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# PROGRESS REPORT

## ON THE *SPECIES AT RISK ACT* (SARA)

Prepared for the Parliamentary Five-Year Review of  
the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA)

May 2009

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# PROGRESS REPORT ON THE *SPECIES AT RISK ACT* (SARA)

## 1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the implementation of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). It has been prepared for parliamentarians who will be participating in the first Parliamentary five-year review of the Act.

## 2. The *Species at Risk Act*

SARA came into force in 2003<sup>1</sup> to prevent wildlife species from becoming extinct or being extirpated and to support their recovery. The Act legislated requirements for the assessment, protection and recovery of species at risk in Canada, actions that had previously been carried out largely on a voluntary basis.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to SARA, the federal government's basic approach to the protection and recovery of species at risk was collaborative, with a focus on protecting habitat in cooperation with the provinces and the territories, and on encouraging stewardship by Aboriginal organizations, conservation organizations, fishers, landowners, resource users and others.

In the 1990s, Canadian action was increasingly shaped by formal international and national commitments. In 1992, Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, pledging to conserve biological diversity, to use its components sustainably and to share equitably the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. In 1996, the federal government published the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy. The subsequent Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk set out federal, provincial and territorial commitments to identify species at risk in Canada, protect their habitats and develop recovery plans.

## 3. Actions to Implement SARA

The implementation of SARA in its first five years has involved defining and putting in place governance structures, policies and procedures to enable the effective and consistent implementation of the Act. It has also required changes to many programs that predated the Act and that had been developed over several decades. At the same time

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<sup>1</sup> SARA received Royal Assent on December 12, 2002; portions of the Act came into force in March and June 2003, and it came fully into force in June 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Other federal laws related to wildlife conservation include the *Fisheries Act*, the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994*, the *Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act*, the *Canada National Parks Act*, the *Canada Wildlife Act*, and the *Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act*. Six provinces (ON, NS, NB, QC, MB and NL) have species at risk legislation, and several provinces have amended their wildlife laws to deal with species at risk.

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as the federal government put these foundational measures into place, it also had to address requirements under the Act for the 233 species that were listed on Schedule 1 of SARA when the Act came into force.

### ***Governance and Accountability***

The responsibility for implementing SARA is shared:<sup>3</sup>

- The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans oversees matters concerning aquatic species when individuals of these species are found outside waters under Parks Canada Agency jurisdiction.
- The Minister of the Environment is currently responsible for the Parks Canada Agency, and thus oversees matters concerning species found in lands administered by Parks Canada.
- The Minister of the Environment oversees matters concerning all other terrestrial species on federal lands and migratory birds protected by the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994*. The Minister is also responsible for the administration of the Act, including the listing of species at risk on Schedule 1, except in so far as the Act gives responsibility to another minister.

Various governance structures and advisory bodies support the implementation of SARA and related federal programs:

- The ***Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada*** (COSEWIC) identifies and assesses wildlife species at risk in Canada. It includes experts from government, academia, Aboriginal organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and business.
- The government works with provinces and territories through the ***Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council*** (CESCC), composed of ministers responsible for the conservation and management of species at risk. Under the direction of CESCC, the federal government also works closely with provincial and territorial departments through the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee.
- The ***National Aboriginal Council on Species at Risk*** (NACOSAR)<sup>4</sup> advises the Minister of the Environment on the administration of SARA and provides advice and recommendations to CESCC.
- The multi-stakeholder ***Species at Risk Advisory Committee*** (SARAC) advises the Minister of the Environment on the administration of SARA.

The federal government also works with the provinces and territories through other mechanisms. For example, the ***Aquatic Species at Risk Task Group*** was established by the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers.

In further recognition of the importance of cooperation to the conservation of wildlife under SARA, negotiations are underway to develop ***bilateral agreements*** on species at risk with all provinces and territories. The agreements will set out shared objectives and

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<sup>3</sup> The Ministers responsible for SARA are referred to as “competent ministers” under SARA.

<sup>4</sup> NACOSAR consists of six representatives of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada selected by the Minister of the Environment based upon recommendations from Aboriginal organizations that the Minister considers appropriate.

