

Snake issue continues to snag lake projects

■ Study to continue as long as money holds out?

I really have mixed emotions about ever running another story on the Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake, but unfortunately, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and United States Corps of Engineers just won't let it go away.

The whole saga was perpetuated more than a year ago when Chris Phillips of the Illinois Natural History Survey reported to the Chicago Tribune that the Carlyle population of snakes totaled perhaps no more than 100.

He stated that the local population was the only one in Illinois that had a chance of making it through the next 20 years.



Longtime Carlyle residents, including a host of "river rats", knew the Phillips statements were downright lies. Unfortunately, Phillips and his cohorts had ulterior motives in the form of multi-thousand dollar studies to "perpetuate the faith".

CONTACTS WERE made with

all sorts of environmental groups and IDNR and the Corps became inundated with all sorts of pro-snake and anti-development mail.

Phillips' studies led to local snakes being implanted with battery operated transmitters at from \$100 to \$200 a crack ... depending on how long the batteries would last.

Snakes in the Hazlet Park, Dam East and Dam West area, and South Shore area have been implanted and the snakes are being "followed" here and fro by two "resident" IDNR biologists for the past two years.

Others had PIT micro chips implanted so the snakes could be catalogued by serial number.

In the meantime, operation snake has been expanded in the Natural History quarters at the University of Illinois and other tenants have been relocated to give the study more rooms.

IN THE MEANTIME, what started out to be a "funny" saga ... isn't very humorous any more, especially to those who depend on tourism for their livelihood.

Untrue horror stories about snakes on cabin porches have spread and no amount of truth can right that wrong that was perpetuated.

One local businessman has been extremely critical of IDNR for not answering negative press. Though his statements have been somewhat purposely extreme, so have statements coming from his "snake lover friends".

Senator Frank Watson and representative Kurt Granberg have been embarrassed by the lack of intestinal fortitude by IDNR.

More than a year ago, Watson announced that construction of additional cabins would start late last summer. IDNR avoids talking about the issue, but last word is that the prospective cabins are being moved



KEYESPORT MAYOR JAY CARTER, who has a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' maintenance contract at Carlyle Lake, checks out the serial number of the Eastern Massasauga snake via a PIN device implanted in the snake. To get a reading the equipment must be within about three feet of the implant.

-continued on page four

Snake issue continues

—continued from page one

of the shoreline into the woods ... taking away the shoreline breeze and introducing cabin dwellers to all sorts of other insect critters.

HEAVEN ONLY knows when the Hazel Park project will get off dead center.

We asked Kevin Sronce of IDNR about the Hazel and about the South Shore report when he appeared at the grand opening of Microtel Inn and Suites here Friday.

He would only say, "Let's take one thing at a time."

The Granberg initiated Bidwell resort complex has been stalled for more than two years by the Massasauga rattlesnake and Indian artifact issues.

No matter who one talks to ... the standard answer is, progress is being made.

However, when one visits the site and sees all the trees that were cut unnecessarily, one wonders why saving snakes is so important while trees can be recklessly cut.

IT HAS BEEN nearly 40 years since the Corps sought bidders for a resort on the site now occupied by the Carlyle Mariner Village complex.

The Microtel Inn and Suites opened there several weeks ago, but the grand opening was held on Friday and Sunday.

Even that project was delayed for weeks at a time waiting for the IDNR bureaucracy to approve plans of this sort or another.

Sure, mistakes have been made in the process. However, government agencies have never learned to help expedite projects so that investors can move in timely fashion and make those same projects financially viable.

We have seen projects here at Carlyle Lake, at Rend Lake, and elsewhere fail, because they could not cope with the bureaucracy called government.

IT IS EXTREMELY important for this area to grow, if we are to hold the line on taxes. As we have reported in the past, the "new" growth from building projects has increased the assessed valuation of unit one schools only about two percent a year for the past five years.

If the district is to be competitive with teacher's salaries, that would not even come close to paying the tab.

So while the anti-development and pro-snake advocates are able to stop or slow development, the taxpayers of unit one schools will be forced to pay more.

Unfortunately, the anti-development lobby does not point this out when making its "pitch."

As we said earlier in this column, those who have been here a long time know that Phillips' statements concerning the pygmy rattler are self-serving.

THOUGH THEY would not say

it publicly, we feel the Corps feels the same way.

We think the "report a snake" program is a great success and will become even a bigger success as the word spreads.

According to our official reports of Massasauga sighting are being reported in Glen Carbon and in several other Madison County areas.

Our first experience with the pygmy rattler came in the 1950s ... when Carlyle Lake was still a dream.

That would be when biology classes used to go to St. Mary's cemetery's rock grotto to collect the critters. They were taken to school and milked of their venom.

Today that would be dangerous and not politically correct, stated one of the biologists at a meeting at the visitors center Friday.

