

Conserving Species and Spaces at Risk

The vast majority of Canadians want to protect endangered and threatened species. The federal government's three-part strategy to protect species at risk consists of the following actions: to build on the 1996 Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk agreed to by federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for wildlife; to promote stewardship and incentive programs to assist citizens, organizations, Aboriginal peoples, land users, and private landowners who are helping to protect species and habitat; and to introduce a new Species at Risk Act. The proposed act would cover the following key elements of species preservation: listing — identifying which species are at risk; prohibitions — ensuring that species are protected; recovery — ensuring that there is a long-term plan for species restoration and survival; and habitat — ensuring that species have the space they need to live.

The survival of species depends on the availability of habitat, which, in turn, is related to ecosystem structures, functions, and processes. Efforts to protect species are increasingly focused on protecting, conserving, and restoring the ecosystems that provide essential habitat. For example, under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, waterfowl populations are being restored through initiatives that rehabilitate degraded ecosystems that provide critical waterfowl habitat throughout the continent.

In Canada, we are examining our ecosystems to determine which are under threat. The 1996 report entitled *Ecosystem-Based Planning Framework and Priority Areas for Action* ranks the Georgia Basin ecosystem as the highest priority for conservation action in British Columbia, based on the level of concern; the degree of threat to air, water, and habitat; and urgency. Ecosystems at risk are protected through a range of means in Canada, including ecological reserves, parks, national wildlife areas, national marine conservation areas, and Marine Protected Areas. But preserving some lands does not mean that Canada cannot influence decisions on the remaining land; we promote sustainable land use by providing information and tools to decision makers, by promoting private land stewardship, and by helping members of the public become involved in protecting the environment.