

Summary of Port Franks Area Turtle Monitoring Program – September 2010

Hope Brock and Kari Jean of Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) and Suzie Coombes of Pinery Provincial Park/University of Toronto held a public meeting on Saturday September 11, 2010 to update the local community on the Port Franks Area Turtle Monitoring Program.

This meeting was a follow up to the March 2010 training workshop regarding the community turtle monitoring network. Information was presented that had been collected in Spring and Summer 2010 regarding local turtles. Next steps for the turtle program were also discussed.

A point form summary of the meeting's content is as follows:

- there are only 8 native species of turtles in Ontario, 7 of these are listed by provincial and federal government agencies as species at risk
- the Port Franks/Grand Bend area is home to 7 of the 8 native turtles species, which is not common in Ontario - this area is providing unique habitat to support rare turtle species
- turtle monitoring program is part of a larger initiative undertaken by ABCA and partners – A Biodiversity Strategy for the Port Franks Area
- Port Franks area is rich in biodiversity, in other words, home to a diverse number of plants, animals and habitats – The Strategy is a management plan document intended to unite community and other stakeholders in protecting species and habitat
- Turtle Monitoring Program was intended to gather information on the turtle species of Port Franks, provide education to local residents and involve them in monitoring turtles
- Turtle Monitoring Program has three components: community's turtle sightings called or emailed into ABCA; Head Start Program – nesting program run out of Pinery; Presence/absence study conducted by ABCA in conjunction with U of Toronto's Freshwater Turtle Genetics study
- Head Start program – turtle eggs were collected from Pinery and community, placed in Pinery incubators which gave turtle eggs a chance at survival as they are targeted by predators such as raccoons and skunks. To date 19 turtle nests were collected in the spring, 392 eggs were incubated, about one third of these have currently hatched (Pinery is waiting on more to hatch)
- ABCA received over 50 calls and emails from the community throughout spring and summer regarding turtle sightings, nesting turtles and turtle mortalities along roadsides.

- ABCA with help of Pinery and U of Toronto conducted surveys for local turtles using hoop nets and hand nets. Information collected included: type of turtle, measurements, weights and sometimes blood for genetic purposes. Turtles were given a unique notch code on their shells for future population study.
- Both community information that was reported and ABCA/Pinery surveys helped to gather initial information that will hopefully lead to a long term monitoring program, how the turtles are using local habitat and how they are moving around within and to and from aquatic habitats.
- Next Steps for turtle program – ABCA would like the community to take a leadership role with the monitoring network in future, as funding might not always be available for the conservation authority to run this program. This could perhaps be accomplished through the local neighborhood associations.
- By looking at all turtle sightings and movement over the spring and summer – the community feels that turtle crossing signs to warn drivers of turtle movement would be beneficial and would cut down on turtle mortalities during their nesting season.
- ABCA would like to work with local community and Lambton Shores Municipality to possibly put up some turtle crossing signs in some areas, community has been very interested in putting up signs
- ABCA will continue with the turtle monitoring program this Fall – please report sightings 1-888-286-2610 or email kjean@abca.on.ca; hbrock@abca.on.ca
- A few turtle friendly tips:
 - create turtle habitat by maintaining a naturally vegetated shoreline, and leaving logs so they can sun themselves
 - don't feed predators - keep garbage contained so that turtle predators (raccoons, skunks) are not attracted to the area
 - pet trade is a serious issue for turtles; please contact the Ministry of Natural Resources if you see someone collecting turtles from your neighborhood 1-877-TIPS-MNR (they should have a permit, like ABCA has to collect turtles, and if they don't they are likely not allowed to be doing so).
 - Slow down and watch for turtles crossing the road especially during May and June (nesting time), also watch for turtles in the water when you're operating your boat
 - If you feel safe, you can assist turtles across the road by carrying smaller turtles and prodding larger turtles like snapping turtles with a shovel, car mat, snow brush etc.
 - Never pick a turtle up by its tail – you can damage vertebrae in their back

- Always move a turtle the way it is already traveling – they have a purpose in mind, for example they may want to cross the road to nest.
- ABCA and Pinery wants to thank volunteers and workshop participants for making the 2010 turtle monitoring project a success, please visit www.abca.on.ca and choose the Community tab, then click on Port Franks Biodiversity Strategy for more information on this project.