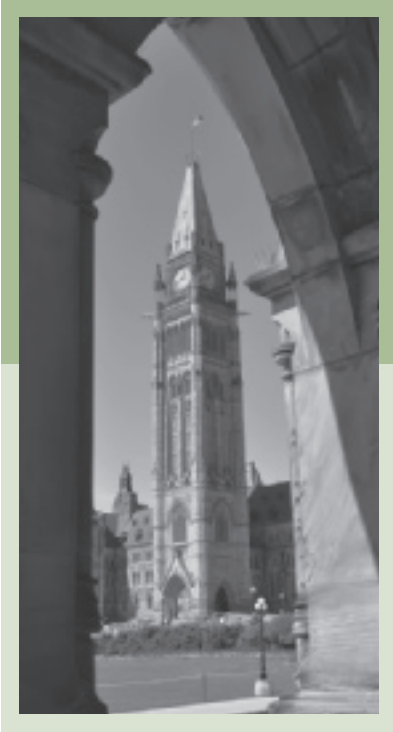


Fall 2013



Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development

CHAPTER 6

Recovery Planning for Species at Risk



Office of the Auditor General of Canada

OAG

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CHAPTER 6

Recovery Planning for Species at Risk

Performance audit reports

This report presents the results of a performance audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada under the authority of the *Auditor General Act*.

A performance audit is an independent, objective, and systematic assessment of how well government is managing its activities, responsibilities, and resources. Audit topics are selected based on their significance. While the Office may comment on policy implementation in a performance audit, it does not comment on the merits of a policy.

Performance audits are planned, performed, and reported in accordance with professional auditing standards and Office policies. They are conducted by qualified auditors who

- establish audit objectives and criteria for the assessment of performance,
- gather the evidence necessary to assess performance against the criteria,
- report both positive and negative findings,
- conclude against the established audit objectives, and
- make recommendations for improvement when there are significant differences between criteria and assessed performance.

Performance audits contribute to a public service that is ethical and effective and a government that is accountable to Parliament and Canadians.

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Recovery Planning for Species at Risk

Main Points

What we examined

As of 31 March 2013, there were 518 species in Canada listed as at risk in Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. Many factors can contribute to the decline of a species, placing it at risk. The most common is the loss and degradation of habitat, often through urbanization and conversion to agricultural use. Other common factors include the environmental contamination of habitat, outbreaks of disease within a species population, and the introduction of invasive species.

Under the Act, Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada are responsible for preparing recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for the species at risk that each organization is mandated to protect. The organizations have one to five years to develop these strategies and plans, depending on when a species is listed under the Act and the degree of the threat to the species. The recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans set out the steps needed to stop, and ideally reverse, the decline of a species. As a result, they are a critical element in managing the preservation and recovery of species at risk.

In 2008, we conducted a follow-up to our 2001 audit that looked at whether departments had made progress in implementing the recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans required by the Act to protect species at risk. Our report noted that the three organizations had made unsatisfactory progress in developing recovery strategies within the timelines set out in the *Species at Risk Act*.

Our current audit examined whether Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada have, in accordance with the *Species at Risk Act*, established the required recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for species determined to be at risk and for which the required strategies and plans were to have been completed by 31 March 2013.

Audit work for this chapter was completed on 3 July 2013. More details on the conduct of the audit are in **About the Audit** at the end of this chapter.

Why it's important

Apart from its intrinsic value as part of Canada's natural heritage, Canada's biodiversity, including wildlife species of plants and animals, represents a vast storehouse of biological resources. The animals and plants found in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems are interdependent, making it important to conserve biological diversity to maintain healthy, functioning ecosystems that support the health of Canadians and a strong economy. Although it may go unnoticed, the loss of one or two key species can resonate across an ecosystem, with potentially significant effects on our quality of life. According to various scientific sources, human activities have greatly increased the rate at which species have been disappearing since the 20th century.

What we found

- Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada have not met their legal requirements for establishing recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans under the *Species at Risk Act*. While the organizations have made varying degrees of progress since our 2008 audit in completing the recovery strategies they are responsible for, 146 recovery strategies remain to be completed as of 31 March 2013. Out of the 97 required action plans, only 7 were in place. The required management plans for species of special concern were not completed in 42 percent of cases.
- We noted that while Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada have made notable progress in completing the majority of the recovery strategies they are responsible for, Environment Canada continues to have a significant number of outstanding recovery strategies. Of these, 84 percent were overdue by more than three years as of 31 March 2013. Of the recovery strategies that the organizations completed, 43 percent did not identify the critical habitat of the species at risk.
- Based on Environment Canada's annual rate for completing recovery strategies since our last audit, we estimate that it will take the Department approximately 10 years to complete its outstanding recovery strategies, including those coming due in the next year. This estimate does not reflect the additional time it will take the Department to complete the subsequent action plans.