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commitments to cooperate on specific initiatives. Agreements have already been signed with British Columbia, Quebec and Saskatchewan, and several other agreements are nearing completion.

The conservation of species at risk on lands under comprehensive land claims agreements requires consultation with a wildlife management board or other relevant body established under the land claims agreement. To that end, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed with the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board focuses on harmonizing activities under SARA with those under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

The departments responsible for SARA also work closely with other federal departments and agencies to ensure that obligations under SARA are met on federal lands, including through the *Interdepartmental Recovery Fund*.

SARA also contains various measures to provide the public with information about decisions and actions taken under the Act. The *Species at Risk Public Registry* provides Internet access to SARA-related documents, and offers a forum for submitting comments on draft documents. The Minister of the Environment must submit an *annual report* on the administration of the Act to Parliament, and must report to Parliament every five years on the general status of wildlife species at risk in Canada. SARA also requires the Minister to convene a *Round Table* at least every two years to solicit recommendations on the protection of wildlife species at risk in Canada. The first Minister's Round Table was held in December 2006, and the second was held in December 2008.

### **Government Funding**

The implementation of SARA was supported by funding in the 2000, 2003 and 2007 budgets:<sup>5</sup>

- **Budget 2000** provided \$180 million over five years for the development of SARA, increased support to COSEWIC and the implementation of the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk and of programs such as the Habitat Stewardship Program and the Interdepartmental Recovery Fund.
- **Budget 2003** provided an additional \$93 million over four years to help establish NACOSAR, the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Sub-Committee of COSEWIC, the Aboriginal Capacity Building Fund and the Aboriginal Critical Habitat Protection Fund.
- **Budget 2007** committed \$110 million over two years for the implementation of SARA to bring total annual funding for SARA to \$100 million per year. This funding has supported improved recovery planning, socio-economic analysis and consultations and engagement, particularly with Aboriginal organizations and wildlife management boards. It has also supported stewardship action by a wide range of non-governmental partners.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that this does not include additional funding from Budget 2007 of \$22 million to support enforcement activities, including 38 enforcement officers for SARA and other wildlife legislation.

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## ***Policy Development***

When SARA came into force, 190 of the 233 species previously assessed by COSEWIC were listed on Schedule 1 of the Act as threatened, endangered or extirpated. The listing triggered obligations to protect these 190 species and to prepare a recovery strategy and action plan for them. For the 43 species that were listed on Schedule 1 as special concern, obligations were triggered to prepare management plans. The implementation of these obligations received the bulk of the federal government's attention in the first few years of work under the Act. This experience demonstrated the need to develop systematic guidance to support the use of SARA as part of coordinated federal-provincial-territorial efforts to conserve and protect species at risk.

In June 2007, federal, provincial and territorial deputy ministers responsible for wildlife endorsed the National Framework for Species at Risk Conservation. The Framework provides a set of common principles, objectives and overarching approaches. The specific objectives of the Framework are to

