



Recreational Fishing and the Species at Risk Act

Protecting wildlife species from the risk of extinction is the responsibility of all Canadians. Whether you're a sports fisher, lodge owner, fishing-tour operator, tackle or boat retailer, one of the most important things you can do is understand your obligations under the country's new *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).

What it's all about

The *Species at Risk Act* was created to prevent wildlife species from becoming extinct. It requires Canada to provide for the recovery of species at risk due to human activity, and to manage species of special concern, making sure they don't become endangered or threatened. SARA not only prohibits the killing, harming, harassing, capturing, taking or possessing of species at risk, but also makes it illegal to destroy

their critical habitats. The Act became law in June 2003, and becomes enforceable in June 2004.

Obviously, no single organization or entity can be responsible on its own for achieving the goals of SARA. Governments and stakeholder groups across Canada must all work together. In fact, SARA was designed to encourage such cooperation.

Aquatic species at risk

Today, 34 aquatic species have been classified 'at risk' under SARA; an additional 28 species are under consideration. Those listed currently include the spotted and northern wolffish, Atlantic whitefish, and Inner Bay of Fundy salmon as well as marine animals such as the leatherback turtle and sea otter.

Working together

Under SARA, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) must produce recovery strategies and action plans for aquatic species listed as endangered or threatened. Recovery strategies for fish and marine species currently listed under SARA must be completed as soon as 2006. Those strategies will be developed in consultation with stakeholders, and will take into account the potential impact of changes on recreational fishers in Canada.

The ultimate goal of these consultations is to ensure that the protective measures we develop at DFO are practical, effective, and in keeping with a sound fisheries management approach. The possibilities include restrictions on bycatch of listed species; modifications of fishing gear; modifications of fishing season openings; and closures or restrictions on fishing areas.

How do species get on the list?

Species are designated 'at risk' by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), an independent body of experts that assesses wildlife according to a broad range of scientific data. The federal Cabinet then decides whether those species should be listed under the *Species at Risk Act*. This decision is made after consultations with affected stakeholders and other groups.

Key steps in the process:

1. COSEWIC assesses and designates a species
2. DFO consults with stakeholders and the Minister of the Environment provides advice to Cabinet
3. Cabinet determines whether to list species under SARA
4. DFO updates fisheries management plans to comply with SARA
5. DFO develops recovery strategies with fishing industry and provincial and territorial governments
6. DFO develops compliance program

What SARA could mean for recreational fishers

Of course, recreational fishing in Canada has long been subject to conservation regulations. SARA does not change this—instead, it adds a new set of considerations to the guidelines and procedures that are already in place. Existing fisheries management plans will continue to outline what can be caught, when and where. Annual fishing guides will include notices of restrictions. Fishing-area closures will be posted on the web, on signs near fishing areas, and communicated through local associations and authorities. And if you accidentally catch a fish you know to be protected under SARA, return it to the water.

For more information

To find out more about SARA, please visit:

- www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca (click on *Species at Risk* link)
- www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca
- www.SARAreistry.gc.ca

Or contact DFO at:

Email: info@dfo-mpo.gc.ca
Telephone: 1-866-266-6603