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At-a-glance: Horizontal evaluation of the Species at Risk Program

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1. Program Overview

The Kunming-Montreal [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (PDF) which resulted from the 2022 United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity calls on national governments to: “Take urgent action to halt and reverse

biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet by conserving and sustainably using biodiversity” (United Nations, 2022b, p. 8).

One of the ways in which Canada protects its biodiversity is through the federal *Species at Risk Act* (2002). The federal *Species at Risk Act* exists to prevent wildlife species from becoming extinct, and to provide for the recovery of wildlife species that are threatened by human activity (Government of Canada, 2002).

The federal *Species at Risk Act* is administered by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). It is delivered jointly by ECCC, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), and Parks Canada (PC). The department or agency’s responsibility for species is based on where the species are found.

Collectively, at the start of the evaluation, these organizations, along with their provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and other partners, were responsible for the protection of 640 species identified in the Act.

Since the federal *Species at Risk Act* is such an important piece of legislation, the administration and delivery of the Act, through the Species at Risk Program, has been subject to several audits and evaluations in recent years. The Horizontal Evaluation of the Species at Risk Program aims to complement the findings of past audits and evaluations by focusing on the outcomes of actions taken to protect species at risk.

2. Scope

The Horizontal Evaluation of the Species at Risk Program is a summative evaluation that covers the five-year period from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022. The evaluation focusses on the following themes:

- Program governance
- Effectiveness
- Monitoring Progress

3. Methodology

A variety of sources were used, including:

- **Case Study.** Ten species were selected to provide a more focused analysis of the program's activities.
- **Document Analysis.** Document analysis on the recovery documents publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry.
- **Survey.** A survey of the external partners, including provincial and territorial governments, academics, and non-governmental organizations.
- **Interviews.** Interviews were conducted with the ECCC and PC practitioners in different regions across Canada, responsible for drafting recovery documents for the case study species, as well as with senior management from ECCC, PC and DFO.

4. Findings

4.1. Governance

The Species at Risk interdepartmental governance is functioning adequately to meet the needs of each organization to facilitate communication and resolve problems. Responsibilities are clearly understood between ECCC, DFO, and PC; all organizations agree interdepartmental forums are working well; and information is shared between the organizations at both the working level and executive level.

That said, these forums operate reactively and there is an opportunity and desire to expand the focus of these forums to introduce proactive identification of issues and interventions.

Within Evaluation Scope	Outside Evaluation Scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods and processes that ECCC, DFO and PC use to work together • Data and information management • Decision-making forums • Evidence of collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Methods or processes used to make decisions in any one department or agency • Grants and contributions funding • Reporting relationships to Parliament or other governments

4.2. Effectiveness

While ECCC has a significant backlog of action plans and implementation reports (including 138 outstanding action plans), it is experimenting with new approaches to address the backlog. For example, the use of multi-species action plans and joint recovery strategies and action plans are reducing the consultation timelines. However, due to the lack of action plans, ECCC misses opportunities to articulate and coordinate recovery actions among partners and stakeholders. Furthermore, ECCC and PC should work to develop stronger guidance on how to conduct meaningful socio-economic analysis to ensure that the costs and benefits to society derived from the implementation of the action plans are known. Finally, while the program is beginning to work more closely with Indigenous partners, progress in this area has been slow.

Within Evaluation Scope	Outside Evaluation Scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities undertaken by the program to produce recovery documents • Implementation of actions outlined in recovery documents • Communications with Canadians • Support for community actions • Collaboration with Indigenous Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of grants and contributions funding • Assessing the number of recovery documents completed • Priority species, priority places and priority sectors initiatives • Outcomes identified in the performance information profile

4.3. Monitoring Progress

ECCC and PC have different approaches to monitoring species populations and tracking the implementation of recovery actions. While this is in part due to the different jurisdictional and operational nature of their responsibilities, there is an opportunity to share information management best practices, informed by PC's success in this area, to ensure that the information collected informs decision making.

Improved monitoring of species populations allows for better prioritization of limited resources and enables future strategic decisions to be adequately targeted.

Within Evaluation Scope	Outside Evaluation Scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we know how the program is currently performing? • Is there quality information available to decision-makers? • Processes used to collect and share information • Communications with Canadians on progress • Collaboration with Indigenous Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance information profile • Grants and contributions data

5. Recommendation, Management Response and Action Plan

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Canadian Wildlife Service at ECCC, the Vice President of Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation at PC and the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Aquatic Ecosystems Sector at DFO review the current interdepartmental governance forums to ensure their terms of reference are up to date, support the proactive identification of issues and interventions, and ensure decisions are made in a timely manner and documented.

Action: Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) with Parks Canada (PC) and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) will work together to review, update and/or develop terms of reference for the Director General and Assistant Deputy Minister Portfolio Committees to align, to the extent

possible, the forums and to support within these structures proactive identification of issues and interventions, such that decisions can be made in a timely, transparent and documented manner.