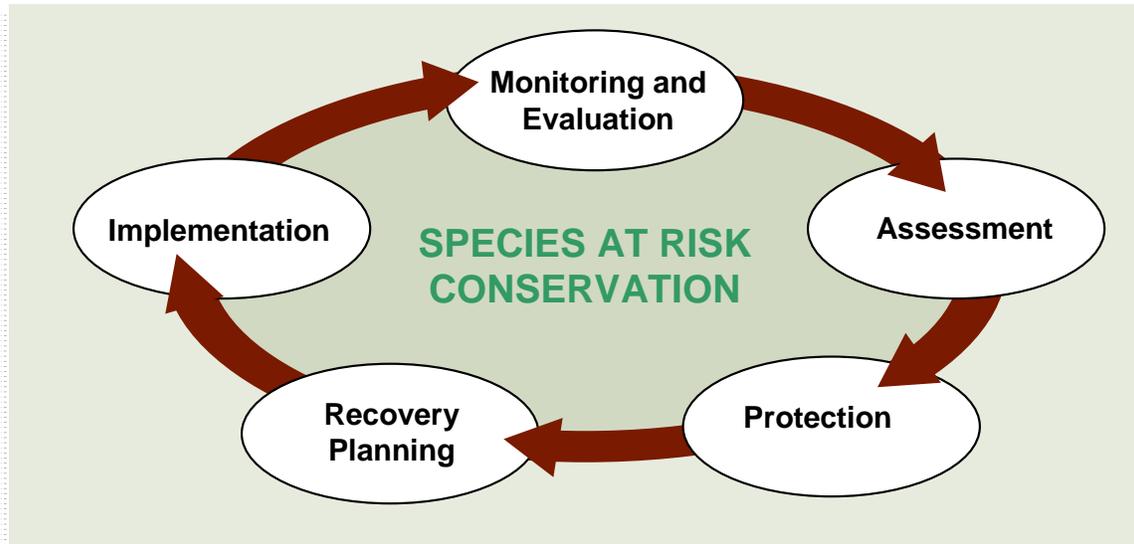
- facilitate coordination and cooperation among jurisdictions involved with species at risk;
- encourage greater national coherence and consistency in jurisdictional policies and procedures; and
- provide a context and common ground for federal-provincial-territorial bilateral agreements.

The federal government is finalizing policies to guide its actions under each of the five related components of the species at risk conservation cycle that is embodied in SARA: species status assessment, protection, recovery planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The policies describe the roles and responsibilities of relevant federal departments and explain the expected contributions to the implementation of SARA by the provinces and territories, as well as by other stakeholders. It is expected that the policies will continue to be refined and updated as more experience is gained in implementing SARA.

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## The Species at Risk Conservation Cycle



### 4. Initial Accomplishments

#### **Banff Springs Snail and the Species at Risk Conservation Cycle**

*The Banff Springs Snail is an endemic species found only on federal land under Parks Canada jurisdiction. Protection and recovery efforts for the Banff Springs Snail have undergone the full SARA cycle: assessment, listing and protection, recovery planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.*

#### **Assessment of Species**

SARA separates the process for conducting scientific assessments of the conservation status of wildlife species from the decision to add a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. This enables scientists to provide independent scientific assessments while reserving for elected officials the role of deciding whether or not to add the species to the List triggering the protection provided by the Act.

Using internationally recognized criteria, COSEWIC provides its assessments of the status of wildlife species and reasons for it to the Minister of the Environment and to the CESCC. There are now 572 species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern and Extirpated.

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- *Extirpated species no longer exist in the wild in Canada, but exist elsewhere in the world.*
  - *Endangered species face imminent extirpation or extinction.*
  - *Threatened species are likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to their extirpation or extinction.*
  - *Species of special concern may become threatened or endangered because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.*

COSEWIC has worked to ensure that its assessment process meets the requirements of the Act. In anticipation of the enactment of SARA, COSEWIC updated its assessment criteria, basing its changes on the criteria used by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). COSEWIC developed a procedure for incorporating community knowledge into its species status assessments. A subcommittee on Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK)<sup>6</sup> developed a draft process and protocol guidelines for including ATK in COSEWIC assessments.

### **Polar Bear and ATK**

*In April 2008, COSEWIC announced its reassessment of the Polar Bear as a species of special concern. A greater effort was made to include ATK in its assessment, and a greater and more consistent inclusion of ATK was presented. Other species assessments in which ATK was used to some degree include the Peary Caribou, Chinook Salmon (Okanagan population), the Beluga Whale, and the Wolverine.*

### **Listing and Legal Protection**

SARA specifies a systematic decision-making process by which the federal government must consider COSEWIC assessments and decide whether to add a species to Schedule 1 (the List of Wildlife Species at Risk).

- Each COSEWIC species assessment received by the Minister of the Environment is posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry, at [www.sararegistry.gc.ca/default\\_e.cfm](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/default_e.cfm).
- On receiving a copy of the assessment, the Minister then has 90 days to publish a response statement and to the extent possible provide timelines for action.

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<sup>6</sup> ATK includes, but is not limited to, the knowledge that Aboriginal Peoples have accumulated about wildlife species and their environment. ATK can incorporate aspects of culture, spirituality and history. Therefore, peoples with different backgrounds (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) may define ATK in different ways.

