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What you need to know about surveying for the endangered Bog Turtle

The Bog Turtle is a small, wetland-inhabiting turtle that is federally listed as “threatened” through the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the State of Maryland, and is listed as “endangered” by the States of Delaware, New Jersey and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Under State and Federal regulations, it is unlawful to sell, trade, barter, possess, import, export, catch, take, or kill Bog Turtles. State and Federal regulations also outline strict, seasonal methods associated with the required surveying of project sites for Bog Turtles and their habitat.

If surveys are not conducted in the prescribed time frame, this tiny turtle can cause BIG headaches for landowners and developers within the turtle’s range, which includes New Castle County, DE, northeastern areas of Maryland and southeastern areas of Pennsylvania, as well as other nearby regions. Unique planning challenges are presented by Bog Turtles because their secretive nature and seasonal activeness restricts the time of year that



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Phase II Bog Turtle Surveys can be executed to just April 15 to June 15.

Luckily, the Bog Turtle’s habitat requirements are specific enough that a property can be surveyed for the presence of potential bog turtle habitat with minimal seasonal restrictions. This “Phase I Bog Turtle Survey,” is designed to identify the presence or absence of suitable Bog Turtle habitat on a site, and may be conducted by a “Recognized Qualified Bog Turtle Surveyor” at any time of the year that the ground is not frozen or covered by snow.

A Phase II Bog Turtle

Survey will be required if potential Bog Turtle habitat is found and it cannot be provided a 300-foot buffer from development and land development projects could be delayed until the Phase II Survey is completed.

The Phase II Survey, which must be conducted between April 15 and June 15—includes a team, led by a Recognized Qualified Bog Turtle Surveyor, that actually searches for the turtles themselves within wetlands identified as potential Bog Turtle habitat. It consists of four (4) separate site searches, two (2) of which must be conducted in May.

Because agency coordination is required prior to the execution of Phase II Surveys in order to ensure that the proposed search areas and man-hours of search effort will be approved, it is highly recommended that you speak with a qualified environmental consulting professional (a Recognized Qualified Bog Turtle Surveyor) immediately to allow adequate planning before “Bog Turtle season” (April 15 to June 15).

Do Your Due Diligence. It is not uncommon for Bog Tur-

tle surveys to be requested or required by county, state, and federal agencies during the plan review process. Under the best case scenario, you should have a Phase I Bog Turtle Survey conducted during the due diligence period prior to purchasing a property. If you already own the property, you can be proactive and have a Phase I Survey conducted or you can wait to see if agencies raise a concern during the plan review process. If you decide not to be proactive and the Bog Turtle issue comes up any time after mid-May, you will have to wait until the following year to conduct a Phase II Bog Turtle Survey, if one is required.

DON’T DELAY!

Contact your environmental consultant TODAY to see if a Bog Turtle Survey is needed now!

Amy Nazdrowicz, Environmental Scientist for Landmark Engineering/JCM Environmental, assists with Phase II Bog Turtle Surveys under the direction of the firm’s Recognized Qualified Bog Turtle Surveyor, Joseph ‘Mick’ McLaughlin. ■