

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf. 03 07-00-0095
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 19 September 2000

TO/DEST. Transportation Committee

FROM/EXP. Chair, Transportation Committee

SUBJECT/OBJET **TURTLE CROSSING SIGNS PROPOSAL**

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Transportation Committee recommend Council approve the installation of Turtle Crossing signs at the main crossing areas where they are needed on RMOC roads and highways and that funding for the signs be found from within the Departmental budget.

BACKGROUND

Each year, vehicles on the highways of Ontario kill thousands of turtles and many of these are reduced to road kill right here in the Ottawa-Carleton area. Turtle crossing signs on roads and highways have proven to be a successful method of preventing their deaths, because they make motorists aware of the areas where more caution is needed.

The Turtle S.H.E.L.L.S. Committee has submitted the attached proposal, detailing their request to the Region to install these signs. Already, turtle crossing signs have been installed in the United County of Prescott and Russell and in the Rockland area. The City of Cumberland has agreed to supply and install turtle crossing signs where they are needed, and a proposal was sent to the City of Gloucester as well.

Approved by
Diane Holmes

/rn

Attach. (1)

TURTLE CROSSING SIGNS PROPOSAL

INTRODUCTION

Turtles play an integral part within our aquatic ecosystem. They are both predator and prey. They eat insects, larvae, water mites, leeches, slugs and aquatic plants which helps to clean our rivers and lakes. In Canada, we have nine species of turtles – eight of which reside in Ontario. All turtle species in province are declining in numbers and four are either threatened or vulnerable to extirpation. The *Snapping turtle*, *Midland Painted turtle*, *Common Musk turtle* and *Blanding turtle* have been reduced considerably in their number while the *Spotted turtle*, *Map turtle*, *Wood turtle* and *Eastern Spiny Softshell turtle* have declined precipitously.

Depending on the species, the average life of a turtle is 20 years to 50 years, with the exception of the Snapping turtle which can live up to 80 years. Contrary to people's beliefs the shell is actually soft like thin layers of a fingernail, which makes it easily crushable, as are the vital organs within.

Turtles generally live in close proximity to rivers, ponds, marshes, wetlands, bogs, swamps and drainage ditches. Animals crossing the highway are usually going to and from nesting areas (from mid-May to the end of June) or migrating from a summer feeding area to a winter hibernation site (September). Turtle populations are composed primarily of hatchlings and juveniles that have only a 1 to 10 percent of reaching adult size. Baby turtles have many natural predators such as coyotes, raccoons, skunks, crows and gulls etc. that takes a high toll of eggs and hatchlings of all species. This means that even in a perfect world, there are always very few breeding age animals to reproduce the species.

Each year, vehicles on the highways of Ontario kill thousands of turtles and many of these are reduced to road kill right here in the Ottawa-Carleton area. This mayhem is a real problem as turtle populations normally include only a small number of breeding adults. Almost all of the kills are females and if more than 5 to 8 percent are killed each year the population will eventually disappear. Though only a few of the road kills are visible to the motorists due to scavengers who quickly clean up smashed carcasses, we have good reason to suspect many females are killed on the road. The ratio of adult males to females is normally about one to one, but in many rivers that border paved roads, the ratio is approximately five to one, a sure sign of heavy loss of females.

Turtles have no way of comprehending the danger posed by cars. Their normal reaction to the rapid approach of a moving object (usually a hungry predator) is to either pull in their heads and legs and wait or if they are close to cover, make a dash for it. In both cases the result is often death. Car horns do not move them, as turtles do not have external ears. Turtles only have binocular vision when they are looking straight ahead, not when they are travelling at

ninety degrees to the road. This means that they have no way of perceiving how fast a car is going or how close it is.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

Turtles are diminishing mainly because of motorists who are unaware of turtle's routine such as crossing roads and highways to lay their eggs and/or to migrate. The uneducated motorist does not know to be prompt to look for small dark shapes on the road or shoulder and this need to be made public knowledge in order to reduce the amount of turtles being killed. By reducing the killing of adults in just a few areas, a real benefit will be granted to the remaining turtles.

Turtle crossing signs on roads and highways is the method of preventing their deaths. It makes motorists aware of the areas where more caution is needed.