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- Within 9 months of receiving the COSEWIC assessment, the Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister of the Environment, must decide whether or not to accept the assessment and add the species to the List. The Governor in Council may also refer the assessment back to COSEWIC for further information or consideration.
  - If the Governor in Council does not make a decision within 9 months of receiving an assessment, the Minister of the Environment must amend the List in accordance with COSEWIC's recommendation.

Listing decisions are subject to the Cabinet Directive on Streamlining Regulation, which requires consultations with affected parties and a description of the socio-economic impacts of the decision. Listing decisions are published in the *Canada Gazette*, and include regulatory impact analysis statements. Explanatory notes are published if a species is not added to Schedule 1 or is referred back to COSEWIC.

- *When SARA came into force in June 2003, Schedule 1 (the List of Wildlife Species at Risk) included 233 species that had been reassessed by COSEWIC in anticipation of the coming into force of the Act.*
  - *As of May 1, 2009, the Governor in Council had received an additional 258 assessments from COSEWIC.*
  - *In addition there have been 34 confirmations of the status of species already listed in Schedule 1.*
  - *As of May 1, 2009, the Governor in Council had listed an additional 213 species, for a total of 447 species on Schedule 1 (one species has been removed from Schedule 1).*
  - *For some species, there has been a need for extensive consultation after the Minister received the assessment from COSEWIC but before receipt by the Governor in Council. As of May 1, 2009, the responsible departments had conducted extended consultations for 83 species. In all, the assessments for 37 of these 83 species have been received by the Governor in Council and 14 of these have been listed.*
  - *The Governor in Council has decided not to list 22 species. Reasons cited included significant potential socio-economic impacts (e.g., for the fishing industry). The Governor in Council has also referred another 12 species assessments back to COSEWIC for more information. It is likely that these latter species assessments will return to the Governor in Council for a final decision on whether to list the species.*

The decision to list a species as extirpated, endangered or threatened triggers legal protections. In particular, SARA makes it an offence to

- kill, harm, harass, capture or take an individual of a wildlife species that is listed as an extirpated species, an endangered species or a threatened species;

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- possess, collect, buy, sell or trade an individual of a wildlife species that is listed as an extirpated species, an endangered species or a threatened species, or any part or derivative of such an individual; or
  - damage or destroy the residence of one or more individuals of a wildlife species that is listed as an endangered species or a threatened species, or that is listed as an extirpated species if a recovery strategy has recommended the reintroduction of the species into the wild in Canada.

These prohibitions automatically apply to

- listed aquatic species throughout Canada;
- listed birds covered by the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994*, wherever they are found in Canada; and
- all other listed species found on federal lands.

For listed species other than aquatic species and migratory birds on non-federal lands in a province or territory, SARA recognizes that provinces and territories have the first opportunity to protect the species through their laws. If the provinces or territories concerned do not act, SARA provides a safety net that permits the Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister of the Environment, to order the application of SARA prohibitions in the province or territory concerned for a given species. The Minister *must* make this recommendation if, after consultation with the provincial or territorial minister concerned, the Minister finds that the species or the residence of its individuals are not effectively protected. The federal government has not invoked these safety net provisions to date.

Ministers may also enter into agreements or issue *permits* authorizing activities affecting listed species that would otherwise be prohibited under SARA. The departments have established permitting systems for activities such as scientific research related to the conservation of a listed species and fishing or other activity that incidentally affects a listed species without jeopardizing its survival or recovery.

**Compliance promotion** and **enforcement** activities support the prohibitions. Compliance promotion encourages compliance through activities that help build awareness of legal requirements.<sup>7</sup>

### **Spotted, Northern and Atlantic Wolffish**

*In Newfoundland and Labrador, communication and education activities, as well as collaboration with fishers to promote the live release of wolffish, demonstrated the importance of stakeholder engagement in promoting compliance to achieve protection and recovery objectives.*

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<sup>7</sup> Current guidance documents include *SARA and You* and *Permitting Qs and As*.

