Nest Site Creation and Maintenance as an Effective Tool in Species Recovery

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The successful creation and maintenance of new nesting sites for the spiny softshell turtle has been ongoing for over a decade in Ontario. Due to growth of invasive vegetation and changes in spring sediment dispersal, this work must be conducted yearly to ensure nesting areas are available and successful oviposition occurs.

Maintenance and creation of turtle oviposition habitat has been a key strategy in spiny softshell turtle recovery in Ontario. In one of only three large communal spiny softshell nesting grounds in Canada, the quality of oviposition habitat continues to decline. Environmental and human-caused factors have increasingly caused the degradation or loss of nesting habitat along the Thames River. Climatic changes, the effect of Dam discharge flow rates, erosion and destruction of sites by cattle has drastically reduced the number of appropriate sand and gravel bars within the river corridor. Additionally, the progressive succession of invasive plant species has changed the micro-habitat conditions conducive to successful egg incubation and hatching. Successful methods for nest site design and maintenance will be outlined, with discussion on not only providing new nesting habitat, but also enhancing existing habitat features.