



Ontario Government Abandons Endangered Species

Environmentalists decry Cabinet decision to gut law protecting imperilled wildlife

Toronto, May 31, 2013 – The provincial Cabinet announced today its approval of sweeping exemptions for industry under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA). Environmental organizations are incensed at the government’s abdication of its responsibility to protect and recover Ontario’s endangered plants and animals.

“This is the first major test of the new Cabinet’s commitment to the environment, and they have failed,” says Dr. Anne Bell, director of conservation and education at Ontario Nature. “They have turned their backs on the province’s most imperilled wildlife, and at a time when the federal government is poised to do the same.”

The new exemptions lower the standard of protection for endangered plants and animals across many industries, including forestry, pits and quarries, renewable energy, hydro, mining, infrastructure development, waste management, and commercial and residential development. They also dramatically reduce government oversight of activities affecting Ontario’s lakes, rivers, forests and wildlife.

“The scope of the exemptions is appalling,” says Amber Ellis, executive director of Earthroots. “The government has caved to industry and turned a deaf ear to all who believe in society’s duty to protect endangered species.”

Among the exemptions is a special five-year exemption for the forestry sector, which leaves forest-dwelling species like the threatened woodland caribou out in the cold. Listed as threatened in Canada in 2000, the woodland caribou has already lost about 50% of its historic range in Ontario and continues to decline, due to industrial activity.

“I guess we’ll need a new animal for the Canadian quarter,” says Dan McDermott, director of the Ontario Chapter of Sierra Club Canada.

“It’s hard to understand how Cabinet could choose to dismantle a law that was passed with broad public acclaim and support from all parties just six years ago,” adds Bell. “Looks like endangered species only had fair-weather friends at Queen’s Park.”

The costs of administering the ESA were one of the factors driving the decision. Environmentalists question, however, the wisdom of Cabinet's decision even from an economic perspective. A government study in 2009 determined the value of ecosystem services (pollination, carbon sequestration, soil retention, flood control, etc.) in southern Ontario alone at over \$84 billion per year.

“Wise management of this asset demands careful government oversight and enforcement of environmental laws and policies, not environmental deregulation,” says Bell. “Society simply can't afford to continue to lose species and degrade the natural environment.”

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Photos are available on request.

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.

The David Suzuki Foundation is a national charitable organization that uses science-based education and advocacy to catalyze social change and spur a more sustainable future www.davidsuzuki.org.

Backgrounder

These are just some of the dozens of species that are losing out on the protections promised under the Endangered Species Act, as a result of the new Cabinet-approved exemptions.



to sun themselves).

Spotted Turtle: First listed as at-risk in Canada in 1991, this mid-sized turtle with bright yellow spots is considered vulnerable and imperilled throughout most of its range in eastern North America. Habitat loss and degradation are a primary threat to this wetland species, which occurs in small populations separated by large distances in Ontario. Adding to the pressure on this species is collection for the pet trade and deaths on roads (which turtles may try to cross to find nesting areas or where they may lie



are becoming scarce in the southern boreal region.

Woodland Caribou: First listed as at-risk in Canada in 2000, woodland caribou (Canada's forest reindeer) continue to decline in many southern boreal forest areas, including in Ontario. Habitat loss and fragmentation that result from such activities as industrial forestry, mining, hydro corridors and roads, are the primary threats. In Ontario woodland caribou have lost about 50% of their historic range. Woodland caribou need large undisturbed forest areas to avoid predators such as wolves and these areas



Ontario houses the most critical portion of the Canadian population within Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence River and its tributaries. Habitat loss and degradation as a result of hydro-dam development, pollution and water level fluctuations are the primary threats to this species. American eels in Ontario are at about 3% of their mid-1980s abundance.

American Eel: First listed as at-risk in Canada in 2006, this species has suffered a rapid decline (up to a 95% decline for many populations), which has led to the closure of both the commercial and sport fisheries in Ontario. This migratory species has a fascinating life history: individuals spawn in the Sargasso Sea near Bermuda but spend most of their lives in fresh water habitats from Greenland to South America.



Bluehearts: First listed as at risk in Canada in 1985, this beautiful pale violet flower is imperilled throughout much of its range in the United States. Growing in hollows between sand dunes along the southern shores of Lake Huron, bluehearts are still found at only three known sites in Ontario. Habitat loss and degradation associated with cottage, residential, road and infrastructure development are the primary threats.



Least Bittern: First listed as at-risk in Canada in 2001, monitoring data indicate that this shy but fascinating wetland loving bird continues to decline. Habitat loss and degradation associated with the destruction and contamination of marshes are the primary threats in Ontario. Other

threats include recreational activities, toxins (pesticides) and collisions with cars, towers and fences.



Eastern Hog-nosed Snake: First listed as at-risk in Canada in 1997, this species is threatened by habitat loss and degradation associated with an expanding road network, agriculture and residential development. When threatened, the hog-nosed snake will flatten its neck and hiss – like a cobra – which, while harmless, can lead people to assume it is dangerous and destroy it.



Kentucky Coffeetree: First listed as at-risk in Canada in 1983, this beautiful shade tree with the giant pea-like seed pods is part of the Carolinian forest, located within the most biologically diverse and threatened region in Ontario, which stretches along the north shore of Lake Erie and wraps the western tip of Lake Ontario. Habitat loss and degradation associated with logging and wetland drainage are the primary threats.