## **COSEWIC Annual Report**

presented to

# The Minister of Environment and Climate Change

and

The Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council (CESCC)

from

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)

2021-2022

COSEWIC

Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada



COSEPAC

Comité sur la situation des espèces en péril au Canada

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### ITEM I - COSEWIC ACTIVITIES

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) Secretariat hosted COSEWIC-related meetings virtually. Some COSEWIC-related activities were limited, including some planned COSEWIC status reports and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge reports that were not advanced, due to COVID-19-related reasons. The switch to virtual meetings had a strong negative impact on the Committee's ability to carry out its responsibilities, which members did their best to compensate for.

## 1. Wildlife Species Assessment Meetings

Section 15 (1) of the *Species at Risk Act* states: "The functions of COSEWIC are to (a) assess the status of each wildlife species considered by COSEWIC to be at risk and, as part of the assessment, identify existing and potential threats to the species and

- (i) classify the species as extinct, extirpated, endangered, threatened, or of special concern,
- (ii) indicate that COSEWIC does not have sufficient information to classify the species, or
- (iii) indicate that the species is not currently at risk".

Under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), the foremost function of COSEWIC is to "assess the status of each wildlife species considered by COSEWIC to be at risk and, as part of the assessment, identify existing and potential threats to the wildlife species".

Due to COVID-19 pandemic related travel restrictions, COSEWIC was not able to hold its regular face-to-face Wildlife Species Assessment Meetings and instead went virtual.

As usual, COSEWIC held two Wildlife Species Assessment Meetings in this reporting year (October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2022). One meeting was from November 22 to December 1, 2021 and the other one was from May 2 to May 11, 2022. During this reporting period, COSEWIC assessed the status or reviewed the classification of 46 wildlife species.

The wildlife species assessment results for the 2021-2022 reporting period include the following:

Extinct:	4
Extirpated:	5

Endangered: 11

Threatened: 7

Special Concern: 18

Data Deficient: 0

Not at Risk: 1

Total: 46

Of the 46 wildlife species examined, COSEWIC reviewed the classification of 24 wildlife species that had been assessed previously. The review of classification for 13 of those wildlife species resulted in a confirmation of the same risk status as the previous assessment (see Table 1a).

Table 1a. Confirmation of status for wildlife species previously assessed:

EXTIRPATED	ENDANGERED	THREATENED	SPECIAL CONCERN
Black-footed Ferret  Dwarf Wedgemussel	Greater Sage-Grouse urophasianus subspecies		Harbour Porpoise (Northwest Atlantic population)
Greater Prairie- Chicken	Mountain Plover		Sea Otter
Greater Sage-Grouse phaios subspecies	Northern Leopard Frog (Rocky Mountain population)		Threaded Vertigo  Victorin's Water–hemlock
Incurved Grizzled Moss	Sage Thrasher		

#### **Data Deficient, Not at Risk, Extinct:**

In December 2021, COSEWIC did not assess any wildlife species as Data Deficient or Not at Risk.

Seaside Bone Lichen was assessed as Not at Risk in May 2022. This wildlife species was assessed previously by COSEWIC as Threatened (April 2008), and is currently listed as Threatened on Schedule 1 of SARA

In December 2021, COSEWIC assessed 3 new populations of Sockeye Salmon as Extinct: Sockeye Salmon (Adams–ES population (original)), Sockeye Salmon (North Barriere–ES population (original)), and Sockeye Salmon (Seton–S population (original)).

In May 2022, COSEWIC assessed the Grey Whale (Atlantic population) as Extinct. This wildlife species was assessed previously by COSEWIC as Extirpated (November 2009), and is currently listed as Extirpated on Schedule 1 of SARA.

Special Note: Sharp-tailed Snake was previously assessed by COSEWIC as Endangered (currently Schedule 1 of SARA); in December 2021 this original unit was split into two populations. Coast Mountains population was designated Endangered, and Pacific Coast population was designated Threatened (Table 1b).

