



Implementing the *Species at Risk Act* in Ontario



Eric Dresser

Wetlands provide essential habitat for many species at risk, yet a majority of these fragile ecosystems has been lost or severely degraded in Ontario.

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) is the newest federal wildlife protection law in Canada. Proclaimed in 2003, SARA aims to:

- prevent Canadian wildlife species from becoming extinct or extirpated (lost from the wild in Canada);
- secure the recovery of extirpated, endangered and threatened species that are included on SARA's List of Wildlife Species at Risk; and
- manage species of special concern to prevent them from becoming endangered or threatened.

SARA applies across Canada and covers all wildlife species at risk nationally, including aquatic and terrestrial plants and animals, and their critical habitats.

The Government of Canada's strategy to conserve and enhance wildlife reflects the different roles and the vital need for shared responsibility, coordination and partnerships among all levels of government, Aboriginal peoples, ranchers, farmers, conservation groups, fishing interests, the resource extraction industry, and individual Canadians.

The three-part federal strategy involves:

- building on the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk;
- complementary stewardship programs; and
- the *Species at Risk Act*.



Robert McCaw

The Least Bittern population in Canada is estimated to be less than 1,000 pairs.

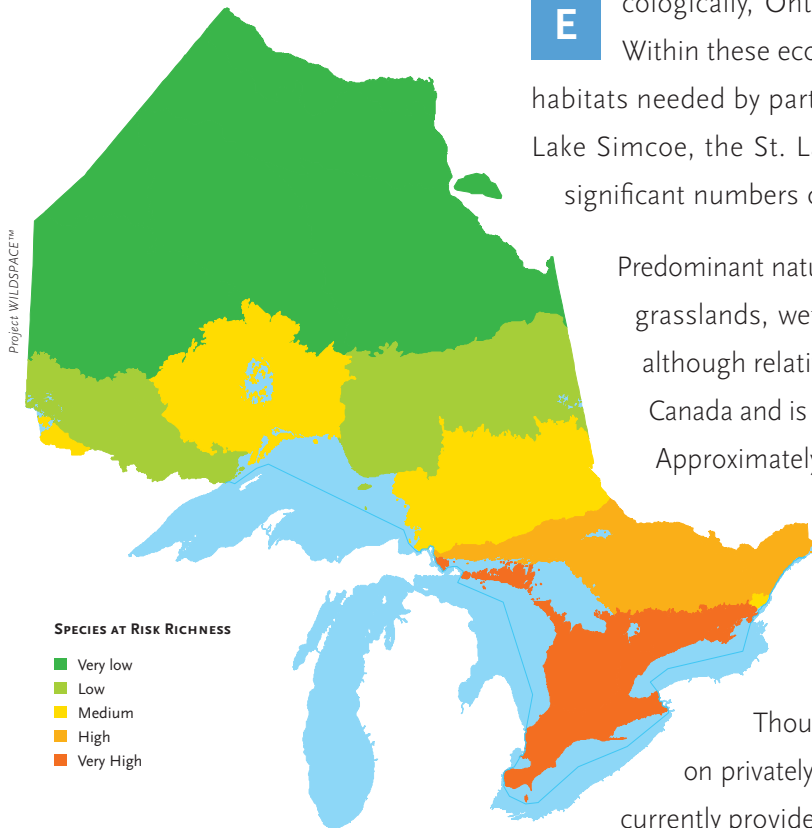
Implementing the *Species at Risk Act* in Ontario *(continued)*

Ecologically, Ontario is a diverse region, consisting of 17 ecoregions. Within these ecoregions are numerous ecosystems that provide specific habitats needed by particular species at risk. The Frontenac Axis, Manitoulin-Lake Simcoe, the St. Lawrence Lowlands, and the Lake Erie Lowlands have significant numbers of species at risk.

Predominant natural ecosystems that are threatened in Ontario are forests, grasslands, wetlands, and the Great Lakes. The Lake Erie Lowlands – although relatively small in area – represents the southernmost part of Canada and is perhaps the single most species-rich region in the country. Approximately one third of the country's species included under SARA at the time of Proclamation (June 2003) are found here.

Ontario has the most concentrated human population in Canada, resulting in various and often significant impacts on the landscape and the wildlife inhabitants.

Though the majority of populations of species at risk are found on privately owned lands, federal lands (including First Nation lands) currently provide habitat for individuals of nearly two-thirds of the species at risk found in Ontario.



Found on the north shore of Lake Erie, Long Point is the most undisturbed and complex of the Great Lakes sand spits. Nearly 4,000 hectares of beach, sand dunes, forests, savannas and wetlands provide essential habitat for many species of local and global rarity.



The King Rail is an endangered species that relies on wetland habitat. Only 25 to 50 pairs remain in Canada.

Tim Hagen

Steps to Listing and Recovery

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assesses the status of species before they are considered for inclusion on SARA's List of Wildlife Species at Risk. At the time of proclamation of SARA (June 2003),

95 species were on the SARA List. There are differences in the number of species listed by COSEWIC and the numbers included on SARA's List of Wildlife Species at Risk because of the process required to add a COSEWIC listed species to the SARA List.

