

Species at Risk and the Gordie Howe International Bridge

Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority (WDBA) is taking steps to ensure that wildlife and several species at risk (SAR) adjacent to the Canadian Port of Entry site are protected while construction is taking place. WDBA is required to develop and implement environmental mitigation plans as part of the *Bridge to Strengthen Trade Act* (BSTA).

The following mitigation efforts are in place to manage and relocate the wildlife found on the project site:

1. Pre-construction surveys are conducted prior to any ground-disturbing activities.
2. Surveys are conducted under ideal conditions when snakes are known to be active.
3. Areas are cleared using “cover board” surveys in all habitat types.
4. A 30 m setback is included around the perimeter of all suitable habitat.
5. If a SAR snake is found on site, work stops immediately and a 30 m buffer is established. An Environmental Monitor is notified and a Snake Specialist captures and removes the snake. The snake is taken to Ojibway Nature Centre where it is temporarily stored and released to suitable habitat.
6. Each contractor is required to have an Environmental Monitor and Snake Specialist on staff.
7. Regular sweeps are conducted.
8. Reports are regularly submitted to ensure protocols are being followed.
9. 4.5 km of exclusion fence has been installed around the perimeter of the site to prevent wildlife, including snakes, from accessing active construction areas.

Construction of the Gordie Howe International Bridge will affect two reptile species that are recognized as endangered species in Canada and receive protection under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Of the five known snake species that live near the Canadian Port of Entry, the two SAR species include the Butler’s Gartersnake and the Eastern Foxsnake.

Butler’s Gartersnake:

The Butler’s Gartersnake is one of the smallest snakes found in Ontario and grows to only 38-51 centimetres in total length. It is brown with three yellow stripes: one down the back and one on each side. Butler’s Gartersnakes are normally active from late March to late October and are non-venomous and rarely, if ever, bite when handled.

The Butler’s Gartersnake has one of the most restricted global distributions of any snake in North America. The distribution is patchy and confined to Southwestern Ontario, and parts of four US states in the Great Lakes Region. The Canadian distribution of Butler’s Gartersnake occupies approximately 16% of its global distribution.

Eastern Foxsnake

The Eastern Foxsnake is the third-largest snake in Ontario and grows to 91-137 centimetres. Its body is yellow to light brown with large, dark brown blotches down the back and two alternating rows of smaller blotches along the sides. This snake has a reddish-brown head with dark bars around the eyes and a yellow chin. Its belly, which is also yellow, has alternating brown patches. Eastern Foxsnakes are active from mid-April to the end of October and are non-venomous and harmless to humans.

The global distribution of the Eastern Foxsnake is restricted to the Great Lakes region of North America. Approximately 70% of the species’ range is in Ontario, Canada.

