

Brief Overview of the SARA Minister's Round Table

November 17, 2014

The Species at Risk Act (SARA) requires that, at least every two years, the federal Minister of the Environment convene a round table of persons interested in matters respecting the protection of wildlife species at risk in Canada.

The fifth SARA round table was held in Ottawa on November 17, 2014 and involved representatives from government, Aboriginal communities, industry, wildlife management boards, ranchers, hunters and trappers, and non-governmental organizations.

The discussion focused on areas where the Federal government can increase collective success in conserving species at risk and improve implementation of SARA. These included Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK), SARA and the North, and efforts to enhance stewardship in the protection of species at risk.

Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge

Participants identified a number of key elements needed for effective and appropriate consideration of ATK in SARA implementation, including: an ongoing commitment to considering and applying ATK throughout the SARA process; funding and other support for working with ATK holders; ongoing education and awareness efforts; adequate infrastructure to work with ATK holders to gather ATK (e.g., Wildlife Management Boards and processes in place in communities); and increased process flexibility in applying this knowledge.

A need for increased transparency and upfront communication about the objectives, intentions, and requirements of project or program was identified by numerous participants. For Aboriginal communities, it must be clear how and why they are being engaged in providing their ATK and how their ATK is going to be specifically applied. Participants noted that Aboriginal communities are more likely to work with the Federal government if project or program leaders “close the loop” with ATK holders, explaining how and why their ATK was applied and the outcomes of the initiative.

Participants also suggested that the Federal government increase the role, authority and capacity of Aboriginal communities to participate in all stages of the SARA implementation process, including the gathering and incorporation of ATK. They also noted the importance of enhanced access to funding by ATK holders and their communities to build longer-term capacity to support conservation of species at risk.

SARA and the North

With respect to the North, participants called for greater collaboration, coordination, education and communication among and between all levels of government, wildlife management boards,

and communities, as early as possible in the SARA process. This requires fostering greater awareness of existing legislative and policy frameworks in the North, ensuring that participants are informed and truly understand how their advice and recommendations will be incorporated into all stages of the decision-making process, and working towards more meaningful communication and engagement with people on the ground (i.e. people who live with the species and are custodians of the land).

They also noted the importance of working proactively to take conservation action before species become at risk in the North. This includes working more actively with wildlife management land use planning boards and making funding available to support a range of data and planning needs in the North. Participants also highlighted the need to adopt landscape and ecosystem approaches when dealing with species at risk, as opposed to focusing on individual species. At the same time, they noted that at present neither the wildlife management boards nor the land use planning boards have adequate data or resources to address cumulative effects on species.

Enhancing Stewardship

An overall theme emerging from the discussion on stewardship was the importance of maintaining an early, open, and transparent dialogue between the Federal government, other levels of government, land owners and land managers. Participants emphasized that this is crucial to the longer-term success of protection and recovery efforts.

Participants welcomed the Federal government's interest in innovative stewardship tools, while noting that existing tools should not be neglected. They suggested that the Federal government look at successful efforts in other jurisdictions (e.g. the US Endangered Species Act), as well as existing voluntary initiatives that stakeholders are familiar with (e.g. environmental farm plans, agricultural beneficial management practices, industry certification), and market-based incentives such as the Alternative Land Use Services program or habitat banks.

Overall, participants emphasized there is no one-size fits all solution to stewardship, and that what might work for a small landowner is very different from what will work for a large resource developer. They noted that effective stewardship tools will likely demonstrate the following characteristics: be results-based; have adequate monitoring; be adaptive and flexible; and be informed by science and local/community knowledge.

Participants underscored the importance of results-based stewardship actions moving forward, and advised the Federal government develop concrete next steps for initiating pilot projects for conservation agreements and other stewardship tools under the Act.

List of Participating Organizations

Alberta Beef Producers

Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers

Canadian Cattlemen's Association

Canadian Electricity Association

Canadian Federation of Agriculture

Canadian Federation of Outfitter Associations

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society

Canadian Wildlife Federation

Coastal Forest Products Association

COSEWIC ATK Subcommittee

County of Forty Mile

Credit Valley Conservation

Cypress County

Earth Rangers

Forest Products Association of Canada

Gwich'in Renewable Resources Board

Kitikmeot Regional Wildlife Board

Kivalliq Wildlife Board

LIFT Philanthropy Partners

Lower Similkameen Indian Band

Makivik Corporation

Nature Conservancy Canada

Nature Trust of New Brunswick

Northwest Territories Environment and Natural Resources

Nova Scotia Nature Trust

Nunavut Department of Environment, Wildlife Management

Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated

Qikiqtaaluk Wildlife Board

Sahtu Renewable Resources Board

Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association

Sustainable Canada

Vancouver Aquarium

Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board