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Enforcement is undertaken by wildlife enforcement officers, fishery officers and park wardens trained and designated under SARA to monitor, inspect, investigate and enforce the prohibitions of the Act. In most cases, these officials carry out enforcement activities under SARA in addition to their enforcement duties under other federal laws, such as the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994*, the *Fisheries Act* and the *Canada National Parks Act*. By 2007, 45 wildlife enforcement officers, over 600 fisheries officers and 185 park wardens<sup>8</sup> had been trained and designated under SARA.

### Northern Abalone

*In April 2007, three people convicted in British Columbia of illegally harvesting Northern Abalone were sentenced under SARA, and faced the stiffest penalties ever exacted. Such enforcement efforts strengthen the overall effectiveness of protection and recovery measures.*

**Environmental assessment** also supports the protection of species at risk. When an environmental assessment of a project is required, as under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, for example, SARA requires the identification of the adverse effects of the project on all listed wildlife species and their critical habitats, and if the project is carried out, requires that measures be taken to avoid or lessen those effects and that they be monitored. The measures must be taken in a way that is consistent with any applicable recovery strategy and action plans. The 2004 *Environmental Assessment Best Practice Guide for Wildlife at Risk in Canada* outlines a national approach for assessing the consequences of proposed action and for making decisions consistent with the protection and recovery of species at risk.

### Recovery Planning

Species recovery includes a wide range of measures to restore populations of species at risk. SARA requires the competent ministers to prepare **Recovery Strategies** and **Action Plans** for all species listed on Schedule 1 as extirpated, endangered or threatened for which recovery is deemed technically and biologically feasible.

Ministers work cooperatively to develop recovery strategies with others, including provincial and territorial governments when species are found in their jurisdictions, and in cooperation with wildlife management boards, Aboriginal groups, landowners, resource users and any other potentially affected parties. The recovery teams formed to develop Recovery Strategies are typically composed of experts from universities, conservation groups, industry and government.

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<sup>8</sup> On May 9, 2008, the Government of Canada announced improvements to law enforcement abilities in Canada's National Parks and authorized the Parks Canada Agency to create up to 100 armed park warden positions. These park wardens are fully dedicated specialists in law enforcement. They are responsible for enforcing all legislation related to Parks Canada's full mandate, including the *Canada National Parks Act* and the *Species at Risk Act*. Park wardens began their duties under the new Parks Canada law enforcement program in May 2009.

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Recovery Strategies must identify threats to the species and their habitats, identify **critical habitat** to the extent possible based on the best available information, and set recovery goals. The identification of the critical habitat that is necessary for the survival or recovery of a listed species is intended to guide recovery planning. SARA grants various powers to allow the federal government to protect critical habitat identified in recovery strategies and action plans against destruction.

- *The first deadline for completion of recovery strategies under SARA was January 2006.*
- *SARA timelines required final recovery strategies for 288 species as of May 1, 2009.*
- *Recovery strategies for 108 species are now posted as final or proposed, and work on strategies for 180 additional species has begun and many are in final stages of completion.*
- *Critical habitat has been identified for 21 of the species with finalized recovery strategies.*
- *Numerous additional recovery strategies will become due between now and 2012.*

Recovery planning requires extensive consultation and cooperation with a wide range of governments and affected parties. These consultations can be complex and time-consuming in the case of species that are broadly distributed or that affect remote and northern communities.

### **Piping Plover and Critical Habitat**

*Critical habitat identification proved to be a challenge in the case of recovery efforts for the Piping Plover, which involved working through issues pertaining to the scale at which critical habitat should be identified and the cooperation, consultation and time frame requirements imposed by SARA. Similar issues exist for many other species, including aquatic species.*

Following the development of the Recovery Strategies, SARA requires the competent minister to develop an **Action Plan** for the recovery of each listed species. Each plan should follow the approach and timelines set out in its species recovery strategy. Where critical habitat is not identified in the recovery strategy, it must be identified in the action plan to the extent possible based on best available information.

