

DEFEND BC'S WILDLIFE



WHY BRITISH COLUMBIA NEEDS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES LAW



Gwen Barlee
Policy Director,
Wilderness
Committee

[@GwenBarlee](#)

What makes British Columbia super natural? Is it our old-growth rainforests? Our wild salmon and grizzly bears?

The truth is that it is all of these things and more. From the mighty Pacific Ocean, to pocket deserts, rippling grasslands, roaring rivers and ancient forests, BC offers something that is in short supply in the rest of the world – amazing wilderness and wildlife.

Our grasslands are home to meadowlarks and badgers. Our forests support marbled murrelets and Roosevelt elk. Our wetlands provide habitat for Oregon spotted frogs and

paintned turtles. In our wild ocean waters you can find killer whales, sea otters and harbour porpoises.

These species are part of the natural fabric of our province but they are also just a handful of the over 1,900 species at risk that are found in BC – **a province with no endangered species legislation.**

Right now BC and Alberta are the only jurisdictions in Canada with no endangered species legislation. Instead, in BC we have a patchwork

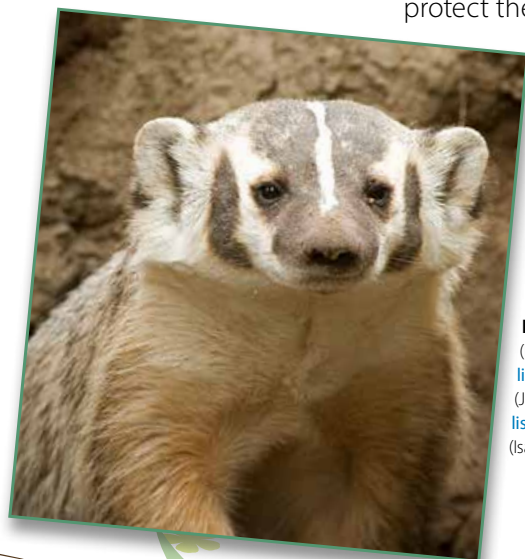
of weak guidelines, old regulations and underfunded government agencies, which don't have the resources or regulatory tools needed to protect our vulnerable wildlife.

People in BC know we live in a special place and we want our children and grandchildren to experience a province that still has burrowing owls, wolverines and Vancouver Island marmots.

We can do that – by working together to introduce a BC endangered species law.

Did you know?

British Columbia is a biodiversity hotspot, and many of Canada's species call it home, including 77 per cent of the country's bird species, 70 per cent of our freshwater species, 66 per cent of our butterfly species and Canada's largest population of grizzly bears.¹



Photos top: Western toad (Jakob Dulisse) - Blue-listed, Yellow-breasted chat (Jared Hobbs) - Red-listed, Grizzly bear (John E. Marriott) - Blue-listed, Sockeye salmon (Dale Sanders) - Yellow-listed.

left: Monarch butterfly (Robert McCaw) - Blue-listed, Western skink (Jakob Dulisse) - Blue-listed, American badger (Isabelle Groc) - Red-listed.

Did you know?

There are over **1,900** species at risk in BC² – a number that increases every year.

Polling shows the vast majority of people living in BC want to see strong and effective laws to protect our wildlife.

Read this paper to find out: how we can protect endangered species in BC; what people are doing to protect western toads in the small town of Nakusp; the number one threat to species at risk in BC; what endangered wildlife need to survive and thrive; and how by taking action **now** we can help protect the best of BC.

ENDANGERED SPECIES AT A GLANCE IN BC

It is sobering to realize that BC has more at risk species than any other province in Canada, with over 43 per cent of assessed BC wildlife species in trouble.³ From the ghostly phantom orchid to the raven-sized northern goshawk, BC's wildlife is struggling with climate change, invasive species, overharvesting, deadly pesticides such as neonicotinoids (neonics) and loss of habitat.

The loss and fragmentation of habitat is the primary reason BC's species are at risk.

BC's wildlife has evolved and adapted to particular ecosystems, but today many of those forests, marshes and grasslands are so fragmented and degraded that they no longer support species they have supported for millennia.

For instance, in BC the **northern spotted owl** relies on low elevation old-growth forests to live, forage and raise its young. Sadly, these same forests have

been heavily targeted by logging corporations. Today, because of the ongoing loss and degradation of their habitat, there are just 12 spotted owls in the wild in BC – the only place they are found in Canada.



Photos: Spotted owl (Jared Hobbs) - Red-listed, Southern mountain caribou (John E. Marriott) - Red-listed.