Approximately two-thirds of the species at risk found in Ontario are found nowhere else in Canada. Many of these species are at the northern limit of their continental range, with the majority of existing populations found in the United States. Though some of these species may be less at risk in the United States, northern range populations often prove to be genetically important, particularly in terms of their adaptation to northern habitats. The Canadian government is working with the United States government to ensure that recovery efforts on both sides of the border are complementary, whenever and wherever possible.

In southern Ontario, large numbers of species at risk are concentrated in small areas that have diverse ecosystems such as Walpole Island First Nation (tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, Carolinian forest, coastal waters



Canadian Wildlife Service

Conducting inventories of species at risk on Walpole Island First Nation, home to about 20 percent of Canada's rare species.

and wetlands) and Point Pelee National Park (savannas, dunes, Carolinian forest, coastal waters and wetlands).

Biological inventories are underway on federal lands in Ontario, including migratory bird sanctuaries, national wildlife areas, national parks, military properties, First Nations, and other lands. This will confirm or determine the presence of both habitat for species at risk and the plants or animals themselves. As well, Environment Canada is working with other partners in recovery to identify habitats necessary for the survival and recovery of species at risk across Ontario.

As of January 2007, there were 534 species at risk in Canada according to COSEWIC. Ontario is home to 182 of these species, the highest percentage of species at risk among the provinces. Ontario species are assessed in the following categories:

- extirpated (11 species)
- endangered (73)
- threatened (46)
- special concern (52)

Found along the shoreline of Lake Erie in southern Ontario, the Fowler's Toad is very rare in Canada.

John Mitchell



Partners in Stewardship

Partnerships with several national, regional and local non-government organizations, First Nations, Conservation Authorities and the provincial government have been established to assist with stewardship activities directed at species at risk, their habitats and priority ecosystems.

Each year, the federal Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk (HSP) provides approximately \$2 million to support species recovery in Ontario and a total of approximately \$10 million to partners nationwide. This funding must be matched (financially or "in-kind") by recipient organizations. HSP projects contribute to the recovery of species at risk by supporting priority activities outlined in recovery strategies, action plans and management plans prepared under SARA.

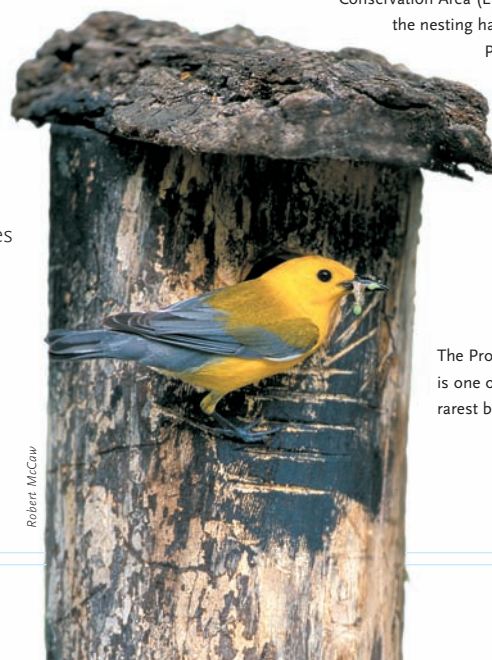
Stewardship activities by landowners and land managers include habitat improvement, habitat restoration, outreach and communication, and land securement.

In Ontario, the HSP has contributed funding to an average of 25 to 30 projects every year that are led by partners. On average, the projects benefit some 75 species at risk in total. Increasingly, projects focus on stewardship of particular ecosystems for the benefit of localized species at risk and any associated species.



Phil Roberts

Flooding an unused road in the Holiday Beach Conservation Area (Essex County) created the nesting habitat required by the Prothonotary Warbler.



Robert McCow

The Prothonotary Warbler is one of Canada's rarest birds.



April White/Environment Canada



April White/Environment Canada



Robert McCow

In cooperation with farmers, volunteers build outdoor aviaries on suitable pastureland for the Eastern Loggerhead Shrike, an endangered species. Within the aviary, captive breeding pairs safely raise their young for release into the wild.

Federal Recovery Strategy Development

The federal government bodies responsible for SARA are Environment Canada (including Parks Canada Agency) and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Environment Canada is responsible for the administration of SARA on behalf of the federal government. The department is primarily responsible for migratory bird species at risk and terrestrial species at risk found on federal lands, plus any other species that is not the responsibility of Parks Canada or Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Parks Canada Agency is responsible for species at risk in national parks, national historic sites and other national protected heritage areas. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is responsible for aquatic and marine species at risk.

In addition, Environment Canada is responsible for species at risk found on federal lands that are First Nations lands. Under SARA, recovery strategies and management plans are required to recognize the importance of aboriginal traditional knowledge in the recovery process, and to consider socio-economic impacts related to the protection and recovery of species at risk.