Where a wildlife species is listed as a species of special concern, SARA also requires ministers to prepare **management plans** for the species and its habitat. Of the species listed under Schedule 1, these are in the lowest risk category. A management plan sets

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out measures to conserve a species and its habitat, and is developed in much the same way as a recovery strategy.

- SARA requires management plans within five years for the special concern species that were on Schedule 1 when the Act came into force and within three years for species listed as special concern thereafter.
- Final management plans for three species are in the Species at Risk Public Registry, and plans for 37 others are under development.

### ***Implementation***

Many conservation and recovery actions for species at risk, including the existence of recovery teams and actions undertaken in partnership with various stakeholders, predated SARA. Many of these continue to be key aspects of implementation, along with new actions established under the Act.

#### **Plains Bison**

*Although the Plains Bison was not listed under SARA, it was successfully reintroduced into the Grasslands National Park, an achievement that represents an important recovery effort for the species and provides grazing essential to the restoration of the endangered native prairie grassland ecosystem.*

#### **Successful Recovery of the Sea Otter**

*After being extirpated in Canada, Sea Otter were reintroduced on the west coast of Vancouver Island in 1969-72. Significant improvement in the population of the Sea Otter is evidenced by the downgrading of status in successive COSEWIC assessments: endangered in 1978 and 1986, threatened in 1996 and 2000, species of special concern in 2007.*

In most cases, effective recovery effort involves a wide cross-section of Canadian society. Cooperative work on recovery implementation with provinces and territories and wildlife management boards has been supported by formal agreements. Work with other stakeholders has involved several stewardship funds and programs, as well as outreach and educational efforts.

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### Critical Habitat and Protection

*Critical habitat does not have to be directly protected by the powers of SARA:*

- *Critical habitat for aquatic species can be protected by the Fisheries Act, the Oceans Act, or other applicable legislation or a conservation agreement.*
- *The critical habitat for species found on lands administered by the Parks Canada Agency can be protected under the Canada National Parks Act, the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act, the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park Act or any other applicable legislation.*

The federal government has supported stewardship actions under SARA by improving knowledge about the distribution and abundance of many species. Efforts have also been made to strengthen the scientific capacity to assess the impact of threats and learn about effective technologies for mitigating threats and protecting habitat. This new information is enabling the federal government and its partners to design more effective protection and recovery efforts.

### Recovery Activities

*Recovery activities supported to date include habitat restoration projects, changes in fishing patterns and methods, changes in land use, negotiation of conservation agreements with landowners, signage or fencing projects, captive breeding of species at risk and their release into the wild, land acquisition, captive broodstock programs, reintroductions, enhancement and naturalization of riparian habitat, reduction of agricultural waste, rescue of entangled marine animals, and removal of ghost nets and illegal nets.*

SARA enables the federal government to encourage the conservation efforts of individual Canadians and communities through provisions for funding programs, conservation agreements and joint programs.

- Since 2000, the **Habitat Stewardship Program** (HSP) has allocated \$95 million to more than 1620 projects to protect habitat, mitigate threats and support other activities identified in recovery strategies. These projects have in turn leveraged an additional \$232 million for a total investment of \$327 million in stewardship projects to support the recovery of species at risk. Projects under the HSP addressed both habitat conservation and threat mitigation, benefiting over 300 COSEWIC-designated species each year. The HSP has generated partnerships with over 200 organizations. Since 2004, the HSP has contributed to the legal protection of over 70,000 ha of habitat and to temporary protection measures on an average of 186,500 ha every year. Moreover, an average of nearly 32,000 ha of habitat have been improved every year.

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- The ***Endangered Species Recovery Fund*** is a joint initiative between Environment Canada and World Wildlife Fund–Canada to support research and education by scientists and conservation advocates. Since 1988, over \$9.8 million has been invested in over 700 projects.
  - Over the last five years, the ***Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk*** has provided \$10.1 million to 333 projects to support Aboriginal organizations and communities involvement in recovery actions and the protection of critical habitat on Aboriginal lands.
  - The ***Natural Areas Conservation Program*** provides matching funds to assist non-profit NGOs in securing privately held ecologically sensitive lands for conservation. Since 2007, 336 properties covering more than 1036 km<sup>2</sup> have been acquired, protecting habitat for 74 species at risk and other elements of biodiversity. The program is expected to secure more than 2000 km<sup>2</sup> of ecologically sensitive land across Canada.
  - In its first seven years, the ***Interdepartmental Recovery Fund*** allocated \$14.5 million to 480 projects from eight federal departments and four Crown corporations.

