

# SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

## Species at risk...in our own backyard



Harbour Porpoise

The damp earthy smell, the rustle of the wind in the tree tops, the scurry of critters among the fallen leaves and the soft give of the soil as you trek through the forest. Or the smell of the salt sea air as your kayak rocks gently in the ocean's waves, the beautiful sight of the rocky coastline laced in bright, golden lichens. These peaceful images are familiar to Nova Scotians and in the heart of the outdoors it's easy to remember how precious the natural world is, how important it is. So why is it that the minute people step back into the city they happily fall back into their everyday routines and politely ignore the plight of the natural world?

There is a constant bombardment of horrific images of mutated frogs from the Brazilian rainforest or endangered cuddly pandas and fierce tigers. We watch documentaries and read newspaper articles and think about how we hope there are still such magnificent animals around when our children are alive. We send away donations to save the chimpanzees or the gorillas. It is painfully obvious that the loss of biodiversity is the most glaring environmental problem today. But, have you ever stopped to think about the species that are at risk right here in Canada and Nova Scotia and what's being done to help them? Quick, think of all the species you know. Now, eliminate some of them from existence. The Peregrine Falcon, the Leatherback Turtle, Atlantic Cod, Harbour Porpoise, Roseate Tern, Right Whale,

Piping Plover, and the Monarch Butterfly. All these animals hold official COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada) status.

COSEWIC, a government project, is responsible for designating how at risk a species is. Species are ranked in status categories of: extinct, extirpated, endangered, threatened, vulnerable, or not at risk. The aim of the project is to prevent species from becoming at risk. Partners in COSEWIC are provinces, territories, Federal Government (Canadian Wildlife Services and Fisheries and Oceans), WWF, Canadian Nature Federation, Canadian Wildlife Federation and others. As of April 1998, 307 Canadian species were listed, while in Nova Scotia alone 32 species had population numbers that were considered to be in serious decline and six species were extinct or extirpated. Given that Canada has many National and Provincial Parks, why are these population numbers still declining?

National and Provincial Parks were created with the sole purpose of providing areas for the benefit, education and enjoyment of future generations. There is an illusion that these parks are a haven for wildlife, a place where they are untouched and safe from human activity. Yet logging, farming and urbanization occurring alongside our National and Provincial Parks are all taking their toll on the wildlife living there. Furthermore, visitors to the park, transportation in and around the

parks and programs like fire suppression are having a big impact as well. So what exactly is being done for Nova Scotian species at risk?

There is a Wildlife Division of the Department of Natural Resources in Nova Scotia dedicated to Nova Scotian wildlife at risk. The mission of the Wildlife Division is to "promote and implement the principles and ethics of conservation and sustainable use of wildlife populations, habitats and ecosystems in Nova Scotia." There are a

number of programs in place to meet these goals. For example, there is a Large Mammal Program that has seven projects currently underway. These projects are designed to maintain White-tailed deer, Moose and Bear populations. These three large mammals are hunted in Nova Scotia. Management programs are in place to make sure the populations remain sustainable and that optimal recreation hunting can be realized. It is questionable whether these animals would be protected if they weren't important for recreational purposes.

There is also a Furbearers (small mammals with fur) and Up-land game program in place. Once again the projects are aimed at keeping populations sustainable and realizing optimal recreation hunting. It is interesting to note the number of projects that have been created out of pressure from hunters in the province. The Trappers Association of Nova Scotia (TANS) has been instrumental in tracking the status of species populations in Nova Scotia. It is absolutely amazing how many reports on species' population health are dependent on kill records, sightings and carcasses that are handed in by hunters. The government sees hunters as a cheap, knowledgeable source of informa-

tion.

RENEW: Recovery of Nationally Endangered Wildlife In Canada is another government project which is aimed at the recovery of species with formal species at risk status with the objective of preventing species from becoming extinct in Canada. It is quite evident however, that, for the most part, the programs and their projects are aimed at species that either have designated status (remember there are only 32 in Nova Scotia) or species that are harvestable and therefore have economic value.

