



Ottawa

## Blanding's turtles at risk of extinction in Kanata in next few years, study finds



Urban sprawl and inadequate relief measures likely to blame, researchers say

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New research finds the development of Terry Fox Drive in the city's west end has led to a steep decline in habitat for Blanding's turtles, leading to a 70 per cent decline in its adult population. (-)

New research suggests an Ottawa-area freshwater turtle is under threat of extinction within the next few years due to the mass urban growth near its habitat in Kanata's South March Highlands.

A team of researchers from the University of Ottawa and Trent University tracked changes to the Blanding's turtle habitat on Terry Fox Drive over the last decade. Its latest findings reveal a 70 per cent decline in population.

"It was quite alarming because there had been a study on that same population in the early 2010s where they found that the population was relatively healthy," said Dennis Murray, one of the researchers from Trent.

The heavy development of houses and roads in that area over the last several years has changed that, and is now encroaching on the turtle's habitat, [the study](#) found.

### Efforts to preserve species unsuccessful

The developer, KNL Developments Inc., had put in mitigation measures such as [wildlife fencing](#), [new wetlands](#) and [wildlife roadways](#) to try to preserve the species, which is protected under the provincial Endangered Species Act.

As part of its development approval process, KNL hired researchers to determine if those practices were working. The study found they weren't.

"They were really unsuccessful. We found that the turtles were able to sneak under the fences, that the wetland that was created was right next to the road," Murray said.

"It's highly likely that animals are going to go to this wetland and then get smacked on the road."

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Dennis Murray has been tracking turtles for 4 summers long in Kanata. He projects that the population of the Blanding's Turtles in the area may face extinction within a decade due to habitat loss resulting from extensive construction in the same area.

The research also found fewer adult females and that no juvenile turtles were being produced. What has been left is a "bunch of old turtles."

With this rate of decline, the Blanding's turtle will likely reach its "quasi-extinction threshold" in the next few years, said Gabriel Blouin-Demers, one of the researchers from the University of Ottawa.

### 'It's too late, basically' to reverse any damage

At this point, it's too late to reverse the damage that's been done to the turtle's population in Kanata due to the high rate of development over the past 20 years.

"Permits have been issued, developments have occurred. It's too late, basically," Blouin-Demers said.

"We're showing this and hope it will prevent other similar cases, but for the Kanata site it's more or less too late."

It's not necessarily all on the developer to do something about the situation, Blouin-Demers added.

"The developers are there to develop, that's their job. So I don't expect a lot of conservation implications on their part," he said.

"But hopefully city council and the government can use this data to better plan future development."

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A group of Blanding's turtles in Kanata is facing extinction after years of development and unsuccessful mitigation measures from a developer, biology professor Gabriel Blouin-Demers said.

Since 2018, the provincial government has provided over \$9 million in total funding to 40 projects that contribute to the recovery of the Blanding's turtle.

Paul Johanis, chair of the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital, said the group was vocal about their opposition to the city's approval to develop the land when it was initially proposed.

The results of the study are unsurprising, he said.

"We're kind of impressed in a way that the actual follow-up study was conducted and that the numbers have now come out really proving that was not an effective way of mitigating the loss of the turtle population in that area," Johanis said.

Johanis said he doesn't think the developer will halt any further plans in that area.

CBC reached out to KNL Developments Inc. but did not receive a response by deadline.

*With files from Omar Dabaghi-Pacheco and CBC Radio's Fresh Air*

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