• The **Oregon spotted frog** is another species at risk in BC that has been heavily impacted by habitat loss. Found exclusively in the Fraser Valley, the frog is struggling due to the fact that over 50 per cent of the wetlands in the region have been lost to urban development and agriculture. This leaves just five Oregon spotted frog populations remaining in all of BC.⁴

• The **American badger**, a veritable digging machine, is another species whose numbers have declined because of non-targeted trapping and persecution, loss and fragmentation of

habitat through urban development and road expansion, poor range management and agricultural expansion. Today roughly 300 badgers are found in the shrinking grasslands and dry open forests of southern BC.⁵



Photo: Garry oak ecosystem - one of the most endangered ecosystems in all of Canada (Michael Wheatley).

Are Plants Endangered Species?

When people think of endangered species, they often don't think of plant species. But healthy plant communities are essential to the web of life in BC and are included in the 1,900 species at risk here. Some of these plant species are the evocatively named phantom orchid, spiny witch's hair, flattop pussytoes, Eschscholtz's little nightmare, dainty moonwort, inelegant horsehair and golden paintbrush. This interconnection can be seen with the white headed woodpecker, a species at risk in BC⁷. This striking bird wouldn't be able to survive without mature ponderosa pine trees, because their primary food source is seeds from these trees.⁸



Photo: Phantom orchid (Gwen Barlee) - Red-listed.

TOAD PEOPLE TAKE ACTION

Across BC, people are working together and taking action for species at risk. In the Lower Mainland, biologists Dick Clegg and Sofi Hindmarsh are mobilizing local citizens to increase awareness around the loss of nesting sites, barns and hunting habitat for the barn owl. In Peace River country, the West Moberly and Salteau First Nations are trying to save the last herds of mountain caribou. In Nakusp, BC, a small town 100 km north of Nelson, locals are working to protect western toads.

Every year western toads near Nakusp migrate from their forested habitat – where they spend the majority of their lives – to breed in nearby Summit Lake. Each August tadpoles, estimated to be in the millions, mature into tiny dime-sized toadlets and make the dangerous journey back to nearby forests.

Their numbers are so large that when the toadlets migrate they look like a moving carpet.

But before the toadlets can reach the surrounding forest they have to cross Highway 6.

Even without human impacts, just one per cent of western toads reach maturity. But when they have to cross the highway, far fewer live to maturity because so many toadlets are squashed by passing traffic.⁹

Due to the high road mortality from toads crossing the highway, combined with local concern, the BC Ministry of Transportation, which called the Summit Lake migration "one of the great wildlife migrations in the world,"¹⁰ built a toad tunnel in 2014 to ensure safe passage for the toads **under** the highway. The tunnel was a **toadal** success with many of the toadlets migrating under the highway to safety.

This story should have a happy ending, but it doesn't because BC has no endangered species law to protect them. In 2015, the BC Ministry of Forests turned around and allowed logging in the core western toad forested habitat.

The tunnel, meant



Photos: Debbie Pitaoulis holding juvenile Western toad, Western toads at Summit Lake (Isabelle Groc) - Blue-listed.

to provide safety for migrating toads, now actually herds the toadlets directly towards habitat that is to be imminently logged.

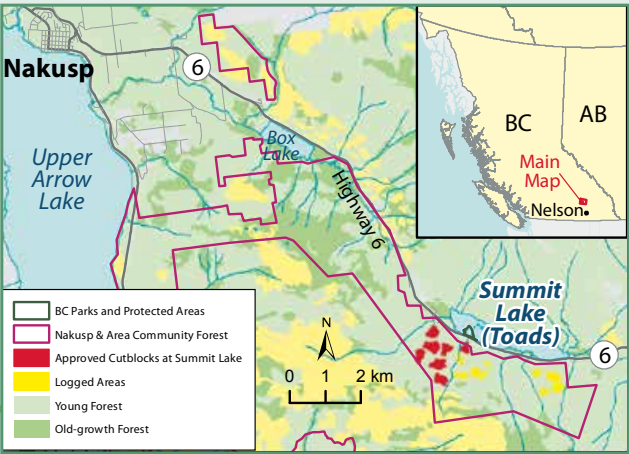
Logging hasn't happened yet, however, thanks to fast-acting locals working with the Wilderness Committee and Valhalla Wilderness Society to raise the alarm. Logging roads have been built into prime toad habitat, but because of intense media coverage on the Summit Lake toads and their world famous migration, they are safe – for now.

