

# Common Musk Turtles and the Department of Defense

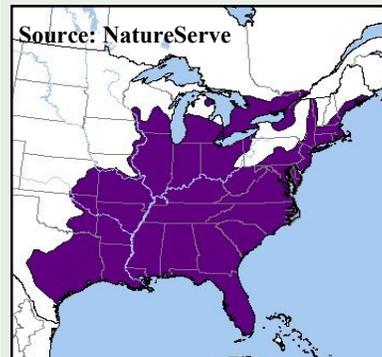


Picture by Jerrod Derr

The Common Musk Turtle (*Sternotherus odoratus*) is an aquatic turtle that is widely distributed across eastern North America. It gets both its common name and nicknames, “stinkpot” and “stinking Jim,” from the odoriferous musk it sometimes expels when handled.

**Description:** Common Musk Turtles are small, attaining a maximum size of 5.5 inches (13.5 cm). They have dark brown or black shells that may be streaked or mottled and commonly accumulate green algae. There are two sets of bold light stripes (occasionally lacking in adults) on each side of the head, one extending from the tip of the snout, through the eye, to the neck, and the other extending from the tip of the snout, along the upper lip, to the neck.

**Range:** This wide-ranging species occurs throughout eastern North



Source: NatureServe

America, including New England, southern Ontario, and southern Quebec, south to Florida, and west to Wisconsin and central Texas. There are scattered populations in south-central Kansas and western Texas.

**Habitat:** Common Musk Turtles are found in a wide variety of permanent bodies of freshwater having a slow (or no) current and a soft bottom.

**Behavior:** Extremely aquatic, Common Musk Turtles spend most of their activity time crawling on the water bottom and seldom bask. Their diet includes carrion, a wide variety of small aquatic invertebrates, and small

amounts of vegetation. Although strongly aquatic, females may travel some distance overland to suitable nesting sites, when this species is likely to be seen crossing roads. A small clutch of hard-shelled eggs is laid in a shallow excavation dug in a mound of loose soil, or in a pile of rotting organic debris. Hatchlings may overwinter in the nest. Hibernation occurs in the bottom mud or debris, under rocks, or in holes in banks along the edge of the water body.

**Military Interactions:** A common, yet infrequently encountered turtle species on DoD properties in the eastern U.S. It may be encountered both in military training and housing areas, wherever suitable wetland habitats are present.

**Conservation Status:** The Common Musk Turtle has no federal conservation status. It is listed as state-threatened in Iowa and considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in several 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:** Threats to this species include destruction and fragmentation of habitats, human persecution, road mortality, and forest succession. A habitat management practice to benefit this species is to restore and/or maintain patches of young forest and shrubland.

## Occurrence on Military Lands

Confirmed	Potential
Confirmed present on 72 military properties (14 Air Force; 41 Army; 4 Marine Corps; and 13 Navy).	Up to an additional 110 military properties (28 Air Force; 35 Army; 5 Marine Corps and 42 Navy).

