

# Habitat Protection Summary for Eastern Foxsnake (Georgian Bay Population)

The Eastern Foxsnake is Ontario's second largest snake reaching lengths of up to 1.75 metres. Along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay, this species frequently occupies open, rocky areas and sparse forests close to the shoreline. The Georgian Bay population was assessed by the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) and listed as threatened on September 10, 2009. More information about this species' status can be found at: <http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/275470.pdf>.

## **Brief description of the habitat regulation:**

The habitat regulation for Eastern Foxsnake (Georgian Bay population) protects sites used for nesting, hibernation, and communal shedding and basking, as well as areas within 3600 metres (primarily islands in Georgian Bay) of an Eastern Foxsnake (Georgian Bay population), but only to a maximum of 500 metres inland, that are suitable for it to carry out its life processes (e.g. foraging and thermoregulation).

The regulation applies where the snake occurs in the following areas: the townships of Severn, Tay and Tiny and the towns of Midland and Penetanguishene within Simcoe County; the Township of Georgian Bay within the District Municipality of Muskoka; and the territorial districts of Parry Sound and Sudbury.

Additional details about this habitat regulation can be found in the following paragraph.

## **Additional details of the habitat regulation:**

The habitat regulation protects important habitat features including hibernacula and 100 metres around hibernacula, as well as natural or non-natural egg laying sites, communal shedding sites and communal basking sites and 30 metres around those sites.

Hibernacula are protected indefinitely as long as the area remains in a suitable condition. Natural egg laying sites, communal shedding sites and communal basking sites are protected until three consecutive years of documented non-use by an Eastern Foxsnake (Georgian Bay population) and during the current season of use until November 30th for non-natural sites.

Areas suitable for foraging, thermoregulation, hibernation and movement are also protected if they are within 3600 metres of an area that is used by an Eastern Foxsnake (Georgian Bay population), including all islands or portions of islands within that distance, and up to a maximum of 500 metres inland from the high water mark of Georgian Bay.

The area between Port Severn and Maceys Bay is included in the regulation, to protect a well-documented population occurring further inland. Areas used for thermoregulation, foraging and hibernation include rock barren, open forest, old field, marsh, shoreline and other similar areas. Other areas, such as closed-canopy forests are used primarily for movement and are also included as regulated habitat. Areas of lakes and rivers, including Lake Huron, that are below the historical low water mark, as well as areas of existing agricultural row crops are excluded.

### Supporting Rationale:

- An area of 100 metres around a hibernaculum and a distance of 30 metres around an egg laying or communal shedding or basking site is intended to protect the feature itself and the terrestrial area required to maintain the suitability of the site.
- Egg laying sites, communal shedding sites and communal basking sites are used repeatedly over the lifespan of an individual Eastern Foxsnake. Naturally occurring sites are protected for three years from last documented use because these features may only be used every two or three years.
- Radio-tracked Eastern Foxsnakes (Georgian Bay population) move an average of 3600 metres from their hibernacula along the shoreline of eastern Georgian Bay and to islands within Georgian Bay, but rarely more than 500 metres inland. An area of 3600 metres is meant to protect an individual's home range, and to provide for all of the habitat components it needs to survive.
- The distance of 500 metres inland is based on an analysis of the geographic distribution of known Eastern Foxsnake (Georgian Bay population) records, which showed that 98% of records are within 500 metres of the high water mark of the Georgian Bay shoreline.

### Activities in Eastern Foxsnake (Georgian Bay population) habitat:

Activities in regulated habitat can continue as long as the *function of these areas for the species is maintained* and individuals of the species are *not killed, harmed, or harassed*. For example, inland closed-canopy forests are used primarily for movement and are relatively tolerant to alteration; most activities can continue in forested areas as long as they do not result in the significant loss of forest cover or create a permanent barrier to the movement of snakes through these areas.

#### Generally compatible:

- Yard work such as lawn care and gardening.
- Continuation of existing agricultural practices such as annual harvest.
- Renovations or the building of small structures such as a shed or a deck.

#### Generally not compatible\*:

- Significant reduction or clearing of natural and semi-natural features, such as forests, woodlands, wetlands, shorelines, rock outcrops, hedgerows, and meadows.
- Large-scale construction, such as a housing development or roads.
- Removal or alteration of documented nesting sites that may be found in rotting logs or compost piles. If these features are man-made, they are protected during the season that they are being used by the snake.

