Threatened and Endangered Species in Forests of Wisconsin

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WISCONSIN
DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

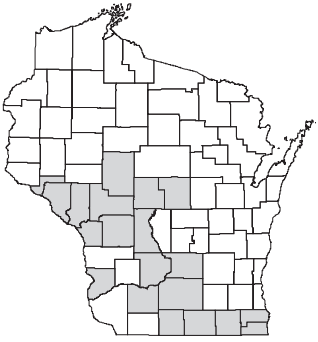
Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake

(Sistrurus catenatus)

Federal Status: Not Listed
State Status: Endangered

Description: The adult eastern massasauga rattlesnake usually is 2 to 3 feet long with a tan body heavily covered with dark blotches edged with black. Its head is flattened and broad, with one white and three dark stripes radiating from its head. Nine enlarged plate scales cover the head like a helmet. The massasauga's tail has 5 to 7 dark cigar-band rings and is tipped by a grayish-yellow rattle.

Habitat: Eastern massasauga rattlesnakes live in a variety of habitat types. These snakes

hibernate underground, either in root canals, crayfish burrows or other subterranean tunnels. Juveniles, males and nonpregnant females usually remain in wetlands throughout the year, seeking areas with at least some open canopy for basking in sunlight. Pregnant females migrate to open upland sites with sandy soils where they incubate their young. Moderately moist prairies, oak savannas and open oak woodlands may be utilized where they occur adjacent to wetlands where hibernation takes place.

Forestry Considerations: Forestry considerations in wetlands are minimal, as most timber cutting and clearing occur after freeze-up. On open upland sites with sandy soils where females are known to occur, forestry cutting and other activities that disturb the ground layer are best done from mid-October through early May. This would avoid impacts to pregnant females.