A SURVEY FOR TIMBER RATTLESNAKES (*CROTALUS HORRIDUS*) ALONG THE PORTSMOUTH BYPASS PROJECT, SCIOTO COUNTY, OHIO

PROGRESS REPORT

Part 1. March 2003– July 2003

Submitted to
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Introduction

The Timber Rattlesnake is the largest venomous snake found in Ohio. Reaching a record length of 74.5 inches most individuals range from 36 to 42 inches. Despite their size, the Timber Rattlesnake is a very docile species, do not attack, and usually lies motionless on the forest floor when encountered by humans.

The distribution and numbers of Timber Rattlesnakes have continually declined from their historical Ohio range. The most recent findings indicate that twenty-four Ohio counties were once inhabited. (Wynn in Tyning, 1992; and Wynn, unpublished). Only six are now known to still support individuals (Wynn, unpublished). More importantly, of those six counties, the number that support viable, sustainable populations may only be one or two.

Timber Rattlesnakes may be present along the proposed Portsmouth Bypass. As requested by the Ohio Department of Transportation, any potential habitats, particularly dens, should be identified. In addition surveys should be conducted to determine if Timber Rattlesnakes might be using the corridor during their foraging and birthing periods.

Methods

1. Maps were examined and it was determined that suitable elevation and aspect are present.

2. One local resident has reported Timber Rattlesnake sightings within proximity to the corridor.

3. The corridor was surveyed and evaluations made on:

    a. the degree of human disturbances
    b. composition of plant communities
    c. structure of plant communities
    d. characteristics of the bedrock
    e. presence of exposed bedrock
    f. degree of relief and steepness
    g. proximately to nearest known locality
    h. sizes of suitable habitats within corridor
    i. sizes of suitable habitats within the average migratory distance of the species in Ohio
    j. isolation from humans
    k. inquiries with local residents and knowledgeable resources such as soil and water conservation personnel, wildlife officers, local naturalists, etc.

4. The most likely habitats, as indicated on the maps, were identified and the greatest efforts made to locate snakes at those sites. This resulted in other sites not being surveyed as intensely. These lower priority sites will be surveyed more intensely through out the rest of the season.

5. Originally cover sheets were to be placed in potential birthing and shedding habitats however this was decided against since an abundance of natural and artificial cover objects are already present. Past work indicates that it may take many years for Timber Rattlesnakes to utilize more recently placed cover sheets.

RESULTS

Fourteen days were spent surveying the corridor. No Timber Rattlesnakes were documented. A number of areas of suitable habitat (as indicated on the maps) were identified and are discussed below:

Site A. This hillside is steep and possesses two zones of rock deposits. One is just below the crest of the hill and the second caps the hill. This is an identical situation to many of the known Timber Rattlesnake dens in the Shawnee State Forest. Significant disturbances from logging activities are present.

Site B. This hillside is similar to Site A with abundant rocks. It also shows signs of major disturbances from logging and off-road vehicles.

Site C. This ridge is traversed by a frequently used road. No rocks were observed and former logging has created thick stands of secondary plant growth. It also appears to have been a former home site and shows major human disturbances.

Sites D – J. All of these sites show major signs of disturbances. Some scattered rocks were observed. A resident near Site J had reported to earlier surveyors of seeing both Timber Rattlesnakes and Copperheads nearby. My inquiries with local residents did not produce any reports and often individuals would state that the nearest Timber Rattlesnakes were in the Shawnee State Forest.

Sites K-M. These sites are very rugged, possess numerous areas that could contain Timber Rattlesnake dens, however they are located very close to human dwellings. In addition they show major signs of human disturbances.

Site N. This ridge is quite steep and contains scattered rocks. The north side of the ridge top has been cleared and is presently a pasture. Again major signs of human disturbances occur. One of the nearest residents reported that she had never heard of Timber Rattlesnakes in the immediate area.

