

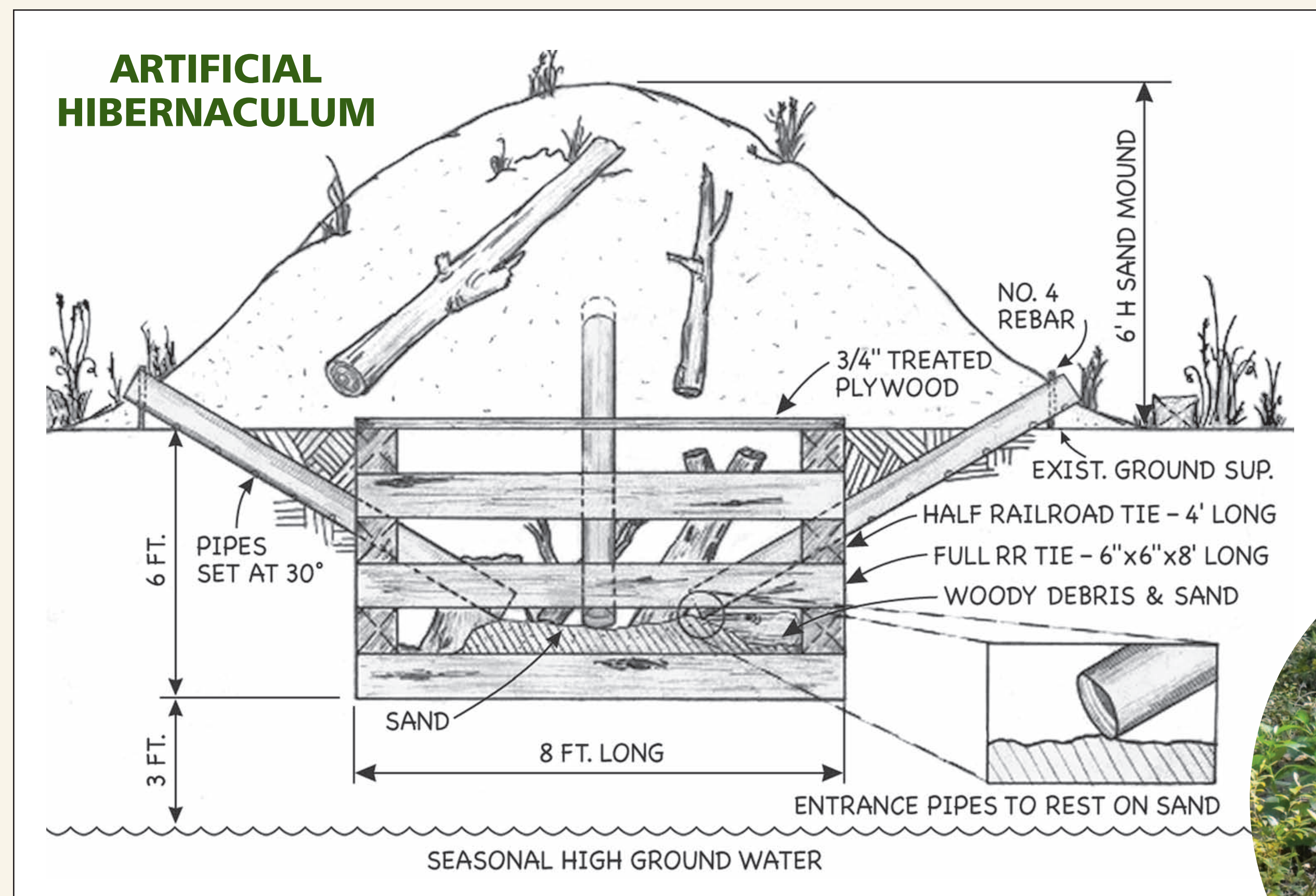
Woodland Snake Hibernation

It's difficult to protect species like snakes that are both feared and misunderstood.

Some people avoid snakes because they don't understand them. That just may be a snake's most effective defense. Unjustified fears often cause people to kill them. But serpents are an important part of our ecosystem.

Snakes, like other reptiles and amphibians, are cold-blooded, and rely on ambient temperature for body warmth. In the winter they hibernate, dropping their metabolic rate to conserve energy. Snakes will overwinter below the frost line in abandoned mammal dens, old tree roots, and in stump holes. They must find a den before temperatures drop, or else risk freezing. As development and human activity expand into former habitats, prime breeding and nesting areas disappear.

Hibernacula like this one help snakes survive harsh winters.



Some local snake species



Northern Scarlet Snake 14-32"
Cemophora coccinea copei

- Fossorial — adapted to living underground
- Nocturnal, surfacing at night
- Highly secretive; rarely seen



Eastern Garter Snake 18-51"
Thamnophis s. sirtalis

- Ground dweller
- Most common NJ snake
- Winter dens are communal



Rough Green Snake 20-45"
Opheodrys aestivus

- Arboreal — often seen hanging in trees
- Generally solitary, but nests and winter dens are communal



Northern Water Snake 22-53"
Nerodia sipedon

- Mostly aquatic
- Feeds on frogs and fish
- Hibernates in uplands, near water
- Non-venomous
- Can be aggressive, with a nasty bite — should be viewed from a distance



Black Rat Snake 34-101"
Elaphe o. obsoleta

- Hibernaculum fidelity — tend to return to the same wintering site
- Young are patterned similar to a copperhead snake
- Their anatomy allows them to climb almost-smooth surfaces



Northern Pine Snake 48-100"
Pituophis m. melanoleucus

- Rare in NJ; risk of becoming endangered
- Resident of large pinelands land tracts
- Winter dens are communal

Major threats:

Forest fragmentation from development and roads, off-road recreation, road mortality, deliberate attacks and/or poaching by humans

Here in the Maurice River watershed, all 18 species of snakes are **NON-venomous**.

- Be careful when you operate vehicles to avoid running over reptiles and amphibians in roadways
- Do not use poisons to kill rodents; use mechanical traps when necessary. Poisoned animals kill non-target wildlife.

It is illegal to kill, harass or collect any native, non-game wildlife.

- Report snake collectors or other wildlife violations to NJ Fish and Wildlife Law Enforcement's Operation Game Thief Hotline: 1-855-648-8477. Gather any data you can: car description, license number, etc. Information is law enforcement's friend.

You Can Help!

Rough Green Snake, Northern Water Snake, Northern Pine Snake photos: Robert Zappalorti, Nature's Film and Photo Images
Artificial Hibernaculum illustration: thanks to Herpetological Associates, Inc. 2010



Para obtener versión en español, visite:
cumaucriver.org/signs/008s.html