Threatened and Endangered Species in Forests of Wisconsin

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WISCONSIN
DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

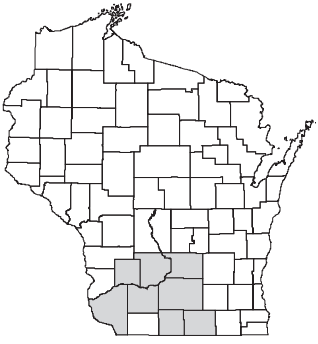
Ornate Box Turtle

(Terrapene ornata)

Federal Status: Not Listed
State Status: Endangered

Description: The ornate box turtle is a small, terrestrial turtle of up to 5 inches long. Yellowish lines, bars and spots radiate from the growth center of each upper shell scute (shell segment). The lower shell is brown with radiating yellow lines. Males tend to be a darker brown than females; the males have bright red eyes. Females have jaws that are lined with pale yellow markings and their upper lip is slightly notched.

Habitat: These turtles are found primarily on dry sand prairies and adjacent oak savannas and oak woodlands. Prickly pear cactus is frequently

found in such habitats along with a variety of other drought-resistant plant species.

Forestry Considerations: Heavy equipment and rural road traffic contribute significantly to the mortality of ornate box turtles in Wisconsin. Where the turtles are found and when the turtles are most active (early April to late September) heavy equipment use should be minimized. Forestry cutting, especially where pine plantations are cleared or heavily thinned, may benefit this species by adding either temporary open habitat if the site is regenerated, or long-term open habitat if the site is restored to an oak savanna or allowed to regrow as dry prairie.