On May 11, 2000, permission was granted to install turtle crossing signs in the United County of Prescott and Russell. The first 14 signs were installed on June 2, 2000. By September 2, 2000, more signs will be installed in the Rockland area and I have also presented my proposal to the Mayor of the City of Cumberland and he has agreed to supply and install the signs where they are needed at the expense of the City of Cumberland. On August 21, 2000, a proposal was sent to the City of Gloucester as well.

Having installed these signs at major turtle crossing areas such as Plantagenet, Domaine Lefebre, Rockland and Clarence, it is becoming more apparent that the signs help to reduce the annual death toll even though it does not eliminate the problem.

With the installation of these signs and with the help of the media, people have become more educated and aware to the degree where a significant amount of turtles have been saved. Motorists tend to have a more watchful eye and these signs have also prompted good Samaritans to pull their vehicles over and rescue a turtle from the road and carry it to safety in the direction of which the turtle was travelling.

CONCLUSION

The turtles have been a resident of the region for a millennium and its disappearance would disastrously curtail the diversity of wildlife in the area.

Surely we want to protect the wildlife with which we share the Earth. We want our children to enjoy nature to the fullest with all of its exquisiteness. This conscious measure to protect wildlife would speak well of governance in the region and provide a good example to other jurisdictions.

Simply, inexpensive and morally exemplary, the installation of road signs seems a worthy initiative to help preserve our wildlife.

In conclusion what we are requesting of the council of the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton is approval to install the Turtle crossing signs at the main crossing areas where they are needed on RMOC Roads and Highways.

Unfortunately, the committee, just recently established, doing this as a volunteer basis during their spare time, would not be able to raise the funding for the RMOC Project at this time. Until the City of Cumberland's approval, I have had to raise the money through donations, which are becoming scarce. Therefore, should the RMOC Council, be unable to supply the signs, posts and installation, the RMOC Project would have to be put on hold to a later date until such funding becomes available, or discontinued entirely. If the funding can be found then we would be more than happy to assist with the arrangement.

Attached, you will find a copy of our proposal for turtle crossing signs with more detailed information.

TURTLE CROSSING SIGNS PROPOSAL

The turtle signs would be of the same shape, size and colour of those that warn of deer and moose crossings. Black on yellow, diamond shaped, 24 inches by 24 inches. The signs will depict an outline of a turtle with 'May-Sept' inscribed above and below in both French and English. Some areas will require an additional sign (24x12) indicating the distance needed to be more cautious.

WHERE THE SIGNS ARE REQUIRED

In the Region of Ottawa-Carleton, following an ongoing survey, it has been brought to my attention that awareness to motorists should be placed at the following locations, where they should be left year round and where they are most urgently required:

1. Two signs on Anderson Road from 2195 Anderson Road, the signs should be at 100 feet before the 80 KM sign (going South) and 1km before the building of National Resources Canada (going North)
2. Eight signs on highway 174 East
 - A. 2 signs at MacSkimming Outdoor Center with next 2 km.
 - B. 2 signs at Kinsella with next 4 km.
 - C. 2 signs at Quigley near resting place for cars with next 4 km.
 - D. 2 signs at Leonard Creek.
3. Two signs on Trim Road, north of Service Road with next 4 km.
4. Six signs on Moodie Drive south, between 950 Moodie Drive to Laidlaw School with next 3kms (in undefined areas).
5. Three signs on Richmond Road
 - A. One sign at intersection facing west north Hunt Club Road indicating next 1 km. Both directions.
 - B. One sign on South side of West Hunt Club Road, and one sign on the North side of West Hunt Club Road, both indicating "for the next 1 km."
6. Eight signs on River Road (minimum) between Baltimore Drive and the Manotick turn off (in undefined areas).

Should you require further information regarding the above-mentioned areas, please feel free to contact Michele Andre-St.Cyr at 613-446-4995.

Submitted by The Turtle S.H.E.L.L.S. Committee.

President – Michele Andre-St.Cyr - Rockland

Vice President – Kim Sinnett – Ottawa East

Treasurer – Herpetologist – Mike Rankin – Ottawa South

Public Relations – Stephen Virc - Clarence

Secretary – Shannon Renaud - Gloucester

Veterinarian – Mary Elaine Dunning – Cumberland

Mathew Dietrich - Sarsfield

Terry Sinnett – Aylmer, Québec

Joni Elbourn – Vankleekhill

Bill Bower- Orléans