

Snapping Turtle Nesting Near Prairie Streams in Montana

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Snapping turtle nesting behavior has not been studied in Montana and little is known about their habitat use on prairie streams. From May to late-June timed visual surveys were conducted for reptile eggs. Eight “nesting aggregations,” with concentrated nesting activity were identified. Fresh snapping turtle nests were excavated to count and measure eggs and then reburied with a HOBO temperature logger. Sites were resurveyed in the fall to document hatching success or predation. Nests were mainly found in mixed substrate on southern facing hills and bluffs with an average slope of 23.6 degrees, located no more than 50 meters from the water. Daubenmire nest/random site comparisons indicated that nest site ground cover consisted of over 75% bare ground, while random sites were more vegetated with only 16% bare ground. Suitable nesting habitat at this creek seems limited and thus it is important that we help landowners understand the value of these sites and how to limit disturbance.