- Given that many of the required recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans remain to be completed, the overall goals, objectives, and necessary actions have not been established for the recovery of species at risk. While the lack of strategies and plans does not preclude recovery activities from taking place, their absence leaves responsible organizations without the tools for identifying, directing, and coordinating recovery efforts, or benchmarks against which to monitor and report on progress.

The entities have responded. The entities agree with our recommendation. Their detailed responses follow the recommendation in the chapter.

Introduction

Extirpated species—A wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere in the wild.

Endangered species—A wildlife species that is facing imminent extirpation or extinction (that is, the species no longer exists anywhere in the world).

Threatened species—A wildlife species that is likely to become an endangered species if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.

Species of special concern—A wildlife species that may become a threatened or endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Source: *Species at Risk Act*

6.1 Canada's *Species at Risk Act* provides for the legal protection of wildlife species at risk, including plants and animals, their residence, and their critical habitat. In the Act, species are listed under four risk levels—**extirpated**, **endangered**, **threatened**, or **of special concern**.

The Act is intended to

- prevent wildlife species in Canada from disappearing;
- provide for the recovery of wildlife species that are extirpated, endangered, or threatened as a result of human activity; and
- manage species of special concern to prevent them from becoming endangered or threatened.

6.2 As of 31 March 2013, there were 518 species listed at risk under the Act. Of these species, 23 (4 percent) are extirpated, 239 (46 percent) are endangered, 126 (25 percent) are threatened, and 130 (25 percent) are listed as species of special concern.

Factors that contribute to placing species at risk

6.3 Many factors can contribute to the decline of a species, placing it at risk. The most common factors include the following:

- **Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation.** This is the biggest risk factor for any species. Approximately 60 percent of species identified as being at risk are affected by habitat loss, degradation, or fragmentation (the process of suitable habitat becoming smaller and more widespread). Common causes for habitat loss include urbanization and conversion of wild habitats into agricultural use.
- **Genetic and reproductive isolation.** Destruction or degradation of a species' range (area in which it can be found) can reduce the amount of suitable habitat it has, causing the species to become isolated. This results in reducing the genetic variability of the species, making it more difficult for it to survive over the long term.
- **Suppression of natural events.** The suppression of natural occurrences by humans can also be detrimental to habitats. For example, steps taken to control water flow in a river can prevent replenishment of adjacent ponds, resulting in making the habitat no longer suitable for a species.
- **Environmental contamination.** Environmental contaminants discharged into the air or water can be detrimental to a variety of organisms, and can result in significant habitat loss or degradation.

- **Climate change.** Whether naturally occurring or caused by human activities, climate change can affect species in a variety of ways that are difficult to evaluate or quantify.
- **Disease.** Outbreaks of disease can decimate populations. Under normal circumstances, the effects are limited because they occur in rather restricted areas. However, when all individuals of a species inhabit a small area, disease can have devastating effects on the entire population, and hence on the species' survival.
- **Invasive species.** Invasive plants and animals, whether occurring naturally or resulting from human interaction, are important factors that cause species decline. For example, during the 1940s and 1950s, the Sea Lamprey contributed to the collapse of commercially valuable fish populations in the Great Lakes, such as the Lake Trout and Whitefish.
- **Species harvest.** Hunting, trapping, and fishing of a species as a result of recreational, traditional, or commercial activities can contribute to species decline.

Roles and responsibilities

6.4 Responsibility for the protection and conservation of wildlife is shared among the federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Each jurisdiction has the authority to pass laws to protect wildlife species. Coordinated efforts for protecting species at risk in Canada started more than three decades ago. In 1978, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada began assessing wildlife species and classifying them according to their risk of extinction.

6.5 Parks Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Environment Canada are the three primary federal government organizations that have responsibilities for implementing the Act.

6.6 Parks Canada is responsible for protecting species at risk found in or on the federal lands it administers. Fisheries and Oceans Canada is responsible for protecting aquatic species at risk other than those in or on federal lands administered by Parks Canada. Environment Canada is responsible for protecting all other species at risk, including working with the provinces and territories to ensure that terrestrial (land-based) species found on non-federal land are protected. Environment Canada is also responsible for the overall administration of the *Species at Risk Act* on behalf of the federal government, including coordination with provinces and territories.

