



10 June 2009
For Immediate Release

Home, home but no range: Government failing the ABCs of habitat protection
First annual report card on Ontario's Endangered Species Act shows unsatisfactory performance

TORONTO- Save Ontario's Species (SOS), a coalition of leading environmental groups, is marking the first year of the coming into force of Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) with the release of its first ESA report card. The report card indicates that the province is setting itself up for failure.

Habitat loss is the number one threat to most endangered species in Ontario, so the identification and protection of all areas used by these species is crucial to their survival and recovery. To protect the habitat of ten "fast-track" species under the ESA, the Ministry of Natural Resources was to have completed ten habitat regulations by June 30, 2009. Now, with only nine of those ten regulations posted in draft form, it is clear that many of the regulations will fail in their primary goal – to protect the habitat needed to ensure the continued survival and recovery of the species, among them the American badger and the barn owl. At present, it is estimated that there are only 200 badgers and 5-10 pairs of barn owls remaining in Ontario.

"Our report card grades are based on the fact that habitat regulations are the most critical element of the new ESA, and it's crucial we get these first ten right," said Dr. Anne Bell, senior director of conservation and education for Ontario Nature. "These regulations are the first real test of whether the ESA is going to be effective."

Animals and plants rely on a variety of areas throughout their life cycle—including spaces for breeding, rearing young, hibernating, migrating and feeding.

"Habitat means a lot more than just dens, nests and roosts. A habitat regulation that protects only dens is as effective as a private property law that applies only to your bedroom," says Rachel Plotkin, biodiversity policy analyst, David Suzuki Foundation. "Like people, species need areas to find food and to move around, not just a den to sleep in."

The report card identifies significant failings in the key areas of translating sound science into strong policy. Five of the nine posted regulations were awarded poor or failing grades.

"Ontario has the best endangered species act in the world, and it's being gutted one regulation at a time," says Janet Sumner, executive director, CPAWS-Wildlands League. "When climate change and habitat fragmentation are driving our ecosystems to their knees we need more, not less, protection for species."

The government failed to post a draft habitat regulation for woodland caribou in time to meet the June 30 deadline. As a result, logging and road-building continue and forest management planning proceeds without any clear direction from government about habitat protection.

"Each day that goes by without a habitat regulation for the woodland caribou brings the species that much closer to extinction," says Catharine Grant, boreal campaigner, ForestEthics.

The absence of a draft habitat regulation for the woodland caribou is a violation of a commitment made by the government of Ontario to regulate habitat for ten species by June 30, 2009.

"Woodland caribou face great peril from ongoing activities, such as logging, in its critical habitat," said Justin Duncan, coordinating lawyer, Ecojustice. "Delaying this regulation will have serious ecological, and possibly legal, implications that cannot be dismissed by our government."

The draft habitat regulations are posted for comment until June 15, 2009 online at:

<http://www.ebr.gov.on.ca/ERS-WEB-External/displaynoticecontent.do?noticeId=MTA2NDI0&statusId=MTU5NjA4&language=en>

The SOS report card can be found at: www.saveontariospecies.ca

-30-

For more information contact:

Anne Bell, Ontario Nature – (416) 444-8419 ext. 239; 416-659-2339 (cell)

Rachel Plotkin, David Suzuki Foundation – (613) 796-7999

Janet Sumner, CPAWS-Wildlands League – (416) 971-9453 ext. 39

Catharine Grant, ForestEthics – (416) 597-1904 ext. 3

Justin Duncan, Ecojustice – (416) 368-7533 ext. 25

About Save Ontario's Species: S.O.S. is a collaboration among CPAWS Wildlands League, the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecojustice, Environmental Defence, ForestEthics and Ontario Nature.