



**COSEWIC**  
Committee on the Status of  
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

**COSEPAC**  
Comité sur la situation des  
espèces en péril au Canada

October 24, 2017

The Honourable Catherine McKenna  
Minister of the Environment and Climate Change  
200 Sacré-Coeur Boulevard  
GATINEAU, QUÉBEC K1A 0H3

Dear Minister McKenna,

Please find enclosed the 2016-2017 annual report of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) which I respectfully submit to you and the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council (CESCC). The submission of this report fulfills COSEWIC's obligations under Section 26 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), which requires that COSEWIC submit a report on its activities to the Minister of the Environment and members of CESCC annually. This Annual Report will also be available online through the SARA public registry.

As you know, COSEWIC's role is to assess the conservation status of wildlife species in Canada. Under Item III, *Wildlife Species Status Assessments*, of the Annual Report, you will find information on how to obtain a copy of the status assignments for the wildlife species assessed in 2016/2017, the applicable criteria and the reasons for the status designation. The Status Reports containing the information used in the assessments are provided in the accompanying email. The reports will also be provided to CESCC members and will be available on the Public Registry.

Over the past year COSEWIC re-examined the status of 40 wildlife species; of these, the majority (78 %) were reassessed at the same or lower level of risk. Of a total of 73 species assessed 11 were assigned the status of Not at Risk (8 re-assessments and 3 new assessments). To date and with the submission of this report, COSEWIC's assessments now include 735 wildlife species in various risk categories including 321 Endangered, 172 Threatened, 219 Special Concern and 23 Extirpated (i.e. - no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition 16 species have been assessed as Extinct, 58 have been designated as Data Deficient and 186 were assessed and assigned Not at Risk status.

The submission of this information fulfills COSEWIC's obligations under Section 25 of SARA, which requires that COSEWIC provide the Minister of the Environment and the CESCC with a copy of the status assessments and the reasons for the assessments. It also fulfills our obligations under Section 24, which requires that COSEWIC review the classification of species at risk at least once every 10 years.

I would also like to take this opportunity to identify two ongoing challenges for COSEWIC. First and foremost is the challenge the committee faces with the high number of re-assessments that we are expected to carry out within the ten year frame set under SARA Section 24. For instance, COSEWIC is required to re-assess over 115 vascular plant wildlife species alone (and over 220 species in total) over the next three years. This does not include any new assessments or any re-assessments that may occur before the 10 year limit set by SARA owing to more recent information on possible status changes. This workload on Species Specialist Subcommittee members, COSEWIC members, and COSEWIC Secretariat staff is not sustainable without an increase in resources. Second is the issue of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge and what constitutes “available” information. Under SARA section 15.2, COSEWIC is required to use the “best available” scientific, community, and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) in its assessment process. “Available” was not defined in SARA and, as such, “available” can be interpreted to mean very different things. While most western science can be accessed via the internet or by direct interviews with scientists who mostly live in the southern margins of Canada, it could be argued that most ATK is only “available” after “gathering” it via person-to-person interviews that require specific protocols often, if not typically, in much more remote regions of Canada. COSEWIC does not have the resources to do such ATK “gathering” which means that we are often not using the best available ATK information in the COSEWIC assessment process. The lack of a definition of what constitutes “available” in SARA means that the transfer of information to support assessments of the two knowledge systems (western science and ATK) is very different: one is relatively straightforward and inexpensive (western science) the other is much more nuanced and requires significantly more resources (ATK). If “available” in terms of ATK means the gathering of information from communities to make sure that COSEWIC fulfils its mandate, then there will need to be a significant increase in resources to facilitate such gathering (these resources need not necessarily be directed towards COSEWIC itself). Specific direction on how to interpret “available” within the context of best available ATK would be most helpful to COSEWIC.

On behalf of the committee, I would again like to thank you for your continuing support for our work and the commitment of your ministry to the conservation and protection of Canada’s biodiversity.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Eric B. Taylor' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Eric B. (Rick) Taylor  
Chair, COSEWIC

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c.c. – Robert McLean, Director General, Assessment & Regulatory Affairs,  
Canadian Wildlife Service