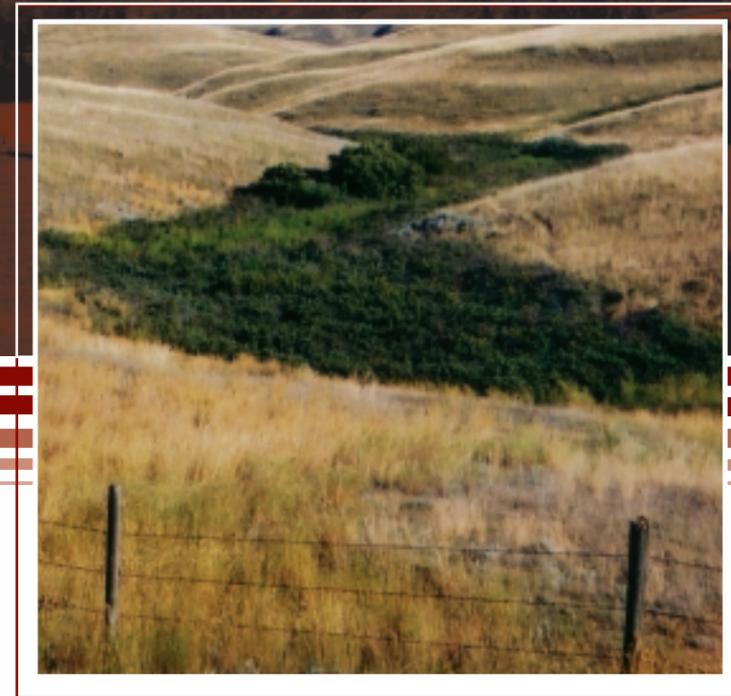


The Species at Risk Act

What You Should Know



In 2002, the Parliament of Canada passed the Species at Risk Act (SARA) "to prevent wildlife from becoming extinct in Canada." SARA was passed after lengthy consultations with federal, provincial and territorial governments as was agreed in the 1996 Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk. In June of 2003, the federal government began implementing portions of SARA with the remainder coming into effect in 2004.



Interested landowners are encouraged to contact:

OPERATION GRASSLAND COMMUNITY
or
PARKLAND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Alberta Fish and Game Association
6924 – 104 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T6H 2L7
Phone: (780) 437-2342
Fax: (780) 438-6872
On-line at: <http://www.afga.org/>

WHY DO WE NEED SARA?

As our human population and its demand for resources have grown, many wild plant and animal species have become extinct or threatened with extinction. Although extinction of species is a natural process, the speed at which it is occurring around the world threatens the diversity of life on this planet. This diversity of life, or biodiversity, helps sustain the environment upon which we all depend.

Concern about the loss of species has been around for a long time, and many federal, provincial, territorial and international laws have addressed the issue. However, in Canada there has not been a nationally coordinated effort to ensure that species at risk receive similar protection in all jurisdictions. SARA was enacted to address that need. As well, SARA helps Canada fulfill its international commitment under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

WHAT ARE SPECIES AT RISK?

Species at risk are those plants and animals that are at risk of becoming extinct in Canada. SARA classifies species at risk into four categories:

- **Extirpated Species** – a wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere in the world.
- **Endangered Species** – a wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.
- **Threatened Species** – a wildlife species that is likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.
- **Species of Special Concern** – a wildlife species that may become threatened or endangered because of a combination of biological factors and other threats.

WHO DECIDES WHAT'S AT RISK?

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) is a group of experts in species at risk that assesses the status of wildlife species that may be in danger of extinction and designates which species appear on the lists. This is done in conjunction with the federal Minister of the Environment and the Governor in Council.

As of May 2003, COSEWIC has assessed 21 species Extirpated, 153 Endangered, 102 Threatened and 143 of Special Concern in Canada.

HOW DOES SARA AFFECT LANDOWNERS?

All species of plants and animals require suitable habitat in which to live. The habitat of a plant or animal is the land the species uses to find sufficient food, water and space in which to live, reproduce and find protection from predators. In the prairie region of Alberta, private landowners control 95% of the land, including that which supports wildlife habitat. For species at risk to be protected and their populations enhanced, landowners must be involved in the management of the habitats that support these species. Therefore, SARA was structured to encourage landowners to become voluntary stewards of their land with respect to species at risk. For example, the federal Habitat Stewardship Program was created to help stewards protect habitat on their lands by providing landowners free consultations with habitat specialists and access to free materials to protect and enhance that habitat where appropriate. Operation Grassland Community is supported (in part) by the Habitat Stewardship Program.

