

# Queensnake

## Ontario Government Response Statement



### PROTECTING AND RECOVERING SPECIES AT RISK IN ONTARIO

Species at risk recovery is a key part of protecting Ontario's biodiversity. Biodiversity – the variety of living organisms on Earth – provides us with clean air and water, food, fibre, medicine and other resources that we need to survive.

The *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) is the Government of Ontario's legislative commitment to protecting and recovering species at risk and their habitats. As soon as a species is listed as extirpated, endangered or threatened under the ESA, it is automatically protected from harm or harassment. Also, immediately upon listing, the habitats of endangered and threatened species are protected from damage or destruction.

Under the ESA, the Ministry of Natural Resources (the Ministry) must ensure that a recovery strategy is prepared for each species that is listed as endangered or threatened. A recovery strategy provides science-based advice to government on what is required to achieve recovery of a species.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STATEMENTS

Within nine months after a recovery strategy is prepared, the ESA requires the Ministry to publish a statement summarizing the government's intended actions and priorities in response to the recovery strategy. The recovery strategy for Queensnake was completed on February 18, 2011 ([http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Species/2ColumnSubPage/STDPROD\\_075653.html](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Species/2ColumnSubPage/STDPROD_075653.html)).

The response statement is the government's policy response to the scientific advice provided in the recovery strategy. In addition to the strategy, input on the response statement was requested from stakeholders, other jurisdictions, Aboriginal communities and members of the public. The statement reflects the best available traditional, local and scientific knowledge at this time and may be adapted if new information becomes available. In implementing the actions in the response statement, the ESA allows the Ministry to determine what is feasible, taking into account social and economic factors.

The Queensnake is a non-venomous, slender snake that can reach up to 60 cm in length. It is an aquatic species and prefers smaller streams and rivers with good water quality where it can hunt for crayfish (their primary food source).

## MOVING FORWARD TO PROTECT AND RECOVER QUEENSNAKE

The Queensnake is listed as an endangered species under the ESA, which protects both the animal and its habitat. The ESA prohibits harm or harassment of the species and damage or destruction of its habitat without authorization. Such authorization would require that conditions established by the Ministry be met.

The Queensnake occurs discontinuously west of the Niagara Escarpment, from northern Bruce Peninsula south to Lake Erie and west to Essex County and has always been relatively uncommon throughout these areas. The Queensnake feeds almost exclusively on crayfish, especially freshly-moulted individuals that are softer and easier to swallow, making it sensitive to changes in crayfish populations. Threats affecting Queensnakes include habitat loss and degradation, intentional and unintentional human-caused mortality, genetic isolation, pollution and invasive species.

**The government's goal for the recovery of Queensnake is to halt further decline and to achieve stable or increasing populations of Queensnake in Ontario throughout the current distribution. The government supports investigating the feasibility of reintroducing populations at historic locations within the Ontario range.**

Protecting and recovering species at risk is a shared responsibility. No single agency or organization has the knowledge, authority or financial resources to protect and recover all of Ontario's species at risk. Successful recovery requires inter-governmental co-operation and the involvement of many individuals, organizations and communities.

In developing the government response statement, the Ministry considered what actions are feasible for the government to lead directly and what actions are feasible for the government to support its conservation partners to undertake.

### GOVERNMENT-LED ACTIONS

To help protect and recover the Queensnake, the government will directly undertake the following actions:

- Develop a survey protocol to be used by proponents and partners to detect the presence or absence of Queensnake.
- Educate other agencies and authorities involved in planning and environmental assessment processes on the protection requirements under the ESA.
- Encourage the submission of Queensnake observation data to the Ministry's central repository at the Natural Heritage Information Centre or to the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas.
- Undertake communications and outreach to increase public awareness of species at risk in Ontario.
- Protect the Queensnake and its habitat through the ESA. Develop and enforce a regulation identifying the specific habitat of the species.

- Support conservation, agency, municipal and industry partners to undertake activities to protect and recover the Queensnake. Support will be provided through funding, agreements, permits (including conditions) and advisory services.
- Establish and communicate annual priority actions for government support across multiple species in order to encourage collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.

## GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED ACTIONS

The government endorses the following actions as being necessary for the protection and recovery of the Queensnake. Actions identified as “high” will be given priority consideration for funding or for authorizations under the ESA. The government will focus its support on these high-priority actions over the next five years.

### Focus Area: **Monitoring and Research**

**Objective:** Increase knowledge of distribution, abundance, life history, threats, and habitat needs of Queensnake and their prey species in Ontario.

#### **Actions:**

1. **(HIGH)** Develop and implement a long-term monitoring and survey program in extant and historic locations as well as within nearby suitable habitat to:
  - determine the distribution and abundance of Queensnake,
  - identify the primary crayfish prey species and their distribution and abundance, and
  - track any invasions of Rusty Crayfish.
2. **(HIGH)** Investigate the impacts Rusty Crayfish and other invasive species may have on Queensnake and native crayfish populations.
3. **(HIGH)** Identify the location of key habitat features such as hibernacula, gestation, and birthing sites.
4. Conduct research to address priority knowledge gaps related to Queensnake including the determination of:
  - home range sizes,
  - habitat needs and use for all life stages,
  - the extent of genetic isolation and gene flow between sub-populations of the species, and
  - the level of chemical contaminant within Queensnakes, their prey, and the water they occur in.
5. Investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of reintroducing the species into historic habitat areas.

### Focus Area: **Protection and Management**

**Objective:** Develop and implement measures to maintain and enhance the quantity and quality of Queensnake habitat and reduce or mitigate threats to the Queensnake.

#### **Actions:**

6. **(HIGH)** Develop and field test a manual for landowners, planners and conservation partners that provides a summary of the best management practices to restore, maintain and protect Queensnake habitat.

7. Develop, implement and evaluate mitigation measures for priority threats to Queensnake and its prey species.
8. As opportunities arise, support the securement of lands that contain Queensnake populations through existing land securement and stewardship programs.

**Focus Area:** Awareness

**Objective:** Increase public awareness about the distribution, habitat and stewardship opportunities related to Queensnake.

**Actions:**

9. Evaluate existing communications and outreach approaches and develop new strategies that will have a positive impact on people's behaviours.
10. Deliver effective communications and outreach to key stakeholders, including landowners and land managers within the range of Queensnake to increase awareness on the species, its habitat, and stewardship options.
11. Work with broader recovery efforts, conservation groups and initiatives to implement recovery actions on a watershed basis.

## IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Financial support for the implementation of actions may be available through the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program or Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program. Conservation partners are encouraged to discuss project proposals related to the actions in this response statement with the Ministry. The Ministry can also advise if any authorizations under the ESA or other legislation may be required to undertake the project.

Implementation of the actions may be subject to changing priorities across the multitude of species at risk, available resources and the capacity of partners to undertake recovery activities. Where appropriate, the implementation of actions for multiple species will be co-ordinated across government response statements.

## REVIEWING PROGRESS

The ESA requires the Ministry to conduct a review of progress towards protecting and recovering a species not later than five years from the publication of this response statement. The review will help identify if adjustments are needed to achieve the protection and recovery of the Queensnake.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all those who participated in the development of the “Recovery Strategy for the Queensnake in Ontario” for their dedication to protecting and recovering species at risk.

### **For additional information:**

Visit the species at risk website at  
[ontario.ca/speciesatrisk](http://ontario.ca/speciesatrisk)

Contact your MNR district office

Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre

1-800-667-1940

TTY 1-866-686-6072

[mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca](mailto:mnr.nric.mnr@ontario.ca)

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