



# BC SPECIES AT RISK

## THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW



### WHY PROTECTING BC'S WILDLIFE IS IMPORTANT



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British Columbia is renowned for its spectacular wilderness and wildlife. Pocket deserts, old-growth forests, grasslands, wetlands, Garry oak meadows, sparkling lakes and wild rivers form the ecological fabric of our province. These wild places are also home to wild creatures. Vancouver Island marmots, spotted owls, grizzly bears, phantom orchids, yellow-breasted chats and tiger salamanders are just some of the amazing wildlife that can be found here. But they are also just a handful of the 1,900 species at risk in BC – a province with no endangered species legislation. Most people are very surprised to find that BC has no endangered species law. After all we have the richest biodiversity in all of Canada. BC is home to 76 per cent of Canada's bird species, 70

per cent of its freshwater fish species, 66 per cent of its butterfly species and 41 per cent of its orchids.<sup>1</sup> In fact, over half of the bird species that breed in BC, breed nowhere else in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this amazing biodiversity, BC laws protect just four per cent of our species at risk.

Even if you take into account federal legislation, such as Canada's anemic Species at Risk Act (SARA), only 11 per cent of BC's endangered wildlife receives legal protection.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of being protected with a strong and effective law, endangered species in BC have to fend for

themselves under a patchwork quilt of weak and discretionary regulations, and inadequate provisions such as BC's Wildlife Act. The Wildlife Act, which the BC government touts as offering protection to species at risk, was in fact

developed from hunting regulations and applies to only four species at risk in

BC: the burrowing owl, sea otter, white pelican and the Vancouver Island marmot.

**Clearly we can do better.** Endangered species in BC need our help, and the help they need is a strong and effective law to protect them.

Read more to find out how together we can ensure that monarch butterflies, canyon wrens and Roosevelt elk are protected in BC now and into the future.

Photo top: **Grizzly bear** (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) in Knight Inlet in the Great Bear Rainforest Jamie Scarrow photo, 2011 Canadian Geographic photo of the year award winner.

Did you know there are **1900** species at risk in BC?



Photo's above left to right: **Nuttall's cottontail** (*Sylvilagus nuttalli, nuttallii*) Robert McCaw. **Monarch butterfly** (*Danaus plexippus*) Dawn's Images. **Lyall's mariposa lily** (*Calochortus lyallii*) Wayne Lynch. **Great Basin spadefoot toad** (*Spea intermontana*) Jakob Dulisse.

## HOME AND HABITAT

The most important thing endangered species need is healthy and intact habitat. British Columbia has an incredible variety of unique habitats that provide diverse homes for thousands of species. Sadly many are under threat in the province, and some are already disappearing.

For example, Canada's only desert ecosystem is threatened by urban and agricultural development. This rare desert habitat, found in the Osoyoos region of the Okanagan Valley, is home to scores of species at risk, including the shy Northern Pacific rattlesnake whose migratory routes are increasingly blocked by urban development.

Another unique habitat in BC is the Garry oak ecosystem, almost exclusively found within a narrow coastal strip of southeast Vancouver Island, in the Gulf Islands, and in two areas of the Fraser River Valley. Due

to invasions of exotic species and land development for agricultural, industrial and urban uses, less than five percent of the original Garry oak habitat now remains, leaving many species such as the pertious duskywing butterfly, the western meadowlark and the sharp-tailed snake at greater risk.

BC's native grasslands have also declined significantly. Over half of the grasslands in the Northern Okanagan Basin and over a third of the grasslands in the Southern Okanagan Highland have been lost. Most of what remains is damaged. Grasslands cover less than one percent of the province, but are home to over 30 percent of BC's species at risk, including American badgers, burrowing owls and sage thrashers.

Species need an intact home to survive. Without habitat protection, more species will likely disappear from British Columbia.



Photo: **Chopaka Grasslands, South Okanagan, BC** Graham Osborne.



Photo left: **Flammulated owl** (*Otus flammeolus*) Wayne Lynch.



Photo: **Garry oak ecosystem** (*Quercus garryana*) Michael Wheatley.



Photo: **Western skink** (*Plestiodon skiltonianus, skiltonianus*) Jakob Dulisse.