### **Outreach and Volunteer Stewardship**

*A Parks Canada project in Kejimikujik National Park encourages park visitors, local community members and Aboriginal communities to work with scientists and stewardship coordinators in support of recovery efforts for species at risk in the area. Over 230 people have been involved, donating over 10 000 hours.*

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Under SARA, the Minister of the Environment reports on the general status of wildlife species in Canada. *Wild Species 2005* reported that the status of 70% of the 7732 species assessed was secure.

In addition to five-year reports on the status of wildlife in Canada, SARA requires some additional monitoring and evaluation:

- COSEWIC must review the classification of a species at least once every 10 years.
- Ministers must report on the implementation of a recovery strategy every five years until its objectives have been achieved or the species' recovery is no longer feasible; on the implementation of each action plan and its ecological and socio-economic impacts five years after the plan comes into effect; and on steps taken to protect unprotected critical habitat every 180 days until the habitat is protected or is no longer identified as critical habitat.
- Ministers must monitor the implementation of management plans for species of special concern every five years until their objectives have been met.

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Current monitoring and evaluation activities focus on determining the effectiveness of protection and recovery measures, measuring progress towards achieving recovery or management goals and detecting changes in the status of species.

The July 2006 *Formative Evaluation of Species at Risk Programs* provided recommendations based on the early implementation of SARA. The December 2006 *Minister's Round Table* complemented this with a dialogue among a wide range of groups on how to improve the conservation and recovery of species. The recommendations and responses from these participants contributed to various improvements in the implementation of SARA, including:

- Departmental governance, coordination and accountability has been strengthened through an *Interdepartmental Action Plan* that identifies core priorities, and the *Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework* and *Risk-Based Audit Framework*, which together define expected results and performance and risk indicators.
- *Greater engagement of Aboriginal peoples* in species at risk conservation has included the development of a strategy for consultation with Aboriginal peoples, ministerial appointments to COSEWIC's ATK Subcommittee in 2007, and work through the Aboriginal Capacity Building Fund and the Aboriginal Critical Habitat Protection Fund.
- SARA policies, bilateral agreements with provinces and the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board MOU (as described above) were developed.
- *Socio-economic assessment* among federal departments has been strengthened through better coordination and the sharing of best practices.

The second *Minister's Round Table* was held in December 2008 as a forum for dialogue with stakeholders on the conservation and recovery of species at risk in Canada.

## 5. Path Forward

The first five years of implementation of SARA have been challenging for the departments responsible for the Act. The 233 species that were already listed on Schedule 1 when the Act came into force triggered a significant number of time-bound obligations that the responsible departments needed to complete while concurrently working to develop governance processes and policies to guide decision making under the Act. With formal governance structures and implementation policies now in place and with practices improving, the pace of implementation throughout the SARA cycle is now improving.

The responsible federal departments and all other affected parties and stakeholders still have much to learn, as more and more species move through the SARA cycle and into the action planning and recovery implementation stages.

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## ***Ecosystem Approaches***

Learning how to use ecosystem and multi-species approaches will be an important part of the path forward. These approaches can make it easier to recognize and address overlaps in species range and needs, positive conservation synergies, interdependencies and potential conflicts, and common underlying problems. There are more than 20 multi-species and area-based ecosystem recovery initiatives underway in Canada. The scientific knowledge, experience and working relationships gained through these efforts will help support expanded use of ecosystem approaches under SARA.

### **Garry Oak Ecosystem**

*An ecosystem approach has helped the federal government to address SARA's requirements for a number of species at risk in the Garry Oak ecosystem of southwestern British Columbia.*

## ***Mobilizing Cooperative Efforts for Protection and Recovery***

The assessment, protection and recovery of species at risk in Canada have received much more formal and structured attention since SARA was enacted. Ultimately, however, helping species at risk to survive or recover is “everybody’s business,” and the ongoing success of SARA will depend on the actions of governments, Aboriginal peoples, conservation organizations, landowners, fishers, resource users and other interested people across Canada.