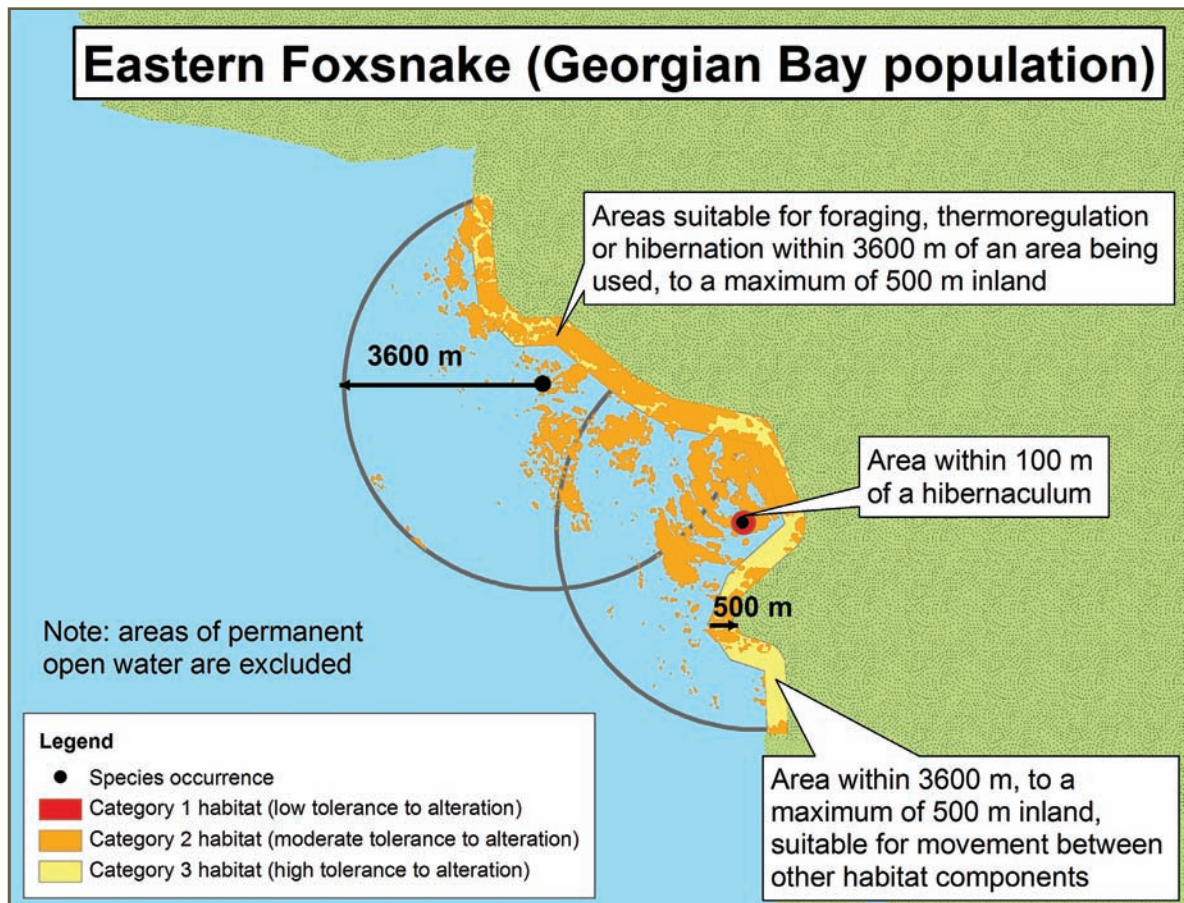
\* If you are considering an activity that may not be compatible with regulated habitat, please contact your local MNR office for more information.

### Key terms:

- **Communal shedding site:** Sites that are used by two or more snakes when moulting their outer layer of skin.
- **Hibernacula:** Underground features, natural or man-made, extending below the frost line where snakes hibernate to avoid extreme cold temperatures during the winter. Some examples are bedrock crevices and small mammal burrows. In the regulation, the hibernaculum includes terrestrial habitat necessary for the site to function as a staging area in the spring and fall.
- **Thermoregulation:** Some animals, such as snakes, use thermoregulation to alter their internal body temperature through behavioural patterns, such as basking in the sun to increase body temperature or seeking out cool areas to lower body temperature.

Below you will find an example diagram of how this regulation would be applied to protect habitat for this species. It indicates how the protected habitat has been categorized, based on how the species uses the habitat and how much activity or change can occur within the habitat, as per the policy "Categorizing and Protecting Habitat Under the Endangered Species Act". This policy can be found at: [http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/stdprod\\_085648.pdf](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/stdprod_085648.pdf)

### Sample Application of the Habitat Regulation:



The content of this summary is provided for convenience only. For accurate reference and the most recent version of the regulation, please view Ontario Regulation 242/08 on e-laws at <http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/index.html>.