6.7 The Act requires these federal organizations to protect species at risk through the following activities:

Recovery strategy—The strategy to identify the scientific requirements for the successful recovery of a species at risk. It includes a description of the species and its needs, the threats to the species' survival, the identification of its critical habitat, to the extent possible, and the goals, objectives, and approaches for the species recovery. The strategy also specifies when action plans will be completed.

Action plan—The plan to identify the specific actions needed to promote recovery of the species as identified in the recovery strategy. The plan identifies various projects and activities along with timelines for implementation.

Management plan—The plan to manage the species, its habitat, and related threats, in order to prevent the species from becoming threatened or endangered. This plan is completed for species of special concern.

- Preparation of **recovery strategies** and **action plans** (extirpated, endangered, threatened species) and **management plans** (species of special concern) for listed species. This involves cooperation with federal, provincial, and territorial ministers, wildlife management boards, and Aboriginal organizations, and consultation with landowners, lessees, and others, to the extent possible.
- Legal protection of listed terrestrial species that occur on federal lands. Listed aquatic species are protected immediately upon listing, regardless of where they occur.
- Collaboration with provinces and territories to protect species that occur on non-federal lands.
- Implementation of conservation and protection measures for listed species found on federal lands administered by them.
- Monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the strategies and plans, and on progress toward meeting the recovery and management objectives for listed species.

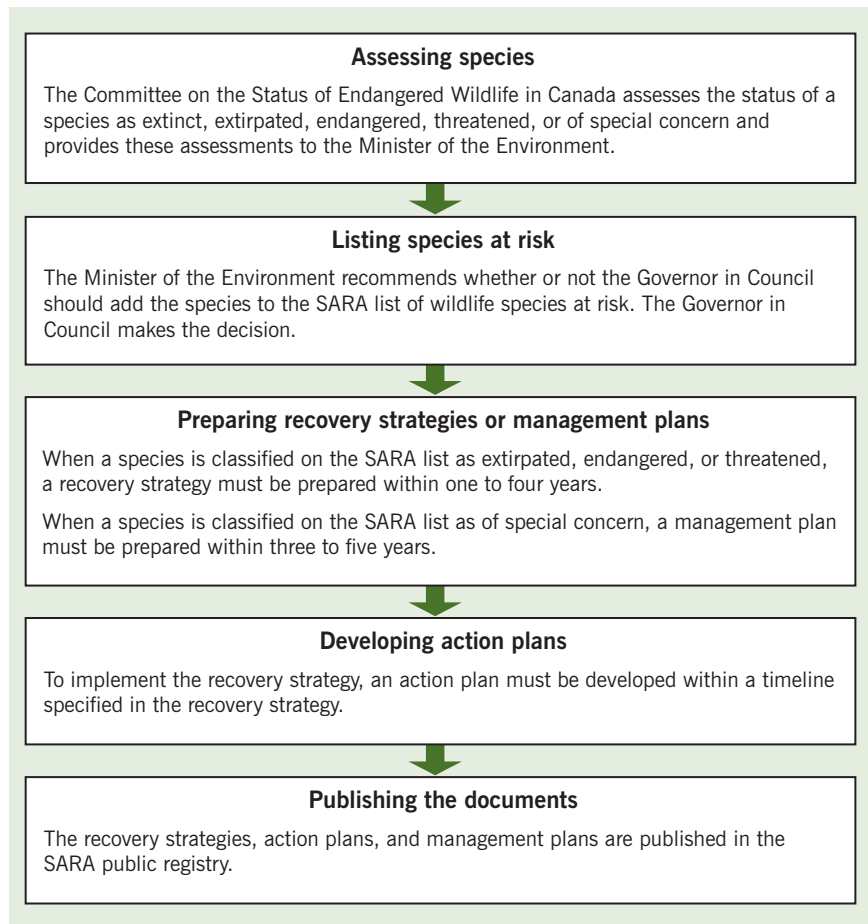
6.8 The recovery planning process for species at risk is described in Exhibit 6.1.

Planning for species recovery

6.9 The *Species at Risk Act* requires Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada to develop plans for the recovery of the species at risk for which they are responsible. The recovery planning process for species at risk varies depending on their risk category. For extirpated, endangered, or threatened species, recovery planning is a two-step process. Part one is to develop a recovery strategy that outlines what needs to be done to stop or reverse the decline of the species. For example, the approach identified in the recovery strategy for the black-footed ferret was to establish a wild population by reintroducing this extirpated species in Canada. Part two is to develop an action plan that identifies the specific actions needed to help in the species' recovery. For species of special concern, a management plan must be developed.

6.10 Of the 518 species at risk listed as of 31 March 2013, Environment Canada leads the preparation of recovery strategies or management plans for 331 species, Fisheries and Oceans Canada for 111, and Parks Canada for 76.

