



## Recreational Boating and the Species at Risk Act

For millions of Canadians boating is a way of life, offering the chance to get out and see the world from a fresh perspective. It's a pastime that comes with certain responsibilities. And with the introduction of Canada's new *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), it is likely that some of those responsibilities will evolve. Here's what you need to know.

### Protecting wildlife

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 or taking 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.

### 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.

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 will be developed in collaboration with stakeholders, and must be completed as soon as 2006. These strategies and plans may include restrictions on boating activities to protect either the species themselves or their critical habitats.

### What is critical habitat?

To put it simply, critical habitat is vital to the survival or recovery of wildlife species. It may be an identified breeding site, nursery area or feeding ground. For species at risk, such habitats are of the utmost importance, and where possible must be identified in recovery strategies or action plans.

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.

Once the decision is made to list a species, SARA requires recovery strategies and action plans to be developed. These strategies must identify threats to critical habitat and outline approaches to addressing those threats.

## What it could mean

Today, there are many boating restrictions in effect in Canada. Most of these were created to ensure public safety, but SARA introduces a new set of considerations. It is possible that environmentally motivated boating restrictions may be added in years to come to protect species at risk. These could include restrictions on speed limits or boating activity, as well as prohibitions against the use of motorized vessels on particular bodies of water.

Whatever the case, restrictions will be communicated clearly. DFO has made it a long-term priority to communicate information about species at risk to stakeholder groups, conservation associations, and provincial and municipal environmental authorities across the country.

It is important to understand that the process for listing a species under SARA is thorough and well considered. Decisions are not made lightly; significant scientific research is conducted and key stakeholder groups are always consulted.

It is also important to appreciate that while SARA represents a significant step forward in Canada's ability to prevent the extinction of wildlife species, it fits into the regulatory framework that exists today. In other words, while you may as a boater have new rules to be aware of when travelling your favourite waterway, those rules will be administered exactly as they are today.

## What can you do?

Every one of us can make a difference in helping to protect species at risk and their habitats. Make sure you're in compliance with SARA by obeying the latest boating restrictions in your area: reduce speed and keep a safe distance from critical habitat where indicated. You can also take active steps to protect species at risk in your community. The Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (HSP) sponsors local stewardship activities. It is managed jointly by Environment Canada, DFO and Parks Canada. For more information, visit the HSP website at: <http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/hsp-pih>.

To find out more about where species at risk reside, contact local environmental groups, municipal and provincial governments, as well as the SARA registry at [www.SARAreistry.gc.ca](http://www.SARAreistry.gc.ca).

### For more information

To find out more about SARA, please visit:

- [www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca) (click on *Species at Risk* link)
- [www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca](http://www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca)
- [www.SARAreistry.gc.ca](http://www.SARAreistry.gc.ca)

Or contact DFO at:

Email: [info@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:info@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)  
Telephone: 1-866-266-6603