



A New Endangered Species Act for Ontario

Ontario's outdated *Endangered Species Act* has failed to achieve its objective of providing "for the conservation, protection, restoration and propagation of species of fauna and flora of the Province of Ontario that are threatened with extinction." There are now 190 officially recognized species at risk in the province, a number that is increasing yearly. To avert a crisis of extinction, Ontario needs a new *Endangered Species Act* of sufficient scope to adequately protect all species at risk.

In the lead-up to the 2003 provincial election, Premier Dalton McGuinty made a written commitment: "We will update and strengthen Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*. Our new Act will put in place effective measures to protect species at risk, including a science-based process to list species and help them recover, and meaningful protection for habitats. Protection of species is virtually meaningless unless there are also protections for the areas where they live, feed and breed."

The provincial government has since reiterated its commitment to review and improve the Act in two recently approved policies (*Our Sustainable Future, Strategic Directions*, 2005; *Protecting What Sustains Us: Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy*, 2005). As well, Ontario signed the *National Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk*, an agreement that commits the federal and provincial governments to providing legal protection for threatened and endangered species and their habitats. The federal *Species at Risk Act* focuses mainly on federal lands, leaving it to the provinces to protect species over the majority of the landscape. Ontario now has an opportunity to lead the way and set a high standard for endangered species legislation in Canada.

The goal of the Save Ontario's Species (S.O.S.) campaign is to engage with the promised provincial review of the *Endangered Species Act* in order to ensure that it creates the necessary legal basis for protecting and restoring all of the province's species at risk.

The critical components for a new Act are:

1. Mandatory protection for threatened and endangered species and their habitats

In Ontario, habitat loss and degradation are the leading causes of endangerment for species at risk. Therefore, mandatory habitat protection is a critical component of endangered species legislation. This protection must be granted to both threatened and endangered species and their habitats across their geographic range.

2. An independent, scientific and timely process for listing and protecting all species at risk

Less than one quarter of Ontario's officially recognized species at risk are regulated for protection under the current *Endangered Species Act*. This discrepancy underlines the need to ensure that new legislation requires species to be listed in a timely manner according to an independent, scientific process. An emergency listing provision is also needed.

3. A mandatory requirement to prepare and carry out recovery plans for threatened and endangered species and management plans for special concern species

Once a species at risk is listed for protection, its recovery will depend largely on the timely development of a strategy to address identified threats. A new *Endangered Species Act* must require that recovery plans be developed and implemented for endangered and threatened species. For species of special concern, the Act should seek to prevent further declines by requiring the development and implementation of management plans.

4. Adequate financing for species at risk programs

To ensure that the goals and objectives of a new *Endangered Species Act* can be met, financing for species at risk programs must be identified in the legislation. The Act should provide for a trust fund that will adequately support monitoring, recovery and management plans, landowner stewardship incentives, enforcement activities and land acquisition.

Endorsed by:

**CPAWS – Wildlands League
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