Exhibit 6.1 Summary of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) recovery planning process



Source: *Species at Risk Act*

6.11 Provincial and territorial governments have jurisdiction and are responsible for the conservation of wildlife on their lands, including species at risk. However, even if a province or territory leads the development of a recovery strategy, the federal ministers are ultimately responsible, under the *Species at Risk Act*, for ensuring that the information contained in the strategies meets the requirements set out in the Act, and that action plans are put in place in a timely manner to implement the recovery strategies. This audit focused only on the recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans developed by the federal government, and did not look at the recovery strategies of provincial or territorial governments.

Previous audit work

6.12 In 2008, we conducted a follow-up to our 2001 audit that looked at species at risk. We noted that all three organizations had made unsatisfactory progress in developing recovery strategies and had not complied with specific timelines established by the *Species at Risk Act*.

Focus of the audit

6.13 The objective of this audit was to determine whether Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada have completed the required recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for species determined to be at risk. To do so, we examined each organization's compliance with the relevant sections of the Act.

6.14 More details about the audit objectives, scope, approach, and criteria are in **About the Audit** at the end of this chapter.

Observations

Recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans

6.15 Recovery strategies must include a description of the species, its needs, and threats to its survival, along with the goals, objectives, and approaches to improve the species' population status. Action plans must specify the activities required to meet the goals and objectives outlined in the recovery strategies. This involves cooperation with federal, provincial, and territorial ministers, wildlife management boards, and Aboriginal organizations, and consultation with landowners, lessees, and others, to the extent possible.

6.16 While recovery activities for a particular species at risk can take place before its recovery strategy or management plan is finalized, the strategies and plans provide the overall goals and objectives for the recovery or protection of a species at risk and form the basis for monitoring and reporting on progress. Recovery strategies and management plans must be prepared according to specific timelines. The time allowed to produce the recovery strategies and management plans varies from one to five years, depending on when the species was listed under the Act and its risk category.

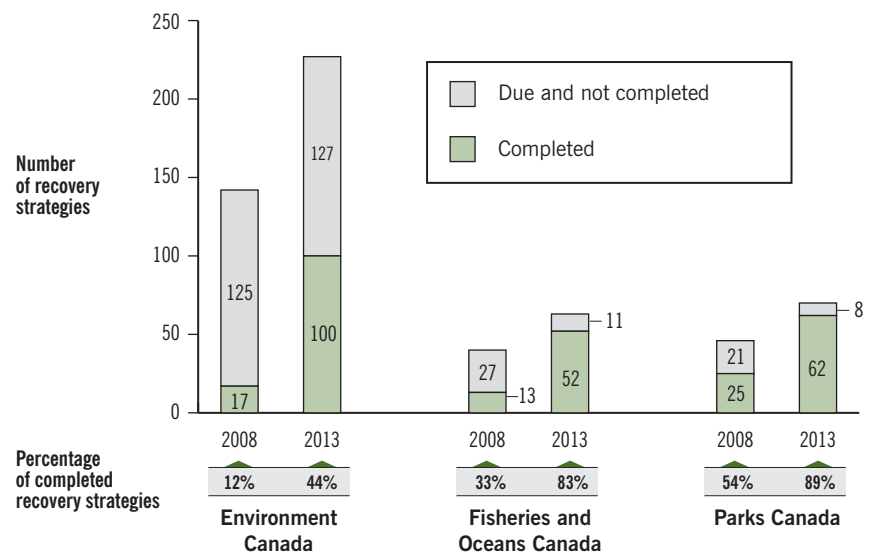
6.17 As part of our audit, we examined whether the three organizations included in our audit had established, as required by the Act, recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for species determined to be at risk and for which the required strategies or plans were to have been completed by 31 March 2013. Our recommendation is in paragraph 6.34.

The number of completed recovery strategies has increased, but legislative requirements have not been met

6.18 As part of our audit, we looked to see if recovery strategies and management plans that were due as of 31 March 2013 were in place. For those recovery documents that were required but not yet completed, we assessed the extent to which the strategy or plan was overdue.

6.19 As of 31 March 2013, recovery strategies were required for 360 species at risk. We found that 214 of them had been completed, which included the finalized strategies and those posted in the public registry for comment. The remaining 146 recovery strategies were outstanding. We found that federal organizations had made some progress since 2008. Specifically, we noted that Environment Canada had recovery strategies in place for 44 percent of species it is responsible for, Fisheries and Oceans Canada for 83 percent of its species, and Parks Canada for 89 percent of the species at risk for which it is responsible (Exhibit 6.2).