For species listed in SARA, timelines are identified for the required production of recovery strategies and action plans (for extirpated, endangered and threatened species) and of management plans (for species of special concern). For species that were listed in SARA at the time of Proclamation (June 2003), recovery strategies for endangered species must be posted on the SARA Registry Web site within three years, within four years for extirpated and threatened species, and within five years for species of special concern. For species listed in SARA after June 2003, the timelines for posting recovery strategies are one year for endangered species, two years for extirpated and threatened species, and three years for species of special concern.

The departments, ministries, and agencies of the federal and provincial governments that have been tasked with recovery have developed a series of templates and support documents, which guide the development of the required strategies and plans. The development of such strategies involves the input of various representatives from government and non-government organizations and, increasingly, includes stakeholders and private landowners.

Draft or final recovery strategies are currently in place for almost all of the species at risk found in Ontario. Recovery activities are underway for many of the species for which there is a draft or final recovery strategy. In Ontario, recovery strategies are developed either for a number of species that share a particular ecosystem or for a particular ecosystem that provides habitat for a number of species at risk.



P. Allen Woodliffe

The Dense Blazing Star, a beautiful perennial herb that grows up to 1.5 metres high, is found mostly in grassland habitats of southwestern Ontario.

REPORT SIGHTINGS OF SPECIES AT RISK IN ONTARIO

Please call Environment Canada's toll-free telephone number:

1 (800) 668-6767



John Mitchell

Federal-Provincial Cooperation

The federal government and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources have initiated discussions toward the development of a bilateral agreement that will reflect the responsibilities of the parties to implement the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk. The agreement will establish the intent of the parties to work

together to achieve the recovery of extirpated, endangered and threatened species; the identification and protection of habitat that is critical to the survival of these species; and to work together to achieve recovery of species of special concern.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources is a member of the federally led Regional Implementation Board (Ontario), which recommends projects for HSP funding. It also coordinates with Fisheries and Oceans Canada in recovery efforts for major watersheds in Ontario.

These activities effectively bring together the federal and provincial governments, both of which are committed to the recovery of particular ecosystems and the species that inhabit them. All federal and provincial departments also work closely with non-government organizations to recover species at risk.

Doug Sweiger/Environment Canada



An Essex County landowner "spotted" Spotted Turtles, Blanding's Turtles and Northern Map Turtles nesting on his property for the first time in 20 years in newly restored wetland habitat. Work was carried out by the Essex County Stewardship Network with support from the Ontario Stewardship Program and the Habitat Stewardship Program. The Spotted Turtle (seen here in Long Point National Wildlife Area), is endangered due to significant habitat loss and degradation.



Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

Volunteers plant vegetation along the banks of Medway Creek (Middlesex County) to reduce erosion and improve water quality for aquatic species.

Walpole Island Heritage Centre



Oak Savanna, an important habitat for species at risk, is characterized by a variety of oak trees and prairie grassland vegetation.

Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples

ARA identifies the responsibility of Environment Canada to work with Aboriginal peoples to identify the presence of species at risk on Aboriginal lands, and to participate in the maintenance or recovery of those populations. Some Aboriginal lands fall within many species at risk ranges and are habitat for significant numbers of endangered and threatened species. Wildlife and biodiversity inventories on Aboriginal lands are a significant gap for wildlife management agencies.

In response, the federal government has set up two funds to support capacity building within Aboriginal organizations and communities for participation in the identification, protection and recovery of species at risk and their habitats.

- The Aboriginal Critical Habitat Protection Fund has the objective to protect critical habitats of endangered and threatened species on Aboriginal lands.
- The Aboriginal Capacity Building Fund has the objective to help Aboriginal organizations and/or communities to build capacity to enable them to help in the protection of species at risk.

Outside of these funds, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada Agency are also working with several First Nations on recovery efforts for both aquatic and terrestrial species at risk.

Additionally, a number of First Nations in the province are, or have been, involved in stewardship activities for species at risk as partners in the HSP initiative.

Canadian Wildlife Service



Community volunteers at Walpole Island First Nation assist with recovery efforts to enhance rare Tallgrass Prairie ecosystems.

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Canadian Wildlife Service

In Canada, the Climbing Prairie Rose (Special Concern) occurs only around Lake Erie, supported by a long growing season and moderate climate.

Internet Resources

Species At Risk Act Public Registry

www.sararegistry.gc.ca
Canada's Web site for information, documents and public comments on species at risk.



Species at Risk in Ontario

www.on.ec.gc.ca/speciesatrisk



Species at Risk in Canada

www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca

Parks Canada Agency Species at Risk

www.pc.gc.ca/nature/eep-sar/

Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Species at Risk

www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/

This fact sheet is available on-line at the following URL: www.on.ec.gc.ca/speciesatrisk. All publications are available in both HTML and PDF formats.

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About the Canadian Wildlife Service

The Canadian Wildlife Service, part of Environment Canada, manages wildlife matters that are the responsibility of the federal government. These include protection and management of migratory birds, nationally significant habitat and species at risk as well as work on other wildlife issues of national and international importance. In addition, the Canadian Wildlife Service does research in many fields of wildlife biology and provides incentive programs for wildlife and habitat stewardship.