THE WILDERNESS COMMITTEE

– Standing Up For Endangered Species Since 1980

Since our founding in 1980, the Wilderness Committee has worked tirelessly to protect BC's species at risk and the habitat they need to survive. Over the years, we have helped to protect millions of hectares of wildlife habitat through the creation of dozens of parks and protected areas including the Khutzeymateen Grizzly Bear Sanctuary, Carmanah Valley and Pinecone-Burke Provincial Parks.

Some of our notable victories include: affording critically endangered species' habitat protection from logging under BC's Forest Practices Code; halting falcon chick capture on Haida Gwaii; protecting hundreds of thousands of hectares of northern spotted owl habitat – one of the most critically endangered species in all of Canada; and obtaining precedent-setting legal protection for BC's southern and northern resident killer whales.



THE SIXTH EXTINCTION

In 2014 a report was published in Science Magazine, which showed that the world is headed into a sixth extinction period for wildlife species. The report said that, “humans have triggered a wave of extinction, threat, and local population declines that may be comparable in both rate and magnitude with the five previous mass extinction in Earth’s history.”¹¹ Over the last 500 million years there have been five periods of time where cataclysmic natural events, such as an asteroid striking the earth 65 million years ago, have resulted in a great loss of species. Many scientists believe today, because of human activity, we have entered a sixth period of extinction for species. Using a conservative analysis, scientists estimate that extinction rates for species in the 20th century are 100 times higher than they would have been without human impact – even higher than the previous significant extinction events.¹² Using a “natural” rate of extinction scientists would anticipate two



Photo: Nuttall's cottontail (Robert McCaw) - Blue-listed.

In a 2013 report, *An Audit of Biodiversity in BC: Assessing the Effectiveness of Key Tools*, Auditor General John Doyle found the BC government was ineffective in conserving biodiversity, had serious gaps in legislation, “poorly implemented policies and tools” and inadequate monitoring and reporting.¹⁴ Doyle also noted that the lack of implementation of habitat tools was “troubling,” and that “significant gaps” existed in terms of the BC government’s understanding of biodiversity.¹⁵

species per 10,000 to go extinct over a hundred years. However, since 1900 we have seen 477 vertebrate species (animals with a backbone) go extinct instead of “the nine species that would be expected at natural rates.”¹³

WEAK LAWS EQUAL WEAK PROTECTION

BC has no endangered species legislation. Instead of a stand-alone law the BC government relies on a hodgepodge of weak policies and discretionary regulations to “manage” over 1,900 species at risk.

- The **BC Wildlife Act** is derived from hunting regulations and applies to just four species at risk in BC. Listing under the Wildlife Act only prevents a species from being killed or harmed without a permit. Nothing in the Act requires the government to protect habitat for species at risk or to prepare provincial recovery plans for them.
- The **BC Forest and Range Practices Act** provides minimal protections for forest dwelling species, but protections are heavily limited if they interfere with logging. Government policy stipulates that recovery actions for wildlife shouldn’t impact more than one per cent of the timber harvesting land base – leaving little real protection for old growth dependent species such as the northern goshawk and marbled murrelet.¹⁶
- The glossy **Five Year Plan to Protect Vulnerable Species in British Columbia**, released in 2013 with only a four week public consultation period, has no legal

enforcement mechanisms and contains no explicit strategy for the survival and recovery of endangered species. The plan emphasizes many of the same voluntary guidelines and fragmented policies that are currently failing to protect species at risk in BC.

- The **Canada-British Columbia Agreement on Species at Risk** is an “administrative framework” document for coordination between BC and the federal government on species at risk. It is meant to provide “flexibility” in how BC manages species at risk and specifically “does not create any new legal powers or duties” on either the federal government or the province to better protect endangered species.¹⁷



Photo: Wolverine - *Lusca subspecies* (Glen and Rebecca Grambo) - Blue-listed.

ECOSYSTEM BENEFITS

At risk species nearly always come from degraded ecosystems – from forests that have been logged, wetlands that have been filled in, grasslands which have been developed and rivers and waterways that have been polluted, dammed or overfished. When we protect ecosystems we protect the species that live and raise their young there and we help ensure the continued benefit of

ecosystem services.

What are ecosystem services? They are services provided by nature which keep our planet healthy and provide essential benefits. Old-growth forests help protect us against climate change by effectively storing carbon; bees and wild pollinators provide us with one out of every three bites of food we eat; healthy oceans support our wild salmon and help regulate the climate; and rivers, lakes and aquifers provide us with fresh water.

