

2020 PROGRESS REPORT

Quarter: (circle one)

2020 1st

2020 2nd

2020 3rd

2020 4th

Grant Program, Number and Title: GSA 00074 - Conservation Plan for the Blanding's Turtle and associated Species of Conservation Need in the Northeastern United States

Organization: Oriante Society

Project Leader: Kiley Briggs

Abstract: Please provide a short (1-2 paragraphs) abstract that addresses EACH of the following: the objectives of your project, accomplishments to date, future plans and timelines with an estimate for when the project will be completed.

The main priority for the current phase of the project was to strategize conservation priorities at the selected sites and initiate conservation efforts where possible. Although the pandemic presented significant hurdles in both the second and third quarter, progress returned to a more normal pace by the end of the third quarter. Recently, we were able to organize and facilitate a site planning session for a Blanding's Turtle site in Maine that originally had been scheduled for April, as well as two other sites in New York and Massachusetts with partners from seven different organizations and agencies. In these meetings we discussed top threats to Blanding's Turtles at each site, relevant management practices to address those threats, and decided on the first steps needed to enhance protections for the turtles on-site. For the site in Maine, a land-protection sub-committee was established to strategize an approach for landowner outreach within core Blanding's Turtle habitat. In New York, tentative plans were established to fix a barrier meant to deter Blanding's Turtles from accessing urban habitat and additional actions will be planned in the coming months during follow-up conversations. Lastly, in Massachusetts, we developed soil substrate maps after meeting with state biologists to help determine the best locations to create or enhance nesting habitat. For the remainder of the year and through the winter, our focus will shift towards working with each state to plan the implementation of necessary conservation actions at many of the selected sites.

Concurrent to the habitat protection meetings, we began work on developing separate Blanding's Turtle best management practice (BMP) documents for landowners and land managers/conservation entities. This began with a thorough review of existing documents outlining BMPs for Blanding's Turtles in the northeast and we are awaiting feedback from members of the Northeast Blanding's Turtle Working Group on the best format for the documents before beginning drafts. Rough drafts should be ready by the end of the year, with final drafts expected by late winter and an initial printing to take place in the spring.

Were planned goals/objectives achieved last quarter?

Mostly. Much of the third quarter was spent catching up on ground lost to the pandemic during the second quarter. Strategic planning sessions still need to take place for two sites (one in Massachusetts and one in New Hampshire). Those initial planning sessions will be completed this winter so our main focus in 2021 will be on implementation of turtle conservation at each site.

One component of the project has not yet begun due to delays in the development of a geospatial database being created by another contractor. As soon as the database is ready for use we will transfer conservation need and action data from each selected site into the database. Melissa Doperalski recently indicated that the database is almost ready for testing and should be available for use very soon.

Progress Achieved: (For each Goal/Objective, list Planned and Actual Accomplishments)

- Planned to conclude site planning sessions – two planning sessions are still needed
- Begin developing BMP document drafts – on schedule, drafts to be completed by end of 4th quarter
- Begin planning conservation actions at selected sites – on schedule. Several on-the-ground restoration activities planned for 2021 (contingent on travel restrictions).
- Produced maps to help plan nesting habitat restoration in Massachusetts.

Difficulties Encountered:

Site visits, in-person meetings, and two fence or retaining wall maintenance projects on hold until travel outside of Vermont can occur without the need to quarantine afterwards.

Activities Anticipated Next Quarter:

- Complete rough drafts of two BMP documents
- Organize and schedule two remaining site planning sessions
- Enter site information into geospatial database if it is ready for use before the end of the year
- Schedule follow-up meetings to plan conservation activities to take place in 2021

Expected End Date:

March 2022

Costs:

Total life to date expenses (include this quarter):

Total Approved Budgeted Funds:

Are you within the approved budget plan and categories? YES

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. R.', written in a cursive style.

Date: October 28, 2020