

Turtle mitigation sites along Hwy 62 near completion



Nov. 17, 2020

By Nate Smelle

When COVID-19 first took hold in Ontario earlier this year, Kelly Wallace of the Think Turtle Conservation Initiative said the prospect of permanent measures being implemented to mitigate turtle road mortality in North Hastings this turtle season seemed unlikely. Considering the Ford government categorized conservation efforts as "non-essential services" during the initial lock down, she said it was a welcome surprise when Think Turtle Conservation Initiative was informed by the Ministry of Transportation in May that they were planning to construct two sections of permanent fencing at two identified turtle mortality "hot spots" along Hwy 62 just north of County Road 620.

Intended to help prevent turtles from being hit by cars, Wallace explained that the fencing is intended to direct the turtles movements, giving them safe passage beneath the road to their nesting site through the culverts on-site. Looking back on how this project came to be, she said it is important to mention the crucial role the community played back in 2017.

Prior to setting-up Think Turtle Conservation Initiative in February 2018, Wallace said she showed up on peoples doorsteps, put notices in the local newspapers, put posters up and with the help of Moose 97.7 FM reached out to people in the community to ascertain documented turtle sightings (alive/dead/injured) they had for the area. As the first step in making the turtle mitigation sites currently under construction a reality, she said the campaign was aimed at compiling data to identify and substantiate high risk turtle road mortality hot spots in the area for the MTO to approve the financing and installation of official MTO turtle awareness road signs. Wallace said "Along with signage there was the added hope of the data contributing to permanent mitigation measures being implemented at any of the hot spots included with the data submitted. Since 2017 the data from that campaign has contributed to six official turtle awareness signs being installed along Hwy 62 between Bancroft and Hwy 7 in 2018."

When the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry "were still involved with species at risk," Wallace said they used the information provided by local community members to encourage the MTO to construct the two sections of permanent fencing at the turtle mortality "hot spots" along Hwy 62. As the 2020 turtle season comes to an end, she said she wants to thank the MTO's contractors and the "very dedicated" work crew that has been working on the project throughout the summer and fall in the rain, extreme heat, snow and cool temperatures.

"MTO's commitment to protecting species at risk and helping prevent road mortality is very apparent by the financial investment in this project, scope of work carried out and the great lengths MTO has gone to amid the pandemic to see this project is completed for

next turtle season," said Wallace.

"Having spoken to several individuals on site with Dufferin Construction and Borall Fence and Guardrail Contractors Ltd, it is evident that there is a shared understanding among the people working on this project regarding the importance of this undertaking. On behalf of Think Turtle Conservation Initiative, and many concerned citizens in the community, thank you for all the hard work that has gone into this project. We are extremely grateful to each and everyone that has been involved in this project."

Looking ahead to 2021, Wallace indicated that TTCI has submitted a letter recommending some modifications to be incorporated into each site for the MTO to consider. She is hopeful that the MTO will implement these recommendations prior to next turtle season, to further help prevent turtle road mortality at these identified hot spots.