## Did you know?

BC and Alberta are the only provinces in Canada with no endangered species legislation.

## ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

Over 84 per cent of species at risk in BC are at risk because of the loss and fragmentation of the meadows, forests and wetlands they call home.

The degradation of habitat matters not only from an endangered species perspective, but it also matters from a human perspective. When a forest is not healthy enough to support a spotted owl or a wetland is too degraded to provide habitat for painted turtles that means not only are we losing important habitat but we are also losing valuable "ecosystem services." Ecosystem services are essential

services provided to us by nature free of charge.

Old-growth forests store carbon which protects us against climate change. Wetlands filter and clean our water. Bees pollinate hundreds of food crops and boreal forest birds provide pest reduction services worth a whopping \$5.4 billion a year.<sup>4</sup>

Ensuring that BC's forests and meadows are healthy enough to support mountain caribou and grasshopper sparrows is not only the right thing to do, it is a smart investment in a healthy and prosperous future for British Columbia.

## WHAT A LAW NEEDS

Because badgers and meadow larks can't defend themselves against chainsaws, bulldozers and climate change they need an effective law to help them. A BC endangered species law should be premised on five clear principles:

- Be based on science
- Identify, protect and recover at-risk species across BC
- Protect and recover species by protecting their habitat
- Be enforced and adequately funded
- Require public accountability and transparency



Photo: **Silvery blue butterfly** (*Glaucopsyche lygdamus*) Robert McCaw.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE STORY OF ELISE

In Brian Selznick's book "The Invention of Hugo Cabret," a resourceful boy named Hugo who lives in the walls of a Paris train station is fascinated by machines and always tries to fix them. In the end, he repairs an old man's broken heart.

Elise Verdin also likes to fix things, and maybe that is why "The Invention of Hugo Cabret" is one of her favourite books. The 11-year old girl, a student at the Francophone school André-Piolat in North Vancouver, loves animals and nature. She heard that British Columbia doesn't have an endangered species law and that her favourite animal, the badger, is not doing well in the province. Only 300 badgers remain, because of habitat loss, persecution and road mortality.

Elise decided to fix the situation. In just five months, she gathered over 800 signatures calling for an endangered species law. She first knocked on her neighbours' doors. Then Elise sent the petitions to her family in France, and collected signatures at the Ambleside dog park in West Vancouver. She even recruited her six-year-old sister Solange. "It is important to protect all species and everyone should make an effort, even if it is a tiny thing," Elise says. "They should all just try and help."

Elise is a soccer player, so she knows the value of teamwork. With your help we can fix things for BC's endangered species. Join Elise's team and sign the petition:

[LastPlaceOnEarth.ca](http://LastPlaceOnEarth.ca)



Photo: **Elise Verdin with BC's species at risk petitions** Claudine Verdin.

## A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Back in 1955, the Brunette was a dying river.

Located in a highly urbanized area of the Lower Mainland, the river winds through parts of New Westminster, Burnaby and Coquitlam. Decades of pollution, including chemicals from a plywood plant, sewage from homes and businesses, and refuse from a slaughter house, combined with the loss of numerous tributaries meant that by 1955 "no spawning salmon made it that year to the Cariboo Dam where the river enters Burnaby Lake."<sup>5</sup>

Fortunately nature lovers didn't give up on the Brunette.

Today, after years of dedication and rehabilitation, the river has come back

to life. Stronger pollution laws and the restoration of habitat for salmon and an endangered minnow – the Nooksack dace – have seen the river slowly rebound. Now, coyotes, great blue herons, kingfishers, salmon and sea-run cutthroat trout, and the occasional black bear call the river home. Instead of a polluted and dead waterway, today children skip rocks, families go for walks and bike paths meander through the protected areas that now flank both sides of the river.

The rehabilitation of the Brunette River continues, and it serves as a powerful testament that healthy ecosystems are beneficial to both kingfishers and humans.<sup>6</sup>



Photo: **Deltoid balsamroot** (*Balsamorhiza deltoidea*) Michael Wheatley.



Photo: **Western meadowlark** (*Sturnella neglecta*) Terry Parker.