When we protect species at risk, we need to start by ensuring that the habitat they need to survive and recover is protected from chainsaws, development, pesticides and fragmentation. When we do this we help ensure our own survival by protecting the life-giving ecosystem services, which healthy habitats provide.

UNDERSTANDING RED AND BLUE LISTED SPECIES

British Columbia uses a “red” and a “blue” list to rank a species’ risk. However, **being red-listed or blue-listed does not confer any protection.** **Red-listed species** in BC includes any “ecological community, and indigenous species and subspecies that is extirpated, endangered, or threatened in British Columbia.”¹⁸ **Endangered species** are species facing imminent extirpation (disappearance from BC) or extinction. **Threatened species** are those species likely to become endangered if existing challenges are not reversed.¹⁹ **Blue-listed species** in BC are at risk species of “special concern because of characteristics that make them particularly sensitive to human activities or natural events.”²⁰

QUE SARA SARA...

Canada has a federal endangered species law called the **Species at Risk Act (SARA)** which was introduced in 2003. **Unfortunately SARA doesn’t protect the vast majority of BC’s species at risk.** If a species is federally listed as endangered or threatened, automatic prohibitions against harming a species or its residence or critical habitat only apply to “aquatic species, migratory birds under the Migratory Birds Convention Act (MBCA) and species found on federal land.”²¹ This leaves the vast majority of BC’s species with no automatic protection under SARA, even if they are listed.

For instance, in the case of birds listed under the MBCA, once critical habitat is identified in a recovery plan under SARA, the prohibition against destruction of critical habitat only applies at the federal government’s discretion or “provided the bird’s habitat is on federal land.”²²

In BC, only 228 of the over 1,900 species at risk here – **just 12 per cent** – receive some degree of protection under SARA.²³ However most species at risk in BC, such as the northern goshawk, mountain caribou and Vancouver Island marmot, will only be protected if they are on federal land. Federal lands make up just one per cent of the land base in BC.



Photo: Barn swallow (Robert McCaw) - Blue-listed.

THERE OUGHT TO BE A LAW

BC has a lot of amazing wildlife. Nowhere else in Canada will you find this unique combination of species, including grizzly bears, Vancouver Island marmots, phantom orchids and bobolinks. However, these species and hundreds more are struggling because BC has no endangered species law to protect them.

Protecting endangered species isn't rocket science. The BC government has to step up and introduce a law to protect our endangered wildlife and the habitat they need to survive and recover.

An endangered species legislation must:

- Be based on science and be scientifically defensible.
- Identify, protect and recover species at risk across BC.
- Protect and recover species by protecting their habitat.
- Be enforced and adequately funded with provisions for public enforcement of the law.
- Have public accountability and transparency.



Photos: Gwen Barlee and Sarah McNeil at the VIMFF (Kristin Henry), Tiger salamander (Wayne Lynch) - Red-listed, Bobolink (Robert McCaw) - Blue-listed.

CLIMATE CHANGE
A growing threat to BC and it's wildlife

One of the growing risks to BC's wildlife is our rapidly changing climate. Extreme weather events, warming temperatures, decreased snow packs, increased storms and droughts, and intense forest fires not only impact the quality of our lives and the health of the planet – they also impact wildlife.

The International Panel on Climate Change estimates that if temperatures increase 1.5 to 2.5 degrees above levels late last century that 20 to 30 per cent of the earth's wildlife will be at risk of extinction²⁴. This double threat of climate change and habitat loss underscores the vital importance of the province introducing an endangered species law. It gives BC's wildlife a fighting chance to survive in a world of climate change.

HELPFUL LINKS

Go to protectbiodiversity.ca to sign our BC endangered species petition, watch short videos on species at risk such as the phantom orchid, barn owl and Western skink and to find other helpful resources.

Check out ToadPeople.org for our soon-to-be released film on people taking action across BC to protect endangered species.

