

Three Different Approaches to Protect Nesting Western Painted Turtles

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The western painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) is provincially blue listed due to its localized occurrence and threats to its habitat and the only native freshwater turtle in British Columbia. Because populations of painted turtles depend on low adult mortality, protection of this life stage is critical. One of the major threats is road mortality of females accessing suitable nesting habitat. This problem has been identified at three sites in the Columbia Basin. At Elizabeth Lake near Cranbrook, female painted turtles were being killed as they crossed Highway 3 in search of suitable nesting areas. In 1991 concerned local residents erected turtle crossing signs in an attempt to reduce mortality. The mortality continued and it was recognized that more extensive measures were required. In response to this, the Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program in conjunction with the Rocky Mountain Naturalists successfully developed alternative nesting habitat on the Elizabeth Lake side of Highway 3 to keep turtles from crossing it and an interpretative sign for educational purposes. In Revelstoke nesting females were being killed crossing Airport Road in search of suitable nesting habitat however the biggest concern was female turtles and their nests being impacted by people and their pets along a popular walkway which is also the primary turtle nesting area adjacent to the road. Alternate nesting areas were created away from the path but with little use by the turtles. Efforts then turned to public education including the establishment of an interpretative sign as well as successfully convincing the municipal government to relocate the path to the opposite side of the road. At the north end of Kootenay Lake female turtles were being killed crossing a secondary road in search of suitable nesting habitat. An alternative nesting area was created on the marsh side of the road resulting in limited success. The majority of turtles were using an existing ungulate trail to access the road so in 2002 a drift fence was installed from the trail to direct the nesting turtles to the alternative nesting area, which proved successful.