We remember when Bud Holtkamp was a partner in Carlyle Lumber and Supply, across the street from the Union Banner office.

HIS DAUGHTER, Cookie, was bitten by a pygmy rattler. After she was treated, Bud when to the grotto and took measure of several of the snakes there.

At the time, before politically correctness became the rage or before an endangered species law was on the books, that was the "normal" thing to do.

Eventually, the grotto was exorcized from the cemetery, but numerous Massasauga can be found just across the road in the forests planted by the area Boy Scouts after comple-

We also remember the National Guard wetlands creation project north of the saddle dams on the south side of the lake.

Dynamic blasted areas and bulldozers moved tons and tons of dirt in creating new areas for waterfowl and wildlife.

We watched the process and photographed about a dozen dead Massasaugas. If we saw a dozen, there had to be thousands of the snakes displaced at the time.

In talking to persons who have talked with the resident snake biologists, we get the idea that they are somewhat disappointed by the huge numbers of snakes they are finding.

Mind you, these same biologist, informed us that the snakes are ordinarily elusive and hard to find.

WE HAVE ASKED time after time ... how many snakes are necessary to get this snake off the endangered list. We have never received an answer.

We believe, there are tens of thousands of the Massasauga in the area. We spotted one in our yard Sunday, approached it, and stopped when it curled and rattled its tail.

Shortly afterward, it slithered into a mole hole on the edge of our one-acre lot.

Last year, my wife quit as my right hand strawberry weeder when a snake made its appearance in the berry patch. I'm not sure if that critter was a Massasauga and she didn't wait around to determine if it was.



THIS EASTERN MASSASAUGA is coiled with its painted rattles covering a portion of its head.

tion of the dam.

And, we have often told the story of the snake disaster that occurred in the early days of the lake. The water was extremely high during the winter and had driven many snakes out of hibernation.

The water froze and, when the Corps lowered the water level, thousands ... and probably millions ... of snakes were crushed around the shoreline.

WE REMEMBER the stench from the rotten snakes and how they were scooped up by the shovel full and taken away.

In the meantime, I have new wedding responsibilities. I'm also wondering if my granddaughter will be allowed to accompany me into the yard.

EDUCATION MIGHT change that, but being surprised by snakes still sends chills up and down my spine.

We challenge the IDNR to admit as much or release the details of their study. Biologists have admitted that relocation here may not be a challenge because of milder weather influences.

Knowing that those involved in the project are drawing paychecks, we think an impartial observer might be involved in making such a decision.

Time is of the essence and we repeat our charge that it is the mission of IDNR to take a six-month project and make it into a six year monstrosity. That has been demonstrated in past years ... over and over again.

WE ALSO KNOW that a second mission of IDNR is to grow larger and larger ... much as an unchecked weed. If those six year projects were accomplished in six months ... think of all the bureaucracy that could be eliminated and all of the tax money that could be saved.

And, maybe IDNR should quit selling tee-shirts and tapes and get back to the business of promoting fishing or hunting or what it was created to do.

We can't employ fish biologist or fill open staff spots, but spend huge sums on acquiring more land.

This despite the fact that gov-

Report Massasauga sightings to the listed agencies, please...

The U.S. Corps of Engineers and Wildlife Service are asking the public to report any recent sightings of massasaugas. They are also interested in finding areas where massasaugas have been sighted in past years on a regular basis.

Sightings can be reported to one of the following individuals:

- Joe Smothers, Carlyle Lake/Kaskaskia Navigation Project, 618-594-2484;
- Tom Keevin, Corps of Engineers, 314-331-8462; or
- Joyce Collins, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 618-997-3344.

ernment already owns the majority of the acreage in these United States.

But expansion dictates buying more and more land ... while what is already there ... cannot be serviced. Just take a look at the IDNR shattered roads not being maintained east of Huey.

I once asked an IDNR official why they didn't go into the super-market or lumberyard business and just run all of free enterprise out of business?

MY ANSWER was a blank bureaucratic stare.

On Thursday, Joe Smothers of the Corps called a meeting of the local press to meet with Chris Parent, project leader for Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake research in Killbear Provincial Park in Nobel, Ontario.

Parent said he started the snake study in 1990 and it was intensified in 1995. The study here parallels his work in Canada, he pointed out.

The snakes are located in eastern Michigan, Illinois, northern Indiana, Ohio, eastern Iowa, Missouri, western Pennsylvania, and a portion of New York in addition to Ontario.

He said much of the Ontario population disappeared because of farming and development and that the snake is considered a threatened species in Ontario.

HOWEVER, PARENT said the population of about 250 has been stable for the past several years.

The project leader said the snake has to cover a wider area in Canada, to find food and to bear young, than at Carlyle Lake.

And, because of much more severe weather, the snake seems to use the same hibernation areas to get below the freeze line.

In contrast, the Carlyle snakes have a much smaller ranging ground and wouldn't have the same winter survival problems.

