

Waterways not home for unwanted pets, SNC says

WINCHESTER — Following the recent discovery of non-native snails and an exotic turtle in its watershed, the South Nation Conservation (SNC) Authority is urging residents not to throw objects in local waterways.

The river in this case is the South Nation, which flows from north of Brockville to the Ottawa River near Plantagenet.

"We routinely organize clean-ups in various parts of the watershed and you'd be amazed at what we find," Gord Shaver, SNC media expert, said. "Cars, televisions... you name it. We're the only area agency that undertakes clean-ups of this type, and as our resources are limited, we'd appreciate co-operation from the public."

Of particular concern are live creatures, dumped by owners no longer prepared to care for them,



which can carry diseases to native species while competing for food and habitat.

Recently discovered by SNC field staff were Chinese mystery

snails in Winchester drains, and a red-eared slider turtle in the Payne River near Finch.

Also called rice snails and Asian apple snails, the more commonly

known mystery snails grow very large and can be present in high densities, clogging water pipes and inhibiting flow. They compete with native snails for food and space.

The infected area stretches from the Gypsy Road culvert south of Winchester to the culvert on County Road 3 north of the village, while the highest snail density is within the village itself.

"The most likely explanation is that someone dumped unwanted aquarium pets into the drain, a practice we definitely want to discourage," Janet Greenhorn, an SNC staffer, said, adding that the invasive snails are now being removed. "We certainly won't be able to get all of the snails, but we're hoping to at least reduce the population and slow their spread."

As for the red-eared slider found near Finch, staff member Karen Pa-

quette said it weighed roughly eight pounds and was more than 20 centimetres in length. The turtle isn't native to Canada, originating near the Gulf of Mexico.

With a distinctive reddish patch on each side of the head, sliders are sold in pet stores as babies. As they grow larger and become harder to care for, pet owners have been known to release them into the wild. Those that survive and thrive compete directly with eight native Ontario turtle species, seven of which are at risk. Sliders can lay up to five clutches of eggs per season, while native turtles lay a maximum of one clutch.

"If you have a red-eared slider you can no longer care for, try to find a zoo or school which might be interested in adopting it," Paquette said. "Never release a pet turtle into the wild."