When seasonal timing conflicts: Developing BMPs for co-occurring species at risk on private woodlands

Laura Carter, Jeffie McNeil

Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute, Kempt, Queens County, Nova Scotia

The Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute's Woodlands for Wildlife (WFW) program aims to protect species at risk (SAR) habitat on private woodlands by working directly with landowners to establish effective buffers around significant SAR habitat on their properties, as well as to implement a series of species-specific beneficial management practices (BMPs), such as seasonal limitations on high impact activities. WFW targets a group of at-risk birds, lichens, trees, turtles, and most recently snakes. The majority of SAR included in the WFW program have similar or overlapping critical timeframes, allowing seasonal limitation BMPs to apply well to multiple co-occurring SAR in a given habitat. The recent addition of snakes to the WFW program introduced a unique issue in which Eastern Ribbonsnakes have different or conflicting seasonal needs from that of another frequently co-occurring wetland SAR, the Blanding's turtle, with Ribbonsnakes moving into terrestrial habitats over winter while Blanding's turtles make terrestrial movements during the active season. A thorough review of known seasonal habitats, species movements, and established BMPs for Eastern Ribbonsnakes and Blanding's turtles was conducted and a custom BMP summary was developed specifically for application on WFW properties in which Blanding's turtles and Eastern Ribbonsnakes are both present. There are currently four properties in the WFW that contain Blanding's turtle habitat, three that contain Eastern Ribbonsnake habitat, and two that support both.

Keywords: best management practices (BMPs), Blanding's turtle, buffers, co-occurring species, Eastern Ribbonsnake