Parent said that PIT (Passive Integrated Transformers) peps ... a microchip of sorts ... are placed in the snake to catalog each with a serial number. The receivers have to be within about three feet of a snake to record.

The snake can be recaptured and length and weight can be calculated as well as determining the length of a snake's life.

FOR OTHER snakes, battery operated surgical implants with antennas beneath the skin are used.

Those implanted snakes can be located at distances of up to one-quarter mile.

The biologist also pointed out that the markings on every snake are unique and mug shots are collected for all the Killbear specimens.

He pointed out that the Massasauga is a master of camouflage and that ... as often 300-400 people can pass within two feet of a snake and never see it.

Parent said the snake would most likely avoid contact with people, but would bite if stepped upon or surprised.

He said he had been bitten three times, but that since 1990 in Killbear Park, two people had been struck by lightning, one died as a result of a heart attack, one was a drowning victim, and none died from snake bite.

THE BIOLOGIST said the important thing is to get treatment if one is bitten. He said that records reported only two persons died in the Killbear area because of snake bite ... one in late 1950 and one early in 1960.

Neither victim sought medical attention.

The Killbear project leader said that education is a must in promoting cohabitation of snakes with people. He pointed out that a lot of persons vie sighting as a positive experience.

The park has "Please Break For Snake Signs" and most of the visitors love those signs.

Twenty or 30 years ago, Killbear snakes would have been killed and a ranger might have killed them.

Now, if a snake appears in a wrong place, the snakes are relocated and released close by with approval of the visitors.

THOSE VISITORS are even asked to name the snakes, according to Parent.



Former aldermen received at the Carlyle city council meeting alderman Margaret Brauermer for 16 service. Brauermer served under four Bill Dunnill and Schmitz. Wilken served

■ Council

—continued from page one

phase meter socket and receptacle type recorders at a cost of \$2,420 from Transcat of Rochester, N.Y. The equipment monitors and records customer electric service voltages and loads to determine power quality.

Alderman Mike Burton won approval for transfers from the general fund in the amount of \$95,000. Some \$20,000 went to street and alley, \$40,000 to police, \$5,000 to EDC, and \$10,000 each to parks, playgrounds, and the Case-Halscheid Library.

City administrator Van Johnson also gave the council a list of transactions for housekeeping purposes at the end of the fiscal year. He pointed out that the moves do not change the appropriations.

The council approved Johnson's recommendation for a five year contract with Ameritech. Johnson said the city would save about \$137 per month, more than \$8,000 over the life of the contract.

FISHERS SAID The January sales tax for Carlyle amounted to \$42,282.97.

Mayor Schmitz appointed alderman Larry Boyd as mayor pro-tem and Brent Staeheim for that position should Boyd and the mayor be out of town.

Also discussed briefly were the plight of the band shell which is separating from the base and the water-related undermining of the streets in the Huelcmann subdivision, east of the fish hatchery.

Don Shepard and Ben Jellen have been studying the habit of the Massasauga here for the past two years and they were at the Thursday meeting with Mike Dreslik, who has offices at the University of Illinois.

They pointed out that the first defense of the area rattlers is to rely on camouflage. Secondly, they will run away, but if that is impossible, they will coil.

Last year the vet at the St. Louis zoo put transmitters in 16 snakes at Carlyle Lake and they were followed last year.

The Corps furnished eight of the one-year transmitters for the program this year.




Hospitalized after Monday ...


Mable C. VanDorn, 86, of Carlyle automobile crash which caused VanDorn was taken to St. Joseph's the windshield on the passenger side 127 from the west when her vehicle. The impact pushed VanDorn's car was sheared off. VanDorn was taken to the Fairfax and Rt. 127 intersection




WITH THE HEAD OF THE SNAKE in a tube, Jacob Prince, 3, of Beckeneyer pets the Eastern Massasauga's rattles. Holding the snake is Ben Jellen, a member of the Illinois Department of Natural Resource's rattlesnake research team.



Published each Wednesday by Dempsey Publishing Co.
671 Tenth St., Carlyle, IL 62231-0220 Telephone 618/594-3131 FAX 618-594-3115
E-mail: dempsey@access.us.net (USPS 647-880)



Periodicals postage paid at Carlyle, IL 62231-0220.
changes to: Union Banner, P.O. Box 220, Carlyle, IL 62231.



NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

Warren Dempsey, Publisher
Mike Langham, Ad Manager

Jane Beckmann, Office Mgr.
Darlene Dempsey, Sales Rep.
Jolie Clinton, Graphic Artist

Sue Packert, Sports Editor
Dan Nordick, Production

Subscriptions: Mail delivered from Carlyle, Clinton County Post Offices — \$17.50/yr. Mail delivered.
From other 622, 620, & 628 Post Offices — \$22.50 per yr. Other out of county, out of state — \$27.50.