB Exposure and Effects

Many laboratory and field studies done in other parts of the country have shown the potentially harmful effects of PCBs on fish, birds, mammals, and other wildlife. However, toxicological data on PCB impacts on reptiles is limited. Some past turtle studies indicate that PCBs may cause behavioral abnormalities, biochemical alterations, and reduced hatching of eggs.

Purpose

Trustees have implemented a preliminary investigation to provide an indication of the extent snapping turtles in the Hudson are currently exposed to PCB contamination. This data will inform the trustees about the need for future reptile studies. Trustees will collect eggs from snapping turtles and analyze these eggs for contamination.

Snapping turtle populations are sensitive to the lethal collection of adults; in contrast, natural rates of predation on snapping turtle eggs are high. Turtles generally produce large clutches of eggs yearly (averaging 15-50 eggs per clutch). Females may lay more than one clutch per year. For these reasons, trustees will collect eggs rather than adult snapping turtles. Care will be taken during the investigation to minimize disturbance to the turtles.

How can you help?

Egg collection efforts will begin in June and last several weeks. If you are aware of snapping turtles that nest on your property and want to make your property available for this study, please contact any of the trustee agency staff listed in the box.

The trustees would also like to hear your ideas for possible restoration projects in the Hudson River valley. Please tell us about habitats (wetlands, streams, etc.), resources (fish, birds, or other wildlife), or specific sites that could be restored or enhanced.



Investigators

The study is being implemented by the trustee agencies—

- U.S. Department of Interior
- New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Trustee agencies act on behalf of the public to restore natural resources injured by hazardous substances. To learn more, please contact—

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[www.darp.noaa.gov/neregion/
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