Special Note; Eastern Sand Darter (Ontario population) was previously assessed by COSEWIC as Threatened (currently Schedule 1 of SARA); in May 2022, this original unit was split into two populations (Southwestern Ontario population and West Lake population), each receiving a designation of Threatened (Table 1b).

With the transmission of this report, COSEWIC provides assessments (see Table 1b) of 28 wildlife species newly classified as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened, and of Special Concern to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to consider whether to recommend to the Governor in Council (GIC) that they be added to Schedule 1 of SARA.

Table 1b. Newly classified wildlife species eligible for an amendment to Schedule 1 of SARA:

EXTIRPATED	ENDANGERED	THREATENED	SPECIAL CONCERN
	Meadow Thistle (Mingan population)  Meadow Thistle (Rocky Mountain population)  Pumpkin Ash  Sharp-tailed Snake (Coast Mountains population)  Sockeye Salmon (Fraser-ES population (original))  Sockeye Salmon (Momich-ES population (original))  Vancouver Island Shieldback	Dusky Dune Moth  Eastern Foxsnake (Carolinian population)  Eastern Foxsnake (Great Lakes / St. Lawrence population)  Eastern Sand Darter (Southwestern Ontario population)  Eastern Sand Darter (West Lake population)  Northern Oak Hairstreak  Sharp-tailed Snake (Pacific Coast population)	American Marten (Newfoundland population)  Bobolink  Brassy Minnow (Missouri population)  Brassy Minnow (Pacific population)  Brassy Minnow (Western Arctic population)  Dense Draba  Dukes' Skipper  Eastern False Rue—anemone  Eastern Sand Darter (Quebec population)  Johnson's Hairstreak  Skillet Clubtail  Sockeye Salmon (Alouette—ES population (original))  Sockeye Salmon (Coquitlam—ES population (original))  Victorin's Gentian

Information pertaining to the wildlife species assessed since the last annual report can be found on the SARA Public Registry website at the following address:

https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/sar/index/default\_e.cfm

A copy of the assessment details for these wildlife species, including status assigned, reasons for designation (including uncertainties if applicable), and COSEWIC criteria with alphanumeric codes can be found on the COSEWIC website at the following address:

### http://cosewic.ca/index.php/en-ca/assessment-process

Status reports containing information on COSEWIC's status assessments will be available on the SARA Public Registry at the following address:

#### https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/sar/assessment/status e.cfm

As of May 2022, COSEWIC's assessments include 841 wildlife species in various risk categories, including 371 Endangered, 196 Threatened, 253 Special Concern, and 21 Extirpated (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition, 23 wildlife species have been assessed as Extinct.

As of May 2022, 62 wildlife species have been designated as Data Deficient and 203 have been assessed and assigned Not at Risk status.

## 2. Important Notes Regarding Status Assessments

Section 27 of SARA states that the Governor in Council may, on the recommendation of the Minister, by order amend the List in accordance with subsections (1.1) and (1.2) by adding a wildlife species, by reclassifying a listed wildlife species or by removing a listed wildlife species, and the Minister may, by order, amend the List in a similar fashion in accordance with subsection (3).

During the period covered in the report COSEWIC did not inform the Minister about any details related to status assessments.

Seaside Bone Lichen was assessed as Not at Risk in May 2022. This wildlife species was assessed previously by COSEWIC as Threatened (April 2008), and is currently listed as Threatened on Schedule 1 of SARA. COSEWIC recommends that the wildlife species be removed from Schedule 1 of SARA.

In May 2022, COSEWIC assessed the Grey Whale (Atlantic population) as Extinct. This wildlife species was assessed previously by COSEWIC as Extirpated (November 2009), and is currently listed as Extirpated on Schedule 1 of SARA. COSEWIC recommends that the wildlife specie be removed from Schedule 1 of SARA.