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsible
ECCC will meet with PC and DFO to discuss approaches to review and update the terms of reference as appropriate, and to use these forums for greater program alignment and decision making. Meeting minutes from this meeting will be produced.	December 31, 2024	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate
ECCC will lead in revising and finalizing the terms of reference for both the Director General and Assistant Deputy Minister Portfolio Committee, with support from PC and DFO, ensuring both process and accountability for records of decision are included.	March 31, 2025	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Canadian Wildlife Service at ECCC work with PC and DFO, as appropriate, to ensure that meaningful socio-economic analysis is included in each action plan, as required in the federal *Species at Risk Act*. This analysis supports decision making with respect to recovery actions included in the action plans.

Action: The Wildlife Management Directorate will be committed to working internally with our Economic Analysis Directorate at ECCC, as well as tri-departmental collaboration on socio-economic analysis. ECCC will develop

internal plans and guidance for advancing the completion of Action Plans, which will cover the evaluation of the socio-economic costs and the benefits to be derived from its implementation.

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsible
<p>ECCC's management response to the CESD Audit Report, Follow-up on the Recovery of Species at Risk, committed:</p> <p>"Environment and Climate Change Canada will continue to deliver on obligations under the federal <i>Species at Risk Act</i> by publishing recovery strategies and management plans.</p> <p>By 31 December 2024, the department will develop a plan indicating the time frames and resources required to advance the completion of recovery strategies, management plans, and action plans and publish implementation reports."</p>	March 31, 2025	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate
<p>Tri-departmental and internal methodologies on socio-economic analysis, and guidance on the use of socio-economic analysis as part of the development of internal planning to recover species at risk will be developed subsequent to the completion of the Action Plan Response to the CESD audit.</p>	June 30, 2025	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Canadian Wildlife Service at ECCC ensure action plans set clear and feasible directions and expectations for partners and stakeholders,

including targeted and measurable actions that address the threats to the species and help to achieve the population and distribution objectives.

Action: The Canadian Wildlife Service will develop internal plans and guidance for advancing the completion of Action Plans which will cover the measures that are to be taken to implement the recovery strategy, including those that address the threats to the species and those that help to achieve the population and distribution objectives. The Canadian Wildlife Service will provide information on the Species at Risk Registry to notify Canadians when this information is available in Action Plans.

The federal government, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, agreed to the implementation of the Pan-Canadian Approach to Transforming Species at Risk Conservation in Canada (Pan-Canadian Approach) in 2018. This approach shifts from a single-species approach to conservation to one that focuses on multiple species and ecosystems.

The Pan-Canadian Approach is already making significant headway in addressing the delivery of targeted and measurable actions for species through Enhanced Nature Legacy and Nature Legacy for Canada investments. This includes implementation of conservation efforts, contribution agreements, and Nature agreements aimed at protecting and recovering species at risk, in collaboration with Provinces and Territories, Indigenous partners, and stakeholders.

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsible
<p>Tri-departmental and internal guidance on the development of Action Plans, which will include targeted and measurable actions to address the threats to the species and to achieve the population and distribution objectives, will be developed.</p> <p>Additionally, ECCC's management response to the CESD Audit Report, Follow-up on the Recovery of Species at Risk, committed:</p> <p>"The department will continue to explore options for multi-species and place-based approaches for recovery planning and action planning, and will consider this as appropriate for implementation reporting. Environment and Climate Change Canada will build the plan to prioritize actions that have the greatest potential conservation outcome, and that will respect the need for meaningful collaboration and engagement with Indigenous communities and groups, stakeholders and other partners."</p>	June 30, 2025	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsible
Notification on Species at Risk Registry when new action plans are posted which contain section on statement implementation of action plan measures.	First notification will be sent starting by June 30, 2025; subsequent notifications will follow as documents are completed	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate
<p>ECCC's management response to the CESD Audit Report, Follow-up on the Recovery of Species at Risk, committed:</p> <p>"Environment and Climate Change Canada, in collaboration with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada, will periodically report on compliance with the obligations related to recovery planning and reporting under the <i>Species at Risk Act</i>."</p>	June 30, 2025	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Canadian Wildlife Service at ECCC prepare for the transition to new information management systems by encouraging the development of data management plans for species population data, including how the data will be used to support performance monitoring and reporting, and communicating these expectations to regional practitioners.

Action: This recommendation is being addressed through the Species at Risk Data Management Tracking System which is designed to track information on species lifecycle, i.e., assessment, listing, recovery and protection. The Species at Risk Data Management Tracking System will enhance reliability, accuracy, and reporting of information on species at risk.

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsible
The Species at Risk Data Management Tracking System team is working on the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada and listing modules of the species at risk data management tracking system. Planning for the Recovery and Protection modules is ongoing.	June 30, 2025	Director General, Wildlife Management Directorate Director General, Wildlife Assessment and Information

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