



KAREN PIKE, *Free Press*

Agency of Transportation Environmental workers and volunteers install a temporary fence along U.S. 2, just east of Sandbar State Park, to keep frogs from hopping to their death on the busy road.

# Fence might save frogs

By Ed Shamy

*Free Press Staff Writer*

MILTON — Any day now, millions of polliwogs in the Lake Champlain marshes along U.S. 2 will wake up and realize they have sprouted legs.

The liberated amphibians will sate their wanderlust by clambering out of the water and taking to the road surface, where they will be squashed by the thousands beneath the rushing tires of cars and trucks.

It's an annual inevitability in the Sandbar Wildlife Management Area, a lethal daily blend of nearly 9,500 cars and thousands of frogs. The run-ins grow so frequent during parts of July — when the ex-tadpoles first exercise their new legs — that a mile-long stretch of asphalt literally glistens with the innards of former frogs.

A band of sympathizers Wednesday took a

modest, experimental, low-tech step toward protecting the young leopard frogs from their own self-destructive meandering.

They pounded stakes and tacked up a thousand feet of silt fence — a 3-foot-high black fabric — on each side of the busy road.

Biologists hope the fabric, mounded at the base with tufts of sod, will keep frogs born to the south of the road in the south and frogs born to the north in the north.

"It's a totally unnecessary mortality," said Nelson Hoffman, environmental coordinator for the Agency of Transportation, "and this is a relatively cheap possible solution."

The agency paid \$500 for the silt fence. It was installed by workers, scientists and volunteers.

Through the summer, workers from the agencies of Transportation

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and Natural Resources will monitor the gory stretch. They'll count squashed frogs along the thousand feet of road with the barrier and compare that with the number of flattened frogs on the 4,000 feet or so that remain accessible.

The fences will be removed in September. Maybe they'll be put back next year, maybe not. Depends on what the numbers show, said Mark Ferguson, a zoologist with the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

He doesn't expect the

barriers to adversely affect the plentiful leopard frog population, because there appears to be no biological or migratory reason for the silver-dollar-sized young frogs to cross U.S. 2.

"I don't think there's any great urge," confirmed Chris Slesar, an environmental specialist with the Agency of Transportation. "It's just random hopping."

Ideally, he said, roads could be outfitted with more sophisticated systems to protect wildlife from traffic — pipes beneath or bridges over travel surfaces. That's expensive and almost unthinkable on an existing road.

"In the whole scheme of things, this is an inexpensive solution," Slesar said. "We'll see if it works."

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