

SARA: The Species at Risk Act and Aboriginal Involvement

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The Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee

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Aboriginal peoples have a historical and cultural relationship to plants and animals on their lands and waters. The knowledge gained about wildlife species and their habitats through this relationship is one part of Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK). ATK is valuable to the protection and recovery of species at risk (plants and animals that are in danger of disappearing from the wild) through the SARA process.

How is Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Included in the SARA Process?

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) is a group of experts that assesses the status (e.g. Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern) of species at risk. COSEWIC writes a status report that provides information regarding population size and threats to a species at risk. These reports assist the federal government in deciding whether or not to legally protect a species under the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)*.

Including Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge when assessing species at risk is essential for accurately determining the status of species and bringing forward information and

perspectives that is not available in published scientific literature. To ensure that ATK is incorporated into species at risk assessments, the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee (ATK SC) was formed to function within and to support COSEWIC in developing status reports.

The ATK SC is guided by the principles that Aboriginal communities are the ones who need to facilitate access to ATK and that this ATK should only be treated as public knowledge with the approval of the holders of the knowledge.



What is the Role of the ATK SC?

Through the ATK SC, COSEWIC can work closely with First Nations and other Aboriginal groups to ensure that the best available Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge is included in Species at Risk assessments. The ATK SC seeks to ensure that Aboriginal knowledge about the biology of animal or plant species, as well as proper Aboriginal names and dialect, are included in the status reports. However, specific information on Aboriginal culture, medicinal or spiritual use of a species are intentionally excluded. COSEWIC and the ATK SC can only “speak for the species” about their biology, habitat, and threats to the species, and based upon that information, recommend to the Minister of Environment the status (e.g. Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern) that a species should be given. The status reports do not take into consideration the social and economic impacts of legally protecting a species under SARA, as these are determined later in the process, during consultations with Aboriginal peoples and other affected groups.

Who are the ATK SC Members?

The ATK SC is made up of individuals that are experienced in ATK. These individuals are recommended by five national Aboriginal organisations including the Assembly of First Nations, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Métis National Council, and Native Women’s Association of Canada.

The ATK SC currently has two co-chairs (Larry Carpenter of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and Henry Lickers of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne) who have directed the work of the ATK SC since April, 2002. As well, ten ATK SC members (two recommended by each of the five national Aboriginal organisations) and one meeting Elder have been selected.

The ATK SC members have varied backgrounds and areas of expertise, including:

1. Gabriel Nirlungayuk from Rankin Inlet, Nunavut (Mosses and lichens)
2. Jeanette Armstrong from Penticton, B.C. (Plants)
3. Josephine Mandamin from Thunder Bay, Ontario (Alternate for Plants)
4. David Dickson from the Kaska
5. Ron Gruben from Inuvik, Northwest Territories (Marine Mammals)
6. Susan Chiblow from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario (Birds)
7. Dean Trumbley from Vancouver, B.C. (Freshwater Fishes)
8. Jason Harquail from Fredericton, New Brunswick (Marine Fishes)
9. Dan Benoit from Winnipeg, Manitoba (Molluscs)
10. Dr. Donna Hurlburt from Caledonia, Nova Scotia (Insects and other Arthropods)
11. Norma Kassi from Whitehorse, Yukon (Gwich'in Meeting Elder)

All ATK SC members will be appointed to their positions for a 4-year term by the Minister of the Environment.



Small White Lady's-slipper

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At the present, properly incorporating ATK into all assessments poses a challenge to the ATK SC due to the large number of species undergoing assessment. Ultimately, the ATK SC envisions establishing a network of Aboriginal knowledge-holders and experts from approximately 35 ecological regions across Canada who will provide expertise to support the work of the ATK SC.

Next Steps

For more information on the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee and its role, or for contact information for co-chairs or members, please see the website: www.cosewic.gc.ca

Aboriginal organisations, communities and individuals are welcome to contact the ATK SC. Please contact:

Gloria Goulet
Science Project Officer, ATK
Environment Canada, Species Assessment
Section
351 St Joseph Boulevard
Gatineau, Quebec
Canada K1A 0H3
Phone: (819) 994-3020
Fax: (819) 994-3684

If you would like to find out more about SARA, potential benefits and adverse impacts on Aboriginal peoples and their rights, and how to get involved in the process through consultation and stewardship activities, read related newsletters from this six-part series.

You can access information in the '**Species at Risk Information Package**' on the CIER website (www.cier.ca), and on the following government of Canada websites:

- (1) www.sararegistry.gc.ca (provides information on the SARA and related legal documents, including the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, permit applications, recovery strategies, action plans, regulations, orders and notices for public consultations);
- (2) www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca (provides information on the biology of species at risk in Canada, their distribution, habitat requirements and threats);
- (3) www.aquaticspeciesatrisk.gc.ca (provides information on aquatic species at risk in Canada, including fish, reptiles, marine mammals and molluscs); and
- (4) www.pc.gc.ca/nature/eeep-sar/index_e.asp (provides information on Parks Canada's role in the recovery of species at risk).

Additional information can be obtained from:

Environment Canada Inquiry Centre
351 St. Joseph Boulevard
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0H3
Tel: (819) 997-2800
Tel: (800) 668-6767
E-mail: enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca

Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Communications Branch
200 Kent Street
13th Floor, Station 13228
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E6
Tel: (613) 993-0999
E-mail: info@dfo-mpo-gc.ca

Parks Canada
National Office
25 Eddy Street
Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0M5
Tel: (888) 773-8888
E-mail: information@pc.gc.ca

Species at Risk Pathfinder
Manitoba and Saskatchewan
Region
3rd Floor, 245 McDermot Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0S6
Tel: (204) 956-0660