Yet there are other programs such as the Terrestrial Habitat Program, which work in conjunction with the forestry and agricultural communities, to protect and enhance wildlife habitat and biodiversity in general. But the real snag in this, and similar programs, seems to be the designation process. In a time when we understand the need to protect and preserve biodiversity we seem to be stuck at the stage of categorizing, zoning, designating and allocating.

For information on the Wildlife Division of the Department of Natural Resources in Nova Scotia, visit: [www.gov.ns.ca/natr/WILD-LIFE/web/wildmiss.htm](http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/WILD-LIFE/web/wildmiss.htm)

### A deeper look into endangered species acts

There are a number of wildlife related Acts and Regulations in Nova Scotia.

- Wood Sustainability and Wildlife Habitat Regulations (Draft May 1999)
- Wildlife Act
- Wildlife Regulations
- Endangered Species Act
- Conservation Easements Act

To find out more about the individual Acts, Regulations and Programs here in Nova Scotia you can visit [www.gov.ns.ca/natr/WILDLIFE/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/natr/WILDLIFE/). In reality, when faced with the day to day challenges of student life, the daunting task of reading and assessing all the Acts and Regulations is almost comical in its absurdity. But there is still something you can do. This year *the Environment Act* is being reviewed.

In 1995 Nova Scotia's Department of the Environment introduced *The Environment Act*, a consolidation of legislation that protects the environment. Now, five years later, it is time to review the Act and make appropriate revisions. The Department of the Environment is seeking public input into the revisions. To find a copy of *The Environment Act*, visit the site: [www.gov.ns.ca/legi/legc/statutes/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/legi/legc/statutes/). To get a copy of the Public Discussion Paper see [www.gov.ns.ca/envi/dept/ess/public.htm](http://www.gov.ns.ca/envi/dept/ess/public.htm).

The Public Discussion Paper addresses the background of the Act and its successes and where the department can see changes need to be made. Basically the Department of the Environment sees three areas where changes must be made:

1) Definition of adverse effect.

*The Environment Act* defines an adverse effect as "an effect that impairs or damages the environment, including an adverse effect respecting the health of humans or the reasonable enjoyment of life or property". This definition has meant that the department has been put off track and wasted valuable resources dealing with odour and noise complaints in residential areas.

2) The efficiency of the Environmental Assessment Board.

This board is made up of three to five members who most importantly conduct investigations and studies and review environmental legislation. Basically they have been found to be superfluous.

3) The ability of Part VIII to regulate the management of contaminated sites.

When the Minister of the Environment designates a site contaminated, Part VIII of the environment act kicks in, basically giving the minister a wide range of ways to manage the contaminated site. But sites that are not designated leave the department with very little authority in managing them. The Department recognizes the following as key areas that need to be fixed:

- A formal or regulated requirement to report the existence of contaminated sites.
- Formally adopted remediation standards.
- A detailed process, including timelines, for reporting.
- A consistent and reliable approach for recording the site conditions following remediation.
- Provisions for cost recovery to ease the pressure on hardship and orphan site cases.

The Government of Nova Scotia is collecting public input on the Act. Here is where you come in. It is evident that we have legislation that has very good intentions, but that is not enough. The vocabulary used in the legislation leaves it wide open to interpretation, making it difficult to uphold in court. What we need to demand from this legislation is that it be solid and more substantially bound by law. We need to have legislation that makes it easier for people in the position to enforce the laws capable of doing so. More importantly, we as a public must be better informed about the state of our environment. Public pressure is a powerful tool, reports on individuals, companies and organizations that have committed environmental offenses should be made readily available and distributed in a publicly accessible arena. All comments on *the Environment Act* must be submitted by April 14, 2000. We encourage you to ask questions and make your government accountable, but most importantly to make your voice heard.

For further information about the Legislative Review process:

Call 1-800-567-7544.

Email: [ecs@gov.ns.ca](mailto:ecs@gov.ns.ca)

Mail: Nova Scotia Department of the Environment

Attn: Environmental Corporate Services

PO Box 2107

5th Floor, 5151 Terminal Road

Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 3B7

Visit these related sites for more facts:

[www.wwfcanada.org/](http://www.wwfcanada.org/)

[www.ednet.ns.ca/educ/museum/](http://www.ednet.ns.ca/educ/museum/)

[www.rbg.ca/cbcn/](http://www.rbg.ca/cbcn/)

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