## 3. Other Wildlife Species Assessment Activities

## **Emergency Assessments**

Section 29 of SARA provides for the listing of a wildlife species based on an imminent threat to the survival of the wildlife species under an emergency basis. Section 30 (1) of SARA states that COSEWIC is to prepare a status report on the wildlife species and, within one year after the making of the order, COSEWIC must, in a report in writing to the Minister, (a) confirm the classification of the species; (b) recommend to the Minister that the species be reclassified; or (c) recommend to the Minister that the species be removed from the List.

No emergency assessments were conducted during the 2021-2022 reporting period.

## 4. Wildlife Species Assessments returned by the Governor in Council (GIC) to COSEWIC for further information or consideration

Section 27 (1.1) (c) of SARA provides for the Governor in Council to, on the recommendation of the Minister, refer an assessment of the status of a species back to COSEWIC for further information or consideration.

The Rusty Cord-moss (*Entosthodon rubiginosus*) was referred back to COSEWIC for further consideration (Canada Gazette, Part II, September 2021). On the basis of new information, the Committee has decided to re-assess this species. For more information, please consult this link:

https://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2021/2021-09-01/html/si-tr58-eng.html

Three populations of Caribou, *Rangifer tarandus* (Northern Mountain population, Central Mountain population, and Southern Mountain population) were referred back to COSEWIC for further consideration (Canada Gazette, Part II, Volume 156, Number 4, February 16, 2022). For more information, please consult this link:

https://canadagazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2022/2022-02-16/html/si-tr7-eng.html

## 5. Wildlife Species Selected for Status Report Preparation

Section 15.1 (b) of SARA states that one of the functions of COSEWIC is to "determine when wildlife species are to be assessed, with priority given to those more likely to become extinct".

Following COSEWIC's process for prioritizing new wildlife species for assessment, 8 (including putative designatable units) wildlife species from COSEWIC's Species Specialist Subcommittees' candidate lists were chosen by the Committee for status report commissioning in 2021. The following is a list of those prioritized candidate wildlife species:

Taxonomic Group	Common Name / Population name	Scientific Name
1. Arthropods	Canadian Philaronia	Philaronia canadensis
2. Arthropods	Leadplant Flower Moth	Schinia luscens
3. Birds	Bermuda Petrel	Pterodroma cahow
4. Birds	Marbled Godwit*	Limosa fedoa
5. Birds	Rufous Hummingbird	Selaphorus rufus
6. Amphibians	Plains Spadefoot	Spea bombifrons

<sup>\*</sup> COSEWIC Birds Specialist Subcommittee is in the process of identifying the appropriate designatable units for this species.

## 6. COSEWIC Subcommittees

Section 18 (1) of SARA requires COSEWIC to establish subcommittees of specialists to assist in the preparation and review of status reports on wildlife species considered to be at risk, including subcommittees specializing in groups of wildlife species and a subcommittee specializing in Aboriginal traditional knowledge.

#### **Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee**

COSEWIC's Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee is responsible for ensuring that Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge (ATK) is integrated appropriately in COSEWIC's assessment process. The Subcommittee consists of members appointed by the Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change. The Co-chairs of the ATK Subcommittee are members of COSEWIC and provide COSEWIC with their expertise on ATK.

The following is a summary of activities over this past year:

- ATK Source Reports were completed for White Birch and Black Spruce.
- The ATK Subcommittee members participated in an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion call to discuss perspectives and advise on how to increase diversity within COSEWIC.
- The ATK Subcommittee hosted a series of teleconferences to initiate discussion towards a more holistic ecosystem approach. The ATK Subcommittee believes they may be most helpful to COSEWIC when an ecosystem approach is considered in terms of threats and the wildlife and land and water around them. Discussions are still underway.

In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some ATK Subcommittee-related activities were limited, including some planned ATK reports that were not advanced. This includes ongoing work to prioritize and select wildlife species for ATK reports.

COSEWIC extends its sincere gratitude to the members of the ATK Subcommittee for their ongoing commitment to ensuring that COSEWIC assessments are informed by the best available information.

#### **Species Specialist Subcommittees**

COSEWIC's Species Specialists Subcommittees provide taxonomic expertise to the Committee. Each Species Specialist Subcommittee is led by two volunteer Co-chairs, and typically 10-12 members who are recognized Canadian experts in the taxonomic group in question, demonstrate high standards of education, experience, and expertise and have a demonstrated knowledge of wildlife conservation. These volunteer members are drawn from universities, provincial wildlife agencies, museums, Conservation Data Centres, and other sources of expertise on Canadian wildlife species. They support the Co-chairs in developing candidate lists of wildlife species to be considered for assessment, commissioning status reports for priority wildlife species, reviewing reports for scientific accuracy and completeness, and proposing to COSEWIC a status for each wildlife species. Currently, COSEWIC has 10 Species Specialist Subcommittees: Amphibians and Reptiles, Arthropods, Birds, Freshwater Fishes, Marine Fishes, Marine Mammals, Molluscs, Mosses and Lichens, Terrestrial Mammals, and Vascular Plants.

For more information please see:

#### http://cosewic.ca/index.php/en-ca/about-us/cosewic-subcommittees

Species Specialist Subcommittee meetings typically take place annually in different locations in Canada. Last year they were virtual due to the pandemic, which hampered the ability of members to solve problems and exchange information that was important for their work. Observers are normally invited to attend meetings, and when meetings return to inperson, public information sessions will resume for some Species Specialist Subcomittees.

In addition to their continued work to ensure that high quality status reports are brought to each COSEWIC Wildlife Species Assessment Meeting, Species Specialist Subcommittees also periodically undertake special projects aimed at assisting their work.

COSEWIC is extremely grateful for the important work of the Species Specialist Subcommittee members who provide their time and expertise on a volunteer basis.

## 7. COSEWIC Operations and Procedures

Section 19 of SARA states that COSEWIC "may make rules respecting the holding of meetings and the general conduct of its activities."

COSEWIC is guided in its activities by an Operations & Procedures Manual that is reviewed annually by COSEWIC's Operations and Procedures Subcommittee, which recommends any changes to the Committee for its approval. During this reporting period, the COSEWIC Operations and Procedures Manual was updated to reflect changes in COSEWIC's procedures. The most notable changes are as follows:

- Changes were made to Appendix E3 (COSEWIC Assessment Process, Categories and Guidelines), most notably to Table 2 (COSEWIC quantitative criteria and guidelines for the status assessment of Wildlife Species), based on recommendations by the COSEWIC Criteria Working Group. COSEWIC also formally adopted long-standing IUCN guidelines on (1) transferring between status categories during a reassessment and (2) on how to proceed with assessment when presented with two non-consecutive plausible status categories.
- Appendix E6 (Procedures for Reviews of Classification) was updated to include a multifactorial key to help determine the review of classification stream and codified reasons for change in species status following an assessment.
- Appendices F1 (Instructions for the Preparation of COSEWIC Status Reports) and F3 (Template for the Preparation of COSEWIC Status Reports) were updated with the goal of reducing status report length, to standardize presentation of information, and to improve the compatibility and usefulness of status reports for downstream users.
- COSEWIC provided its updated (2020) Appendix F5 (Guidelines for Determining Designatable Units) to the Canadian Wildlife Directors Committee, inviting any comments they or their staff might have. Input is due to the COSEWIC Science Support office by December 21, 2022.
- COSEWIC also formally approved changes to the Operations and Procedures Manual
  to add two new Early Career membership positions to the Committee, as another means
  of increasing diversity. This led to changes to the number of votes required for quorum
  and a successful motion or species assessment vote. COSEWIC also added one new
  Early Career membership position to each of the 10 Species Specialist Subcommittees.
  We have received very positive feedback regarding these new positions.
- A few definitions specific to COSEWIC and their assessments were updated.

## 8. Procedural Working Groups

Section 18 (1) of SARA also allows COSEWIC to establish subcommittees to advise it or to exercise or perform any of its functions.

Procedural working groups are essential to ensuring COSEWIC's operations and procedures are efficient, effective and followed clearly, thus maintaining the quality and consistency of COSEWIC status assessments and processes.

### a) Press Release

This Working Group was inactive during the 2021-2022 timeframe due to the need to use virtual meetings, which led to increased workload issues. Reporting by COSEWIC to the public is mandated under SARA, and the Committee looks forward to being able to resume this activity when it returns to in-person meetings.

## b) Species Prioritization

The Priority Setting Working Group met in March of 2021 to rank candidate species for COSEWIC assessment. Nine species were designated high priority for COSEWIC assessment and advertising on the fall 2022 Call for Bids for status report commissioning. The working group also met in June of 2021 to discuss SARA minimum requirements, streamlined processes for reassessment and the ranking of reassessments. This work is aimed at finding solutions to COSEWIC's growing list of backlogged reassessments while ensuring that COSEWIC targets highest priority species for assessment.

#### c) Status Report Streamlining

The updated status report template was finalized and implemented in 2022. The working group has fulfilled its mandate and it has been disbanded.

#### d) Designatable Units

This working group continues to assist Species Specialist Subcommittees with implementing the updated (2020) Guidelines for Determining Designatable Units.

#### e) <u>Data</u>

This working group is still reviewing the Operations and Procedures Manual, Appendix F8 (Updated Guidelines Concerning Sensitive Information) of the Operations and Procedures Manual. They are also discussing details related to COSEWIC-related data with the aim of improving its accessibility to others.

#### f) Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

This working group is advancing its work to achieve diversified membership that is representative of the population we serve. An EDI consultant has been hired to facilitate this goal. The contract includes surveying membership, analyzing recruitment documents, identifying barriers, and providing training. The consultant has worked closely with the working group over this past year, with a final report and recommendations planned to be provided to the Committee in Fall 2022. The working group has provided the Committee with advice on operations and procedural changes on advertising membership positions and assessing membership applicants to strive for qualified diverse membership. COSEWIC has now achieved gender parity, and we are continuing to push for improvements in other axes of diversity.

## g) Criteria

Revisions to the Operations and Procedures Manual, Appendix E3 Table 2 (Quantitative Assessment Criteria) were proposed and voted on as part of Operations and Procedures Manual revisions. These included 'Transfer Between Categories', addition of subcriteria applicable for Special Concern/Data Deficient outcomes, and revisions to Criterion C. It is anticipated that relevant training for COSEWIC will be initiated, as well as a workshop on Bayesian statistics.

#### h) Threats Assessments

Revisions have been made to Appendices F1 and F3, and revisions are proposed for F13, to simplify and collate guidance on assessing threats. It was agreed that COSEWIC will continue to use the last version of the threats calculator to align with NatureServe (and not use the latest revised version). It is anticipated that relevant training will be initiated for new facilitators and Species Specialist Subcommittee Cochairs.

#### 9. COSEWIC Communications

Insofar as resources allow, COSEWIC and its Chairs over the years have made every effort to inform governments and the public about the work of the Committee. COVID-19 travel restrictions prevented the COSEWIC Chair from attending in-person meetings this past year.

During the current reporting period, COSEWIC produced two press releases outlining the results of the fall 2020 and the spring 2021 Wildlife Species Assessment Meetings. The links to the COSEWIC press releases can be found on the COSEWIC website:

#### http://cosewic.ca/index.php/en-ca/news-and-events

COSEWIC's Twitter account informs Canadians about news on Canadian species at risk. The account can be found at <a href="https://twitter.com/cosewic">https://twitter.com/cosewic</a> and now has nearly 2,000 followers.

The Chair of COSEWIC gave the following 14 virtual presentations on the work of COSEWIC:

- The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Sustainable Development Institute (FNQLSDI)
- Fraser Basin Council, BC
- Canadian Wildlife Federation public webinar
- Canadian Wildlife Federation board and staff
- Alberni Naturalists, BC
- Okanagan Naturalists, BC
- South Coast Conservation Program, BC
- Royal BC Museum
- Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre, BC
- Conservation Biology Course University of Toronto
- Conservation Biology Course University of British Columbia
- Conservation Biology Course Sanford Fleming
- Capilano University
- Prairie Conservation Action Plan, SK

In addition, the Chair of COSEWIC had written correspondence regarding the following issues.

