

November 23, 2010

## ***2010 GREAT BAY TERRAPIN PROJECT NEWSLETTER***

*by Ben Wurst, Habitat Program Manager, Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ*

This year, Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ began a new project to help reduce the number of **northern diamondback terrapins** that are killed by motor vehicles along Great Bay Boulevard in Little Egg Harbor Township, Ocean County, New Jersey. The project began with a large fundraising event hosted by Mr. Geoff Peters at his house in Princeton. We managed to raise a large amount of funding from the event. Individual contributions also helped this project be successful. This funding allowed us to purchase 4,000 feet of barrier fencing, five X-ING signs, and design and print an educational brochure. We believe that this has helped to raise awareness to the threats terrapins face locally and throughout their range.



Figure 1: Map depicts section of Great Bay Blvd. that was fenced.

In mid-April, over 15 volunteers helped install the barrier fence along the first section of Great Bay Blvd. after Sea Isle Dr. This section of road was chosen very carefully. A study conducted in 2006 found that this section of road had the highest mortality rate (30.6%) and the most traffic (936 mean vehicles/day)(Szerlag 2006). Since this is the first thing people see when driving down the road we believed that it would bring high exposure to our conservation efforts there. I witnessed first hand the traffic volume and high speeds that vehicles traveled at this year.

I conducted random informal surveys along the entire length of Great Bay Boulevard during the summer months. Most surveys occurred in late June. I recorded a total of 15 sightings from May 28 – June 23. A total of 9 individuals were found dead in the roadway, while 6 were found live crossing the roadway. I realize the lack in survey effort this year. I plan to recruit volunteers and/or a student intern to help conduct surveys from May through August in 2011 and in the future to help study the effects of the barrier fencing on the behavior of nesting female terrapins.

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The second part of the project is public awareness and education about terrapins. We had over 15 volunteers assist with the installation of barrier fence in mid-April. Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ raised just over \$5,000 in private donations to fund the project in 2010. Three “**TERRAPIN X-ING**” signs were installed along the road. Two more were purchased as “back-ups” in case they were vandalized (which they were not). The signs have dates to inform the public as to when terrapins are active. The township of Little Egg Harbor is reviewing the legal speed limit on the road, after we made inquires as to what it was, since it was not posted. It turns out that it is actually 50MPH. We made the argument that it should be decreased given the actual size of the road, the documented environmental/wildlife impacts, and the human use in the form of outdoor recreation that occurs along it. An educational brochure “**Be Terrapin Aware**” was designed, printed, and locally distributed to help educate the public about terrapins, their threats, and how to help.



Figure 2: Terrapin X-ING sign at the beginning of Great Bay Blvd.

In conclusion, we believe that our project was successful this year at raising awareness and reducing terrapin mortality in the Great Bay/Little Egg Harbor area. We are committed to helping to reduce the number of terrapins that are killed by motor vehicles through hands-on management and education. Thank you to all the sponsors, volunteers, and donors for your support!

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## REFERENCES:

- Szerlag, S., S.P. McRobert. 2006. Road occurrence and mortality of the northern diamondback terrapin. *Journal of Applied Herpetology* 3: 27-37.

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