Photo: **Northern leopard frog** (*Rana pipiens*) Robert McCaw.



Photo: **American badger** (*Taxidea taxus*) John E. Marriott.



Photo: **Gwen Barlee with an American badger** Isabelle Groc.

## THE TROUBLE WITH SARA

In 2003, after years of foot dragging, the federal government finally introduced endangered species legislation to Canada: the Species at Risk Act (SARA). Initially there had been high hopes that the legislation would apply to all species at risk throughout Canada, however the federal government defined the scope of SARA very narrowly; automatic protection applies only to species under federal jurisdiction – namely migratory birds, aquatic species or species that reside on federal lands. Since over 98 per cent of BC's land base falls under provincial jurisdiction, most of BC's species

at risk are not protected under SARA. The federal government, if it wished, could protect species that fall under provincial jurisdiction, such as the critically endangered spotted owl, with the "safety net" provision of SARA. But so far, these discretionary powers have never been used.



Photo: **Woodland caribou** (*Ranifer tanandus caribou*) John E. Marriott.

**Healthy forests, thriving wetlands and intact grasslands are not only good for species; they are good for people also.**

# SPOTTED OWL

## DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS

The spotted owl, a beautiful medium-sized bird with a distinctive round face and dark chocolate brown eyes, is one of Canada's most endangered species. After a century of logging in their old-growth habitat in southwestern mainland British Columbia – the only place in Canada in which they are found – just 12 owls remain in the wild today.

A century ago 500 pairs of spotted owls called these old-growth forests home.

As with most of BC's endangered species, the primary threat to the owl is the loss and fragmentation of their habitat. Over 70 per cent of the owls' habitat has already been logged and what remains is heavily

fragmented and vulnerable to further destruction. Spotted owls can't survive in young forest; they rely on old-growth forests to breed forage and raise their young.

Astoundingly, the BC government still allows logging in spotted owl habitat – even areas that are supposedly protected. In 2011 the provincial government set aside a Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) for the spotted owl in the Chilliwack River Valley. However, after "protecting" this habitat, they then turned around and allowed logging in that same area. On February 22, 2012, chainsaws started roaring and trees began falling in the habitat of one of the most endangered species in Canada.



Photo left: **Spotted owl** (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) Jared Hobbs, below: **Resident of Chilliwack River Valley next to old growth tree felled in spotted owl protected area** (WC files).



Photo: **Logging area** (WC files).

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[protectbiodiversity.ca](http://protectbiodiversity.ca)  
[env.gov.bc.ca/atrisk/toolintro.html](http://env.gov.bc.ca/atrisk/toolintro.html)  
[facebook.com/BCendangeredspecies](https://www.facebook.com/BCendangeredspecies)

\*If you want a petition to collect signatures for endangered species legislation, email: [species@wildernesscommittee.org](mailto:species@wildernesscommittee.org)

# TAKE ACTION

## BC needs an endangered species law!

Polls show over 80 per cent of British Columbian's support endangered species legislation. Write now to let the BC government know how you feel about a strong and effective law to safeguard BC's 1900 species at risk. Together we can do it!

**Contact information: Premier of British Columbia, Box 9041, Station PROV GOVT, Victoria, BC, V8W 9E1**  
**E-mail: [premier@gov.bc.ca](mailto:premier@gov.bc.ca)**  
**Phone: 250 387-1715**



Photo: **Rufous hummingbird** (*Selasphorus rufus*) Paul Colangelo.

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**WildernessCommittee.org • 1-800-661-WILD (9453)**

# YES! I WANT TO HELP PROTECT BC'S SPECIES AT RISK

**clip**  
 And return to the:  
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The Wilderness Committee is Canada's largest membership-based wilderness preservation organization.

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**Wilderness Committee, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2012.** Canadian Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 0900567. Posted in Vancouver for free distribution. Printed in Canada on recycled newsprint with vegetable-based inks.

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Published by  
**Wilderness Committee — National Office**  
 P.O. Box 2205, Station Terminal  
 Vancouver, BC V6B 3W2  
 T: 604-683-8220 or 1-800-661-9453 F: 604-683-8229

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