

Conservation Advisory

Heavy Duty Silt Fence May Cause High Mortality in Large-bodied Snake Species

The Ministry of Natural Resources in Parry Sound advises Federal, Provincial and Municipal Government agencies, private construction, engineering and environmental consulting firms about the risk to large-bodied snake species posed by “heavy duty” silt fencing material used in construction practices in Ontario.

The use of “heavy duty” silt fence in areas where large-bodied snakes are found has been shown to cause high levels of mortality. For example, in one 30 metre section of “heavy duty” silt fence installed along the edge of a newly constructed road bed at a river crossing, two Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes and three Northern Watersnakes were found entangled and dead. **The Eastern Massasauga is a nationally Threatened species.**



Any large-bodied snake could become entangled in the reinforcing mesh, including a number of species at risk: the Lake Erie Watersnake (**Endangered**), Eastern Foxsnake, Eastern Hog-nosed Snake, Black Ratsnake, Queen Snake (**Threatened**), and Eastern Milksnake and Northern Ribbonsnake (**Special Concern**).

Silt fencing is commonly used to control erosion in riparian areas along the shorelines of waterbodies, streams and wetlands. Riparian areas are favoured habitats for a number of Ontario's snake species.

Snakes may encounter the silt fencing where it has been erected across or along a movement corridor. They may also be attracted to the thermal properties of the material in order to regulate their body temperature.

The particular type of silt fence that is most dangerous to snakes is constructed with nylon mesh netting reinforcing the regular, woven plastic strand material. The nylon mesh is approximately one inch square. Large-bodied snakes become entangled in this mesh and perish.



There are ways to help prevent snake mortality. Better, on site management of temporary stockpiles of fill could preclude the need for reinforced silt fencing. Keeping fill material several metres back from the fencing helps prevent large volumes of soil from washing into the fence, weighing it down and knocking it over.

For further information contact:

**Ron Black
Wildlife Biologist
Ministry of Natural Resources
7 Bay Street
Parry Sound, Ontario
P2A 1S4
(705) 773-4225**