If a species at risk occurs on private land, information about the species and what can be done to preserve and enhance the critical habitat of that species will be provided to the landowner through these stewardship programs. By working with programs like Operation Grassland Community, the landowner can develop a plan to manage the critical habitat within the context of running his or her day-to-day business.

HOW IS SARA ENFORCED?

The intent of SARA is to encourage protection of species through voluntary actions, such as the stewardship programs offered by Operation Grassland Community. However, if no action is taken or stewardship actions do not protect critical habitat on private land, a person or corporation can be charged under SARA or related federal and provincial laws (for example, the federal Migratory Bird Convention Act, 1994 or the Alberta Wildlife Act).

Under SARA, it is an offence to:

- kill, harm, harass, capture or take an individual of a listed species that is extirpated, endangered or threatened.
- possess, collect, buy, sell or trade an individual (or its parts or derivatives) of a listed species that is extirpated, endangered or threatened.

- damage or destroy the residence of one or more individuals of a listed endangered or threatened species, or of a listed extirpated species if a recovery strategy has recommended its reintroduction.

Penalties for each offence range up to a \$250,000 fine for individuals and non-profit corporations, and up to a \$1,000,000 fine for corporations, depending on the severity of the offence.

WHEN IS COMPENSATION OFFERED?

In cases where the prohibition against the destruction of critical habitat has extraordinary impact on an individual, the federal Minister of the Environment may provide fair and reasonable compensation. Regulations governing how to apply for compensation will be found through the SARA public registry (see below).

THE SARA PUBLIC REGISTRY

As directed by SARA, Environment Canada has established a Public Registry on the World Wide Web of the Internet to provide information about SARA and the decisions that have been made about species at risk. The registry includes or will include the SARA list of species at risk; SARA regulations and orders, recovery strategies, action and management plans; COSEWIC classification criteria and status reports, among other documents. You can access the Public Registry on the web at www.sararegistry.gc.ca

If you do not have access to the Internet, contact one of the offices listed at the end of this fact sheet. They will help you find the information you require.

PUBLIC INPUT TO SARA

SARA provides ways for people with concerns about species at risk to initiate or follow-up specific actions. These include applying to COSEWIC for a status assessment of a particular wildlife species; applying to COSEWIC to assess the threat of a species that may require an emergency endangered species listing; providing comments on a proposed recovery strategy, action plan or management plan for a wildlife species; and requesting an investigation of an alleged SARA offence. For information on how to proceed with such an action, go to the SARA Public Registry (see above) or contact one of the offices listed at the end of this fact sheet.

HOW CAN OPERATION GRASSLAND COMMUNITY HELP?

As members of Operation Grassland Community (OGC), landowners have access to information and free consultations about managing the natural communities on their land within the context of maintaining a sustainable ranching or farming business. Membership is free, participation in any of OGC's activities is strictly voluntary, and all information provided to OGC is kept strictly confidential. Members of OGC receive extension materials on prairie ecology and wildlife, land management, and emerging environmental and agricultural issues. They appreciate the specific information they receive about their land, what is living on it, and how it can be conserved to benefit both wildlife and the farming or ranching business.

Since 1989, OGC has promoted good stewardship of Alberta's native grasslands. We continue to work with our members on issues pertaining to critical habitats and species at risk.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Web:

SARA Public Registry – www.sararegistry.gc.ca

Species at Risk – www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca

Alberta's Threatened Wildlife – www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/threatsp/

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Information Centre – www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/info/

Operation Grassland Community – www.afga.org/Conservation/ogc.htm

E-mail:

Environment Canada – enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development – env.infocent@gov.ab.ca

Operation Grassland Community, Alberta Fish and Game Association – office@afga.org

Telephone:

Environment Canada's Inquiry Centre – 1-800-668-6767

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Information Centre – (780) 944-0313

Operation Grassland Community, Alberta Fish and Game Association – (780) 437-2342