



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Ontario is Making Little Effort to Protect At-Risk Species from Building and Resource Development: Auditor General

(TORONTO) The province is failing to protect species at risk as required by the *Endangered Species Act*, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *Annual Report of Environment Audits*.

Development projects that may harm species at risk are automatically approved, the audit found. “Staff at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks have no direction on when to reject permit applications that would do harm, and consequently, they are always approved,” said Lysyk. “The Ministry is essentially facilitating development rather than protecting species at risk.”

Since 2009, the number of approvals for development and other projects that harm protected species has increased by over 6,000 per cent. The number of species at risk has increased by 22 per cent.

The report also notes:

- Changes in 2019 to Ontario’s criteria for classifying species are inconsistent with the science-based criteria in other provinces in Canada – and may result in some species losing existing protections.
- The Minister’s species-at-risk advisory committee is now dominated by industry representatives. Additionally, six members were appointed to the assessment committee in 2019 and 2020 without the standard screening and recommendation process.
- The number of species at risk has increased since 2009, but funding for the stewardship program has decreased by 10 per cent in the same period.
- Forestry operations on Crown land are now exempt from the *Endangered Species Act*, despite the Environment Ministry warning that this may cause significant adverse effects on 12 endangered or threatened species like boreal caribou and Blanding’s turtle.
- The province’s plans for species protection and recovery are usually less ambitious than what independent scientific experts recommend.

“Our audit found that, in the absence of substantive actions, the condition of species at risk in Ontario will continue to deteriorate and more species will be added to the list,” said Tyler Schulz, Assistant Auditor General and Commissioner of the Environment in the Office. “Protecting these species is critical to reduce the loss of nature and its contributions to Ontarians, and to safeguard the environment and our economy.”

This audit report includes 21 recommendations for improvement. In its responses to our audit recommendations, the Environment Ministry confirmed its lack of commitment to improve transparency and its programs and processes to protect species at risk.

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Read the report at www.auditor.on.ca

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