Exhibit 6.2 The organizations have made progress in completing recovery strategies



Most outstanding recovery strategies are overdue by more than three years

6.20 For the 146 instances where a recovery strategy was required but not yet in place, we looked to see the extent to which they were overdue. We found that 79 percent of these strategies were overdue by more than three years (Exhibit 6.3).

Exhibit 6.3 More than three quarters of the outstanding recovery strategies are overdue by more than three years

Federal organization	Number of recovery strategies that are more than three years overdue
Environment Canada	107 out of 127 (84%)
Fisheries and Oceans Canada	6 out of 11 (55%)
Parks Canada	3 out of 8 (38%)
Total	116 out of 146 (79%)

6.21 Recovery strategies are the key documents for stating the objectives for the recovery of the species, its critical habitat, and the actions needed to stop or reverse its decline. The Wood Bison is an example of a species for which a recovery strategy is overdue (Exhibit 6.4).

Exhibit 6.4 The recovery strategy for the Wood Bison is six years overdue

Wood Bison (threatened)

The Wood Bison is found only in Canada and is the largest land mammal in North America. Today, there are both wild and captive herds of Wood Bison in parts of



Photo: B. G. Smith/Shutterstock.com

Alberta, Manitoba, British Columbia, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. Historical estimates suggest that there were once over 168,000 Wood Bison in Canada. The latest population estimates count approximately 10,820 free-ranging Wood Bison in Canada, consisting of about 4,470 disease-free animals.

Status. The Wood Bison has been listed as threatened under the *Species at Risk Act* since 2003.

Threats. The main threats to the Wood Bison are habitat loss and degradation as a result of agriculture, forestry, and petroleum resource development. Other factors that contribute to placing the species at risk include disease and

cross-breeding with Plains Bison, domestic bison, or cattle.

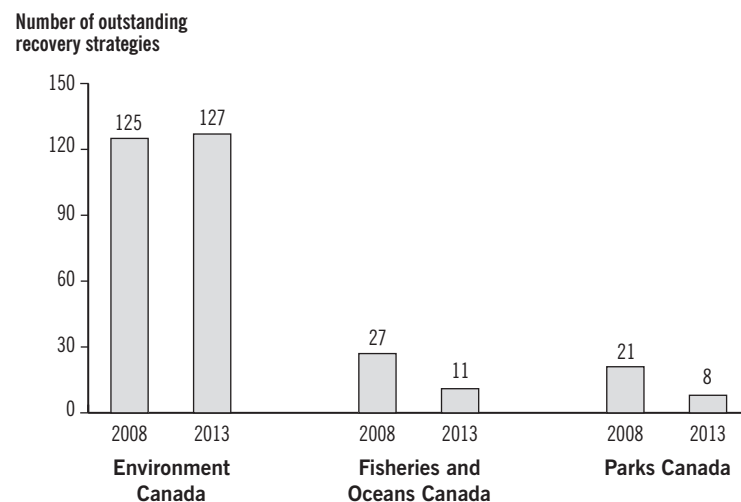
Recovery planning. A recovery strategy identifying the critical habitat as well as the goals, objectives, and approaches to recover the Wood Bison was required by June 2007. To date, Environment Canada has not completed the recovery strategy for this species. The Department informed us that a number of actions aimed at improving the status of the Wood Bison are being undertaken. However, in the absence of a recovery strategy, a coordinated approach may be lacking, and there is no overall benchmark against which progress can be monitored, evaluated, and reported.

6.22 As part of our audit, we looked at progress since our 2008 audit in completing the recovery strategies that were outstanding at that time. In addition, we looked to see the extent to which the organizations had completed recovery strategies that came due between 2008 and 31 March 2013.

6.23 In 2008, Environment Canada had 125 recovery strategies that needed to be completed. An additional 85 strategies became due as of 31 March 2013. While the Department has made progress in completing 83 recovery strategies (at a rate of about 15 per year) since our last audit, the rate of completion is such that the backlog has not decreased, with 127 outstanding as of 31 March 2013. Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada both completed the majority of their recovery strategies (Exhibit 6.5).

6.24 Based on their rate of progress in completing recovery strategies since our last audit, we estimated the time it would take the organizations to complete the outstanding strategies, including those shortly coming due. We estimated that at the current rate, it will take Environment Canada approximately 10 years to complete its outstanding recovery strategies, including those coming due by March 2014. We note that the number of recovery strategies coming due drops considerably after 2014. Based on a similar analysis, we estimated that it will take Parks Canada about 1.25 years to complete its outstanding recovery strategies due by March 2014. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has estimated that it will take approximately 3.5 years to complete its outstanding recovery strategies. These estimates do not

Exhibit 6.5 The number of Environment Canada’s outstanding recovery strategies has not decreased since 2008



reflect the additional time it will take for organizations to complete the required action plans related to the recovery strategies or the recovery strategies coming due after March 2014. The analysis does not take into account new species being added to the list or multi-species recovery strategies that may affect the time required to complete the strategy. The analysis assumes that the available resources to complete the recovery strategies remain constant.

Critical habitat has not been identified in many recovery strategies

6.25 The *Species at Risk Act* protects critical habitat by prohibiting its destruction and allowing for its protection. The Act requires federal organizations to identify the species' critical habitat, to the extent possible, in preparing the recovery strategies. The critical habitat of a species at risk is defined as the habitat that is necessary for its survival or recovery, and that is identified as the species' critical habitat in the recovery strategy or in an action plan for the species. That habitat can include breeding sites, nursery areas, and feeding grounds. Habitat loss and degradation is one of the greatest contributing factors to the decline of a species at risk.

6.26 For each of the species at risk for which a recovery strategy was completed and recovery of the species was found to be feasible, we looked to see whether the species' critical habitat had been identified. We found that critical habitat had not been identified in 43 percent of these recovery strategies. Specifically, Environment Canada had not identified the critical habitat in 31 percent of its recovery strategies, Fisheries and Oceans Canada in 66 percent of its strategies, and Parks Canada in 46 percent. Identifying the critical habitat of a given species at risk is one of the essential first steps in protecting it and prohibiting its destruction. This is significant because where critical habitat was not identified in the recovery strategy due to inadequate information, it will be identified only when subsequent action plans are developed. If a species' critical habitat is not protected, the species' survival or recovery may be placed further at risk.

Few action plans have been completed

6.27 Action plans outline the activities required to meet the objectives set out in the recovery strategies. The *Species at Risk Act* requires that the recovery strategy specify a timeline for completing the action plans needed to support the recovery of the species. Time frames for developing such plans range from about one to five years. A plan is not required where a species' recovery is determined not to be feasible.

6.28 Action plans were due for 97 of the 214 completed recovery strategies as of 31 March 2013. We found that plans for only 7 species (7 percent) were completed. We noted that Environment Canada had 4 of the 33 action plans (12 percent) that it was responsible for in place; Fisheries and Oceans Canada had finalized 1 of its 34 action plans (3 percent); and Parks Canada had completed 2 of the 30 action plans (7 percent) required. The Leatherback Sea Turtle is an example of a species for which an action plan is overdue (Exhibit 6.6).

6.29 While recovery activities for a particular species at risk can take place before the action plan is finalized, the plan identifies what actions are needed to recover the species at risk, the timeline for their implementation, and how they are to be coordinated and implemented. The action plans also provide a basis for monitoring and reporting on progress.

Exhibit 6.6 Action plans for the Leatherback Sea Turtle are more than three years overdue

Leatherback Sea Turtle (endangered)

The Leatherback Sea Turtle is the world's largest reptile, reaching over 900 kilograms in weight and 2 metres in length. The species has remained virtually unchanged since before the days of the dinosaurs. Leatherbacks are migratory sea turtles that breed in tropical or subtropical waters and move to temperate waters in search of food. They can be found in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. In Canada, Leatherbacks are found off the coasts of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. The Leatherback has also been seen off the coast of British



Photo: Stephanie Rousseau/Shutterstock.com

Columbia. Canadian waters provide an important feeding area for these turtles.

Status. The Leatherback Sea Turtle has been listed as endangered under the *Species at Risk Act* since 2003. In 2012, the species was reassessed and its status remained unchanged. The population is estimated to have declined by over 90 percent in the last 100 years.

Threats. In Canadian waters, Leatherbacks are threatened primarily by becoming entangled in fishing gear, colliding with vessels, and mistaking plastic debris for food, and by offshore oil and gas development activities. Other threats to the population include human development on the Leatherbacks' nesting beaches and egg collection by predators and humans.

Recovery planning. In 2007, Fisheries and Oceans Canada developed two recovery strategies for the Leatherback Sea Turtle: one for the Pacific Leatherback population and another for the Atlantic population. These strategies identified a

number of objectives for the recovery of the species, including the need to determine the species' critical habitat by conducting research to better understand its biology, behaviour, and habitat requirements. Another objective noted in the recovery strategies is to develop and implement measures to reduce the threats to the species and protect their critical migratory and foraging habitats once the threats are better understood and the critical habitat is identified.

The recovery strategies indicated that the action plans would be completed by 2009 for the Pacific population and by 2010 for the Atlantic population. While the Department has indicated that some activities have been taken to recover the species, it has not completed the required action plans for this species. Ten years after the species was listed as endangered, the specific actions needed to help the species' recovery, along with its critical habitat, have not yet been determined, nor has a timeline been set for their implementation.

Environment Canada has been slow to complete management plans

6.30 The *Species at Risk Act* requires management plans to be completed for species listed as being of special concern, outlining how to manage the species, its habitat, and related threats, and how to prevent the species from becoming threatened or endangered. Management plans were due for 106 species classified as being of special concern as of 31 March 2013: 71 at Environment Canada, 29 at Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and 6 at Parks Canada.

6.31 Overall, we found that 61 of the 106 (58 percent) required management plans had been completed, which include the finalized plans and those posted in the public registry for comment. Environment Canada had developed 34 out of 71 management plans (48 percent) for which it was responsible; Fisheries and Oceans Canada for 21 of 29 plans (72 percent); and Parks Canada for 6 of 6 plans (100 percent).

6.32 For the 45 instances where a management plan was required but not yet in place, we looked to see the extent to which it was overdue. We found that 27 (60 percent) of these plans were more than three years overdue. All of these instances related to species for which Environment Canada is responsible. Management plans detail the necessary actions to be taken in order to prevent a species of special concern from becoming threatened or endangered.

Several factors contribute to delays in completing recovery strategies and plans

6.33 Given that we found many of the recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans were overdue, we asked the organizations to provide us with an explanation for the delays. Officials indicated that a key challenge in completing the strategies is the significant amount of time it can take to meet the cooperation and consultation requirements of the Act. The Act requires that recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans be prepared in cooperation with federal, provincial, and territorial ministers, wildlife management boards, and Aboriginal organizations, and in consultation with landowners and lessees, and others, as required. In addition, officials told us that the effort required to develop the policies and guidance to implement the Act have contributed to the delays.

Recommendation

6.34 Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada should determine the priorities, time frame, and resources required to complete the outstanding recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for species at risk. In addition, the organizations should report publicly, and annually, on the strategies and plans completed, those remaining to be done, and the time frame within which outstanding recovery strategies and plans will be completed.

Environment Canada's response. Agreed. Environment Canada will continue to address the backlog of overdue recovery documents and prepare recovery documents for newly listed species. To structure and guide this work, the Department will develop a posting plan in consultation with Parks Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada for recovery documents that will establish a timeline for each species; Environment Canada will share posting plan information annually via the Species at Risk Public Registry. Additionally, the Department will complete the development of tools for tracking recovery planning and for tracking the progress of implementation. It will further develop guidance for various aspects of the recovery planning process. In carrying out this work and completing recovery documents in line with the timelines set out in the *Species at Risk Act*, the Department will also consider and continue to meet the consultation and cooperation requirements of the Act.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada's response. Agreed. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has put in place measures to improve its performance in completing recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans to address the overdue documents in a more timely fashion while respecting the various requirements of the *Species at Risk Act*, such as the requirement for consultation and cooperation, identifying critical habitat, and implementation of measures to support species recovery. The work on the overdue documents will be undertaken concurrently with the work on completing recovery documents for newly listed species, while meeting the various requirements of the *Species at Risk Act*, within existing resources. In cooperation with Environment Canada and Parks Canada, a plan will be developed, regularly updated, and posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry to communicate to Canadians our progress on recovery documents.

Parks Canada's response. Agreed. Parks Canada will continue working to complete overdue recovery documents, including the completion of consultation and cooperation processes. Parks Canada will use an ecosystem approach to produce multi-species site-based action plans for Parks Canada sites. This approach is designed to achieve the greatest conservation benefit for species at risk in an efficient and effective manner. In cooperation with Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, a posting plan will be developed, regularly updated, and posted on the public registry to provide a transparent means of communicating our approach and progress to Canadians. Parks Canada will continue to implement recovery activities for species at risk to improve the conservation status of species on our lands. This work will be completed within existing resource allocations.

Conclusion

6.35 Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada have not met their legal requirements for establishing recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans under the *Species at Risk Act*. While organizations have made varying degrees of progress since our 2008 audit in completing the recovery strategies they are responsible for, 146 recovery strategies remain to be completed as of 31 March 2013. Over 90 percent of the action plans required to guide and direct the implementation of these recovery strategies have yet to be completed. The required management plans for species of special concern were not completed in 42 percent of cases.

6.36 We noted that while Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada have made notable progress in completing the majority of the recovery strategies they are responsible for, Environment Canada continues to have a significant number of outstanding recovery strategies for which it is responsible. Of these, 84 percent were overdue by more than three years as of 31 March 2013.

6.37 Based on Environment Canada's annual rate for completing recovery strategies since our last audit, we estimated that it will take the Department approximately 10 years to complete these outstanding recovery strategies, including those coming due in the next year. In addition, Environment Canada has been slow to complete its management plans, with approximately half of these plans outstanding as of 31 March 2013.

6.38 Given that many of the required recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans remain to be completed, the overall goals, objectives, and necessary actions have not been established for the recovery of species at risk. While the lack of strategies and plans do not preclude recovery activities from taking place, their absence leaves responsible organizations without the tools for identifying, directing, and coordinating recovery efforts, or benchmarks against which to monitor and report on progress.

About the Audit

All of the audit work in this chapter was conducted in accordance with the standards for assurance engagements set by The Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. While the Office adopts these standards as the minimum requirement for our audits, we also draw on the standards and practices of other disciplines.

As part of our regular audit process, we obtained management's confirmation that the findings reported in this chapter are factually based.

Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada have established recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for species identified as being at risk under the *Species at Risk Act*.

Scope and approach

The audit focused on all species declared at risk for which a recovery strategy, action plan, or management plan was due as of 31 March 2013. For each of these species at risk, the audit determined if the necessary recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans were established in accordance with the requirements of the *Species at Risk Act*. We did not examine the adequacy or implementation of the strategies and plans for the recovery of species at risk.

In carrying out our audit, we interviewed relevant stakeholders and officials at Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada, and reviewed and analyzed departmental documentation.

Criteria

Criteria	Source
To determine whether Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada have established recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for species identified as being at risk under the <i>Species at Risk Act</i>, we used the following criteria:	
The organizations have established recovery strategies and management plans for the listed species at risk for which they are responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Species at Risk Act</i>
The organizations have established action plans to implement recovery strategies for species at risk for which they are responsible.	

Management reviewed and accepted the suitability of the criteria used in the audit.

Period covered by the audit

We focused on the species declared at risk for which a recovery strategy, management plan, or action plan was due as of 31 March 2013. Audit work for this chapter was completed on 3 July 2013.

Audit team

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Appendix Recommendation

The following recommendation is found in Chapter 6. The number in front of the recommendation indicates the paragraph number where it appears in the chapter. The numbers in parentheses indicate the paragraph numbers where the topic is discussed.

Recommendation	Response
<p>6.34 Environment Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada should determine the priorities, time frame, and resources required to complete the outstanding recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans for species at risk. In addition, the organizations should report publicly, and annually, on the strategies and plans completed, those remaining to be done, and the time frame within which outstanding recovery strategies and plans will be completed. (6.15–6.33)</p>	<p>Environment Canada’s response. Agreed. Environment Canada will continue to address the backlog of overdue recovery documents and prepare recovery documents for newly listed species. To structure and guide this work, the Department will develop a posting plan in consultation with Parks Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada for recovery documents that will establish a timeline for each species; Environment Canada will share posting plan information annually via the Species at Risk Public Registry. Additionally, the Department will complete the development of tools for tracking recovery planning and for tracking the progress of implementation. It will further develop guidance for various aspects of the recovery planning process. In carrying out this work and completing recovery documents in line with the timelines set out in the <i>Species at Risk Act</i>, the Department will also consider and continue to meet the consultation and cooperation requirements of the Act.</p> <p>Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s response. Agreed. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has put in place measures to improve its performance in completing recovery strategies, action plans, and management plans to address the overdue documents in a more timely fashion while respecting the various requirements of the <i>Species at Risk Act</i>, such as the requirement for consultation and cooperation, identifying critical habitat, and implementation of measures to support species recovery. The work on the overdue documents will be undertaken concurrently with the work on completing recovery documents for newly listed species, while meeting the various requirements of the <i>Species at Risk Act</i>, within existing resources. In cooperation with Environment Canada and Parks Canada, a plan will be developed, regularly updated, and posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry to communicate to Canadians our progress on recovery documents.</p>

Recommendation	Response
	<p>Parks Canada’s response. Agreed. Parks Canada will continue working to complete overdue recovery documents, including the completion of consultation and cooperation processes. Parks Canada will use an ecosystem approach to produce multi-species site-based action plans for Parks Canada sites. This approach is designed to achieve the greatest conservation benefit for species at risk in an efficient and effective manner. In cooperation with Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, a posting plan will be developed, regularly updated, and posted on the public registry to provide a transparent means of communicating our approach and progress to Canadians. Parks Canada will continue to implement recovery activities for species at risk to improve the conservation status of species on our lands. This work will be completed within existing resource allocations.</p>