

IDENTIFICATION: The flattened musk turtle (*Sternotherus depressus*) is a small freshwater turtle less than 5 inches in total length with a distinctly flattened top shell (carapace) that is dark brown to orange in color with dark bordered seams. The bottom shell or plastron is pink to yellowish. The head is greenish with a network of dark markings.

The flattened musk turtle is only found in the Black Warrior River system above the Bankhead Dam. Optimal habitat includes free-flowing large creeks or small rivers where it feeds on invertebrates such as snails and mussels. It can also be found upstream, downstream or around the margins of impoundments in the upper Black Warrior River system.



Flattened Musk Turtle
Blackwater Creek, Walker County

It was listed as a threatened species and [provided protection under the Endangered Species Act](#) on 6-11-1987. Three studies conducted from 1981 thru 1986 indicated heavy silt accumulations were limiting turtle populations, especially juveniles. Changes in agriculture, forestry, and surface mining have significantly reduced the amount of silt loads being added to the Black Warrior River basin during recent decades. The [recovery plan](#) published in 1990 states the flattened musk turtle will be considered for delisting when there is evidence of a viable population over a 10-year period in at least 12 streams. Hopefully, the turtle's habitat can begin to slowly recover from past degradation activities so populations may increase to a point where delisting is considered.

FORESTRY CONSIDERATIONS: These animals are sensitive to changes in streambed and water quality, especially siltation. Following Alabama's Best Management Practices for Forestry will protect them from any negative impact of forestry activities. Read and adhere to label directions when using any herbicides on property adjacent to potential habitat.

DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTY: The 11 Alabama counties included in its range are Blount, Cullman, Etowah, Fayette, Jefferson, Lawrence, Marion, Marshall, Tuscaloosa, Walker and Winston.

Photo Credit: Mark Bailey, Conservation Southeast Inc.

Text Credit: Threatened and Endangered Species of Alabama: A Guide to Assist with Forestry Activities, 2nd Edition, USFWS



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