Cooperation and coordination with provinces and territories is especially important under SARA. Various provinces and territories have introduced or strengthened their own legislation and, since SARA was passed, there has been a marked increase in provincial and territorial efforts to protect species at risk.

## ***SARA and the Ongoing Conservation Agenda***

Finally, by focusing on the species facing the greatest risk of extinction, SARA plays an important role in the overall efforts to conserve biodiversity in Canada. That role will continue to evolve with the ongoing development of integrated approaches that use the powers of SARA in conjunction with the range of other available tools and a broad understanding of ecosystem features, functions, trends and influences. This approach will permit preventive approaches, early intervention and effective conservation of wildlife species at risk and management of ecosystem health and biodiversity in Canada.

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## Management of Species at Risk in Canada: Milestones

### 1978

- The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) began assessing wildlife species and classifying their chances of survival.

### 1988

- The Wildlife Ministers' Council of Canada established the committee on the Recovery of Nationally Endangered Wildlife (RENEW).

### 1992

- Canada signed the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and committed to protect endangered and threatened wildlife.

### 1996

- Federal, provincial and territorial governments endorsed the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk, agreeing to develop laws and programs that work together to protect species at risk and their habitat throughout the country.

### 1999

- COSEWIC adopted quantitative criteria based on the criteria developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature to assess and classify wildlife species at risk.

### 2000

- Budget 2000 committed \$180 million over five years for a national strategy for species at risk; by fiscal year 2003–2004 the allotment was an ongoing \$45 million per year.
- The Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk became operational.

### 2001

- The Interdepartmental Recovery Fund was created to protect critical habitat on federal lands.

### 2002

- The *Species at Risk Act* was passed by Parliament, with 233 species listed on Schedule 1.

### 2003

- Budget 2003 committed \$93 million over four years for the implementation of SARA, in addition to the ongoing funding of \$45 million per year approved in Budget 2000.
- SARA sections 1, 134 to 136 and 138 to 141 came into force on March 24. Sections 2 to 31, 37 to 56, 62, 65 to 76, 78 to 84, 120 to 133 and 137 came into force on June 5.

### 2004

- The remaining sections (32 to 36, 57 to 61, 63, 64, 77, and 85 to 119) came into force on June 1.

### 2005

- 112 species were added to Schedule 1.
- A bilateral agreement on species at risk was signed with British Columbia.
- The National Aboriginal Council on Species at Risk was established.
- The Species at Risk Advisory Committee was established.

### 2006

- 44 species were added to Schedule 1.
- 68 recovery strategies were posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry.
- The National Framework for Species at Risk Conservation was approved.
- The first Minister's Round Table on SARA was held.

### 2007

- Budget 2007 committed \$110 million over two years for the implementation of SARA, to bring total annual funding for SARA to \$100 million per year.
- 36 species were added to Schedule 1.
- 25 recovery strategies were posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry.
- Bilateral agreements were signed with Quebec and Saskatchewan.

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## 2008

- 29 COSEWIC assessments were received by the Governor in Council (11 endangered, 5 threatened, 12 species of special concern, and one plant that is on Schedule 1 as threatened and that COSEWIC has assessed as not at risk and is now being considered for delisting from Schedule 1).
- 39 COSEWIC assessments were posted on the SARA registry.
- 17 recovery strategies covering a total of 22 species were posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry.
- A memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board was signed.
- The second Minister's Round Table on SARA was held.

## 2009

- The National Roundtable on Polar Bears was held.
- The report *The Status of Wild Species in Canada (SARA General Status Report 2003–2008: Overview Document)* was posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry.
- The Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development began its five-year statutory review of the *Species at Risk Act*.
- As of May 2009, 23 species had been added to Schedule 1. In addition, five already listed species had been reclassified and one species removed from the List.
- As of May 2009, five recovery strategies had been posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry.