

Fellows - FYI

Timber Rattlesnakes Ignored Sanctuary Fences (Pinelands, NJ) Based on article by Paul Leakan, Burlington County Times, 9/11/04 Found on Phillyburbs.com,

Southampton, NJ.

Don't fence me in was the apparent message from nine timber rattlesnakes that were radio tracked as part of a three-year study by scientists from the state Pinelands Com-mission at the Sanctuary housing development in Evesham, NJ. The study showed a series of mesh fences installed on the site failed to prevent keep out any of the tagged rattlesnakes from residential properties or construction areas. Additionally, the rattlesnakes used specially constructed culvert passages only twice in three years. The study was part of a legal settlement with one of the main landowners of the upscale development. Kim Laidig, a scientist with the commission, stated that snakes either passed around or through the fence. Scientists tracked nine rattlesnakes at the Sanctuary after capturing them and surgically implanting transmitters in their bodies, Laidig said. The goal of the study was to determine where in the development the snakes travel and make their dens, and whether fences and culverts can channel the snakes away from roads and homes. During the study, two of the snakes were found dead. One was run over after giving birth. The other was killed near a street. Three others went missing, Laidig said. Scientists were able to keep track of the other four, he said. As a result of the study, scientists discovered six new rattlesnake den sites at the Sanctuary, Laidig said. They also found that core "snake activity" occurred in areas of the community that could be developed in the future. Pinelands Executive Director John Stokes said the commission has encouraged the owners of the development to remove the fences, which officials said could make snakes more vulnerable to predators. Stokes said the study underscores the importance of protecting habitats for endangered species on a sub-regional rather than a site-specific basis, as was the case with the Sanctuary. Carleton Montgomery, executive director of the Pinelands Preser-vation Alliance, said the study should have been done before the commission reached a settlement.