



Media Release
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Sweeping exemptions would leave endangered species sliding toward extinction

Some 65 species have been waiting and waiting for habitat protection – on average for 19 years

Sixty-five species slated to receive mandatory habitat protection this summer under Ontario's Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA) may be out of luck if the government proceeds with sweeping exemptions to the act. A new analysis reveals that these species, listed as at-risk before the act was passed six years ago, have now been waiting an average of 19 years to have their habitat protected. Now that wait-time is about to be extended – in some cases, forever.

When the Act was passed in 2007, the Legislature decided to give MNR a six year grace period (one year before the act came into force, plus five additional years) to deal with habitat protection for dozen of species. The assumption was that MNR would do this incrementally over the years. But that didn't happen. And now the time is up.

"Almost every one of these 65 plants and animals is threatened by habitat loss. The vast majority (83%) have been listed as threatened or endangered for more than 10 years. Almost half have been listed for more than 20 years," says Dr. Anne Bell, director of conservation and education at Ontario Nature. "Yet the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) is proposing to waive ESA protection requirements for a broad suite of activities that would damage or destroy the places where these species survive."

A number of industries, including pits and quarries, housing development, waste management, hydro, renewable energy and mining, would now face much less rigorous requirements to protect the habitat of endangered species if these amendments were adopted. The net result would be a far lower standard of protection and a dramatic reduction in government oversight of harmful activities.

"MNR's proposed Orwellian changes to the ESA would rank human convenience and cost-cutting above the protection of some of Ontario's most endangered species," says Dan McDermott, director of the Ontario Chapter of Sierra Club Canada. "Such an Endangered Species Act would be unworthy of the name."

The proposed exemption would undermine protection not only for the 65 species that are due to receive habitat protection this summer, but for any species added to Ontario's endangered species list in the future. The exemption would also kick in every time habitat is newly protected under the ESA.

“This proposal gives the green light to those industries most responsible for habitat destruction, the primary threat to species in Ontario,” says Amber Ellis, executive director of Earthroots. “Rather than strengthening the act, it adds to the many extensions, exemptions, and loopholes that already exist, leaving species ever more vulnerable to clearcutting, mining and sprawl.”

MNR is proposing several other ESA exemptions at the same time, including a five-year exemption for forestry and permanent exemptions for existing pits and quarries and hydro facilities.

“This is short-sighted behaviour at its worst,” adds Bell. “It’s the very definition of ‘false economy.’ There are alternative revenue models available to help offset the cost of species protection. Other agencies are using them and so should MNR.”

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Ontario Nature protects wild species and wild spaces through conservation, education and public engagement. It connects thousands of individuals and communities with nature through conservation groups across the province (charitable registration #10737 8952 RR0001). For more information, visit www.ontarionature.org.

Earthroots is a grassroots environmental organization dedicated to the protection of Ontario's wilderness, wildlife and watersheds, through research, education and action. Earthroots acts on behalf of its supporters across Canada and empowers thousands of people each year to advocate for better environmental protection. For more information, visit www.earthroots.org.