

U.S. officials visit to study rattlesnake programs

PARRY SOUND - US army engineers and Illinois state park officials were in Ontario last week to learn more about how the Ministry of Natural Resources and partners handle public education surrounding species at risk.

“Staff at Killbear Provincial Park and MNR District staff in Parry Sound, Midhurst, Ayhner, and Guelph have been working closely with local residents, municipal officials, campers and vacationers for years on how to live

with the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake,” said Natural Resources Minister John Snobelev.

Sharing knowledge

“We are happy to share our knowledge with our American neighbours.”

Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes are found in four locations in Ontario - the eastern Georgian Bay shoreline, Bruce Peninsula, Ojibway Prairie near Windsor, and the Wainfleet Bog near Port Colborne. They are con-

sidered threatened in Canada. There is also a population of the rattlesnakes at Carlyle Lake, which is part of Eldon Hazlet and South Shores Illinois State Park which draws four million visitors a year. continued on page 22

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Since 1992, Ontario has been using an integrated rattlesnake conservation project to maintain peaceful cohabitation between humans and snakes. There are “brake for snakes” signs in Killbear park, people can touch the snakes, take interpretive walks to learn more about the animals, and can even help research staff capture the snakes.

The MNR is also working with the Ministry of Transportation to help minimize the impact on rattlesnake populations and habitats as the expansion of Highway 69 proceeds north.

To accommodate the snakes during the highway reconstruction, the MNR is directing the reconstruction of important habi-

tat away from the construction zone to reduce the need for snakes to cross the highway.

“It is through the exchange of information on projects like these that we maximize the benefits to our respective citizens,” said Brent Manning, director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, offering congratulations on “one of the finest conservation programs we have seen.”

The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake Recovery Team includes representatives from the Toronto Zoo; Environment Canada - the Canadian Wildlife Service; Parks Canada; Ojibway Nature Centre; Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority; the MNR District office staff, and Ontario Parks.