Timber rattlesnakes are extremely well camouflaged and difficult to spot in the forest vegetation.

AVOIDING & TREATING SNAKE BITES

A snakebite from a chance encounter between timber rattlesnakes and people on State Forest land is rare. The snake is generally secretive and docile and normally chooses to move away, hide, or issue a warning in order to avoid a confrontation with an intruder.

When cornered, surprised, or touched, the possibility of a rattlesnake striking in defense (sometimes without warning) becomes more likely.

Maintaining a 3-foot buffer around even the largest timber rattlesnakes is sufficient to avoid an effective strike.

Due to the complexity of snake venom and the variables involved in bites and victims, reactions to timber rattlesnake bites vary accordingly: from a “dry bite” (no venom injected in 30% of cases) to a life-threatening situation.

In the rare event of a snakebite:

- Remain calm and reassure the patient. There have been no deaths in Pennsylvania attributable to timber rattlesnake bites for at least the past 25 years.
- If possible, immobilize the affected area and transport the patient immediately to the nearest medical facility.
- Do not attempt first aid measures such as incision, suction, tourniquets, alcohol, or drugs.

Pennsylvania’s State Forests Timber Rattlesnake Habitat

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Forestry’s 2.1 million acres of State Forest lands provide the largest blocks of timber rattlesnake range remaining in the Northeastern states. These forests are managed according to the principles of ecosystem management, with the realization that all the different species must be present to sustain a healthy, functioning forest.

The presence of timber rattlesnakes is one of the components that gives a wild flavor to State Forest land. The largest populations of timber rattlesnakes occur in the remote, heavily forested regions of Pennsylvania.

Worldwide, the importance of venomous snakes is being recognized not only for their role as both predator and prey but for their medical value. Recent promising breakthroughs in treatments for hypertension, heart attack, and cancer are attributed to snake venom research.

Pennsylvania experienced a major decline in its timber rattlesnake population during recent decades attributed mainly to unrestricted commercial and sport hunting, den raiding, and land development. This decline prompted the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (charged with fish, reptile, and amphibian management) to implement regulations to check the uncontrolled exploitation of the species. DCNR urges all State Forest users including recreational visitors, camp lessees, logging, mineral, and rights-of-way contractors, fuelwood cutters, and passers-through to exhibit a tolerance for the timber rattlesnake and abide by all applicable regulations:

- Persons who hunt, capture, kill, or possess timber rattlesnakes must have an Individual Timber Rattlesnake Hunter and Rattlesnake Possession Permit.
- Damage to denning areas is prohibited.
- Selling timber rattlesnakes or parts thereof is prohibited.
- Timber rattlesnakes are protected under specific regulations by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. For more information, consult the most recent “Pennsylvania Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws” (supplied with fishing licenses) or direct questions to: Nongame and Endangered Species Unit, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, 450 Robinson Lane, Bellefonte, PA 16823 <www.fish.state.pa.us>
SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

In known timber rattlesnake territory, during the active season of April to October, common-sense precautions will minimize serious encounters with timber rattlesnakes.

- When walking through unmowed grass and brushy areas, wear loose-fitting, full-length pants and high-topped (8") leather boots. Walk at a normal pace so you will not surprise a snake.
- Look for rattlesnakes before you sit down, reach into, over, or under bushes, logs or rocks.
- Be aware that rattlesnakes are attracted to certain structures to hunt for mice and to bask such as a pile of rocks, logs, or boards. They may also be found around a shed or equipment.
- Never attempt to pick up a rattlesnake, even one that appears to be dead.

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