Visit the Ecosystem Explorer, a great online resource to find out about BC's endangered species. You can find it at: a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/eswp

Each year in August there is a ToadFest to celebrate the western toad migration, and to help toadlets (those that don't use the underground tunnel) cross the highway. For more information go to: bit.ly/1WqutEN

REFERENCES

1. BC Species and Ecosystems Explorer. BC Ministry of Environment. 2016.

2. The 1,900 species at risk also includes the different populations of species like mountain caribou.

3. Anions, Marilyn. "Global and Provincial Status of Species in British Columbia." Biodiversity BC. December 2007. <http://bit.ly/1Tx0E35>

4. Wetlands In BC. Ministry Of Environment. 2016. <http://bit.ly/1TeEav>

5. Jeffersonii Badger Recovery Team. "Recovery Strategy for the Badger (Taxidea taxus) in British Columbia." BC Ministry of Environment. Sept 2008. <http://bit.ly/1Tekl7Q>

6. Ibid, 2008.

7. BC Species and Ecosystems Explorer. BC Ministry of Environment. 2016. <http://bit.ly/1SKMkUj>

8. Blood, Donald A. "White Headed Woodpecker." Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. August 1997. <http://bit.ly/1riHmFF>

9. BC Frogwatch Program, Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, 2016. <http://bit.ly/1TeEclj>

10. Sielecki, Leonard. "On The Move Again: The Great Annual Summit Lake Western Toad Migration." Road Runner. Nov 2011. <http://bit.ly/1VVIHCS>

11. Rodolfo Dirzo et al. "Defaunation in the Anthropocene." Science. July 25, 2014. <http://bit.ly/1N09ebj>

12. Vaughan, Adam. "Humans creating sixth great extinction of animal species, say scientists." The Guardian. June 19, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1lp3dw1>

13. Ibid, 2008.

14. Doyle, John. "An Audit of Biodiversity in B.C.: Assessing The Effectiveness of Key Tools." Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia. Feb 2013. <http://bit.ly/26uRonn>

15. Ibid, 2013.

16. An FOI FNR-2015-53856 filed by the Wilderness Committee confirmed the policy guidance for protection of species at risk in the Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB) should not exceed 1 per cent impact on mature timber.

17. "Canada-British Columbia Agreement on Species at Risk" Species At Risk Public Registry. April 2005. <http://bit.ly/21fyrB5>

18. "Provincial Red & Blue Lists." BC Ministry of Environment. <http://a100.gov.bc.ca/pub/eswp/>

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Smellwood, Kate. "A Guide to Canada's Species at Risk Act." Sierra Legal Defense Fund. May 2003. <http://bit.ly/1NALhHJ>

22. Ibid, 2003.

23. BC Species and Ecosystems Explorer. BC Ministry of Environment. 2016. <http://bit.ly/1NAMajB>

24. Fraser, Don and Dave Fraser. "Adapting to Climate Change." The International Panel on Climate Change. Sept 2013.

PLEASE WRITE TO BC'S PREMIER AND ASK THEM TO
INTRODUCE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES LAW

Grizzly bears, wild salmon, mountain caribou, phantom orchids and spotted owls are part of the ecologic fabric of this province. But if we want to have these incredible species in our future, we need to the BC government to step up and introduce a BC endangered species law.

Join the Wilderness Committee and the hundreds of thousands of British Columbians who feel the same way and tell the BC government the time for a BC endangered species law is now!

Contact Information:

PREMIER OF BC
PO Box 9041, Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC, V8W 9E1
☎ 250-387-1715 📠 250-387-0087 ✉ premier@gov.bc.ca



Burrowing owl (Roberta Olenick) - Red-listed.

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

YES! I BELIEVE BC NEEDS AN
ENDANGERED SPECIES LAW

clip
Return to the:
Wilderness Committee
46 E. 6th Avenue,
Vancouver, BC V5T 1J4

call
(604) 683-8220 in the
Lower Mainland
1-800-661-9453 toll-free
elsewhere in Canada

Enclosed is: ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ Other \$ _____
Fed. reg. charity #11929-3009-RR0001

I want to become a member! Enclosed is my annual fee for a:
☐ \$59 Family Membership ☐ \$35 Individual Membership

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____

PROVINCE _____ POSTAL CODE _____ EMAIL ☐ Yes, send me updates via email.

The Wilderness Committee is Canada's largest membership-based wilderness preservation organization.

CREDITS

Writing: Gwen Barlee.
Editing: Rumnique Nannar.
Graphic Designer: Perry Sky Jack, Sue Fox.
Mapping: Geoff Senichenko.
Wilderness Committee, Vol. 35, No. 5, 2016.
Canadian Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 0900567.
Posted in Vancouver for free distribution. Printed in Canada on recycled newsprint with vegetable-based inks.
Press Run 32,000 © Wilderness Committee 2016.
All rights reserved. Written material may be used without permission when credit is given.

Published by
Wilderness Committee — National Office
46 E. 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5T 1J4
☎ 604-683-8220 or 1-800-661-9453 📠 604-683-8229

f /WildernessCommittee
t @WilderNews i @WilderNews

