

Canada's Species at Risk Program

Questions and Answers on the federal *Species at Risk Act*



Farmers, ranchers, Aboriginal peoples, scientists, and other people with an interest in the natural world have noticed and documented the disappearance of certain plants and animals for some time. The federal *Species at Risk Act* is one part of the Government of Canada's strategy for protecting wildlife species at risk.

The National Strategy for the Protection of Species at Risk

In a country as vast and diverse as Canada, conservation of species at risk requires the participation and cooperation of many people and organizations. The Government of Canada has therefore adopted a three-part strategy to protecting species at risk: stewardship and incentive programs, the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk and the *Species at Risk Act*.

Stewardship and incentive programs

Stewardship refers to a wide range of voluntary actions that people take to care for their environment. Working together to find solutions is the essence of cooperative stewardship. The Government of Canada supports stewardship initiatives through the Habitat Stewardship Program. This program provides funding to landowners through various conservation organizations for projects that protect species at risk and their habitats.

The Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk

In 1996, the federal, provincial and territorial governments endorsed an Accord that recognized the importance of cooperation among governments in protecting species at risk. As part of this commitment, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada Agency will implement the federal *Species at Risk Act*, complementing the work being done through provincial and territorial laws.

Species at Risk Act

The purpose of Act is to:

- ◆ prevent wildlife species from becoming extinct or lost from the wild (extirpated);
- ◆ help in the recovery of extirpated, endangered or threatened species;
- ◆ ensure that species of special concern do not become endangered or threatened.



Piping Plover on nest
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How are species listed?

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), a group of government and non-government experts, assesses and recommends wildlife species for listing. The committee uses the best available scientific, community and aboriginal traditional knowledge to make its recommendation. Then, the government decides if the species should be added to the legal list. The government's listing process considers social and economic implications of listing a species.



Whooping Crane
© Environment Canada
Photo: Geoff Holroyd

The Swift Fox – a recovery success

The Swift Fox was common in the southern Prairies during the 19th century. Due to habitat loss, trapping and poisoning campaigns aimed at other animals, as well as severe weather factors, the Swift Fox was gone from the Canadian prairies by 1978!

Wildlife agencies and partners have helped to bring the Swift Fox back. Foxes obtained from the U.S. were released directly into the wild or bred in captivity to produce offspring that were then released in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

About 600 of these graceful little animals are now re-established in Canada.



Swift Fox
Photo: © L. Carbyn

To which species does the Act apply?

There are over 300 species on the legal list of the Act. Less than 20 percent of these species are found in the Prairie provinces. Examples of endangered species in the Prairies include the Whooping Crane, Piping Plover, Loggerhead Shrike, Burrowing Owl, Swift Fox, Sage Grouse, and several plants such as the Small White Lady's Slipper. The legal list of species can be found at www.sararegistry.gc.ca and is updated about once a year.

How are listed species and their residences protected?

There are prohibitions against the killing, harming, harassing or taking of endangered, threatened and extirpated species listed in Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* (www.sararegistry.gc.ca) and against the damage or destruction of their residences (e.g. nest or den). These prohibitions apply to:

- ◆ all endangered, threatened and extirpated species listed in Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) found on **federal lands** such as national parks, national wildlife areas, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration pastures, Aboriginal reserve lands and military training areas;
- ◆ all endangered, threatened and extirpated **aquatic species** listed in Schedule 1 of the SARA, anywhere they occur;
- ◆ all endangered, threatened and extirpated **migratory birds listed in the *Migratory Birds Convention Act (MBCA), 1994***, listed in Schedule 1 of SARA, anywhere they occur;
- ◆ **Other species on provincial or private land:** For endangered, threatened or extirpated species listed in Schedule 1 of SARA other than the species listed above, the prohibitions may apply on provincial or private land if provincial legislation does not effectively protect the species and its residence, and cooperative stewardship does not succeed. In such a case, consultations would first be held with the provincial government. Most of these species are currently protected by other laws.



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How do I get involved in stewardship projects?

Stewardship projects are run by organizations and individuals, often in cooperation with the Government of Canada. The Habitat Stewardship Program is one place to start. Various organizations such as the Alberta Conservation Association, Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation, Nature Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority and Nature Conservancy of Canada are involved in projects that work cooperatively with landowners.

Can I receive compensation for land I cannot use because a species at risk lives there?

In most cases, a species at risk inhabits an area because the current conditions are already suitable. Assistance in protecting species and their habitats is provided through the Habitat Stewardship Program. In the rare event that the cooperative stewardship approach does not succeed, and provincial laws do not protect the critical habitat of a species at risk, the prohibition against destruction of critical habitat of non-aquatic species may be invoked on private lands. The Government of Canada may provide compensation if you have a loss as a result of an extraordinary impact because of the prohibition on the destruction of critical habitat.

What is critical habitat and how does the Act protect it?

Critical habitat is the habitat necessary for the survival or recovery of a listed endangered, threatened or extirpated species on Schedule 1 of SARA. Critical habitat will be described within recovery strategies or action plans within a few years after the species is listed. These strategies and plans will be developed in co-operation with various agencies and in consultation with people who are directly affected.

The intent of SARA is to protect critical habitat. Critical habitat found on federal lands and for aquatic species anywhere will be protected within six months after it is described. For any other species (i.e. non-aquatic species) on private or provincial land, the intent of SARA is to protect critical habitat as much as possible through voluntary actions, stewardship measures or provincial law. If these measures do not succeed, a prohibition on the destruction of critical habitat may be applied.

How will compliance with the Act be encouraged?

Making landowners aware of species at risk on their land, and helping them protect the species and its habitat are important first steps. Voluntary actions and stewardship can protect species and critical habitat on private lands. If violations of the Act are identified, measures will be taken to ensure that they no longer occur. The type of enforcement action will be determined on a case by case basis.

Examples of Stewardship

Operation Grassland Community and Operation Burrowing Owl, believe that prairie habitats can be managed in a way that ensures conservation of habitats and sustainability of agricultural livelihood.

Hundreds of participating land stewards protect thousands of hectares of native prairie habitat for species at risk.

Both programs receive funding from the Habitat Stewardship Program.



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Burrowing Owls DEPEND on grazing!

The endangered Burrowing Owl requires native prairie habitat for nesting. Ranches can provide this ideal habitat.

Did you know that Burrowing Owls:

- ◆ prefer pastures grazed by cattle for nesting
- ◆ use cow dung to line their burrows and nests
- ◆ eat insects and small rodents often considered pests by land owners
- ◆ nest in holes excavated by Badgers – the Badgers excavate these holes to hunt Richardson's Ground Squirrels (gophers).

Over 700 landowners across Canada have voluntarily set aside land for Burrowing Owls, conserving an area larger than the City of Edmonton!



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What is the role of Aboriginal peoples?

A National Aboriginal Council on Species at Risk has been established to advise the government on the Act. Aboriginal people will be involved or consulted on all aspects of the Act in areas involving reserve lands or land claim areas.

Where can I learn more?

Environment Canada

Canadian Wildlife Service
Prairie and Northern Region office
(780) 951-8700 or 1-800-263-0595

SARA Public Registry

www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Includes COSEWIC assessments, recovery strategies, action plans, regulations and orders. The site is intended to provide open and transparent information to the public.

Species at Risk

www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca

Includes information on species at risk and on stewardship programs.

Canadian Wildlife Service, Prairies

www.pnr-rpn.ec.gc.ca/nature/endspecies/index.en.html

Includes information on species at risk in the Prairies and on conservation efforts being undertaken in your region.

Habitat Stewardship Program

www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca/support/default_e.cfm

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