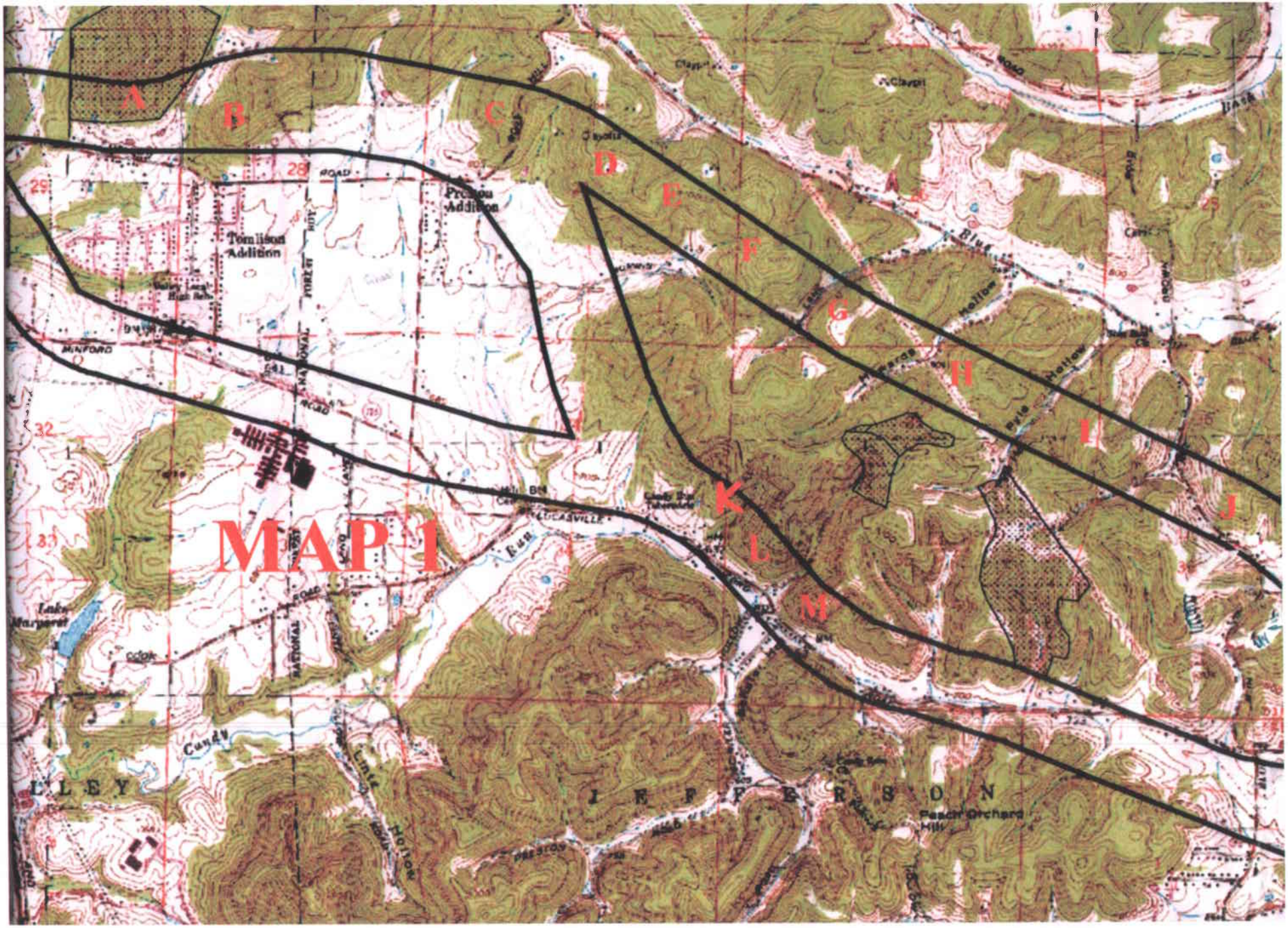
Site O. This area is quite large and fairly remote compared to many of the ridges that have been surveyed. Some rocks are present however it is heavily grazed by cattle. Thus most cover is gone. This property is owned by a resident who has a biology degree from Morehead State University. He reported that he has never heard of Timber Rattlesnakes in the area and stated that Shawnee State Forest is the nearest locality.

Site P. Blake Hollow is very rugged and relatively remote. Signs of human disturbances are widely present. No one in the area has reported Timber Rattlesnakes.

In summary, many examples of potential Timber Rattlesnake dens are present. However signs of major human disturbances are common. Furthermore, no residents reported that they had ever observed or heard of Timber Rattlesnakes in the area.

References Cited:

Tyning, T.F. 1992. Ed. Conservation of the timber rattlesnake in the northeast. Massachusetts Audubon Society., Lincoln, Massachusetts. 1-26.


A
B
C
D
E
F
G
H
I
J
K
L
M
MAP 1
Tomlison Addition
Preston Addition
MANFORD
LUCASVILLE
Lake Margaret
Candy
Peach Orchard Hill
28
29
32
33


MAP 2
N
O
P
Minford
Clarktown
Long
Sweet
Run
Harrison
Furnace
Sampson
Hollow