- Numerous media requests concerning federal protections of Monarch Butterfly (all declined with explanations about the COSEWIC-SARA process, as this is beyond COSEWIC's mandate)
- Concerns about protection of Copper Redhorse in Quebec
- Concerns about protection of Blanding's Turtles in Ontario

The Chair also had the following meetings:

- Members of the New Zealand government regarding potential Species at Risk legislation in their country
- Representatives from the Auditor General of Canada's office regarding aquatic species at risk

The Chair of COSEWIC has had a number of meetings regarding an increased focus on working collaboratively with the federal government on the implementation of SARA.

In addition, the Chair of COSEWIC participated in several media interviews about the untimely death of Dr. Jeffrey Hutchings, former Chair of COSEWIC.

## ITEM II - COSEWIC MEMBERSHIP

Section 16 of SARA states that (1) COSEWIC is to be composed of members appointed by the Minister after consultation with the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council and with any experts and expert bodies, such as the Royal Society of Canada, that the Minister considers to have relevant expertise. (2) Each member must have expertise drawn from a discipline such as conservation biology, population dynamics, taxonomy, systematics or genetics or from community knowledge or aboriginal traditional knowledge of the conservation of wildlife species. (3) The members are to be appointed to hold office for renewable terms of not more than four years.

## 1. Membership Changes

For a current list of members on COSEWIC, please see the COSEWIC website.

#### http://cosewic.ca/index.php/en-ca/about-us/cosewic-members

Members from the Federal, Provincial or Territorial jurisdictions are recommended to the Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change by the jurisdiction.

The Co-chairs of the ATK Subcommittee are elected by the ATK Subcommittee members and recommended to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change for appointment to COSEWIC. The Co-chairs and all ATK Subcommittee members are nominated by National Aboriginal Organizations with the exception of two of its members who can be nominated by the ATK Subcommittee. Subcommittee members are appointed by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

Species Specialist Subcommittee Co-chairs and Non-government Science Members are recommended to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change by COSEWIC following an in-depth review process.

A call for six Species Specialist Subcommittee Co-chairs, one Non-Government Scientist, and one Chair was posted on the COSEWIC website between January 20 and February 17, 2021. Selection Committees composed of COSEWIC and Species Specialist Subcommittee members then evaluated the applications following procedures set out in COSEWIC's Operations & Procedures Manual. The Chairs of each Selection Committee prepared reports summarizing the strengths and weaknesses of the applicants, which were discussed with COSEWIC during the virtual species assessment meeting on May 11, 2022. Selected candidates were confirmed by COSEWIC and their names and CVs were provided to the Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change in June 2022 for consideration of appointment. Members of CESCC were copied on this correspondence.

## ITEM III - WILDLIFE SPECIES ASSESSMENTS

In accordance with Section 25(1) of SARA when COSEWIC completes an assessment of the status of a wildlife species, it must provide the Minister and the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council with a copy of the assessment and the reasons for it. A copy of the assessment must also be included on the public registry.

Information pertaining to the wildlife species assessed since the last annual report can be found on the SARA Public Registry website at the following address:

https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/sar/index/default e.cfm

The status reports will be available in English and French on the Public Registry at the following address:

https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/sar/assessment/status e.cfm

## ITEM IV – WILDIFE SPECIES ASSESSED BY COSEWIC SINCE ITS INCEPTION

In accordance with Section 25(2) of SARA, COSEWIC must annually prepare a complete list of every wildlife species it has assessed since the coming into force of that section and a copy of that list must be included in the public registry.

The Canadian Species at Risk publication is available on the Species at Risk Public Registry.

https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/search/advSearchResults\_e.cfm?stype=doc&lng=e&advkeywords=&docid=33&start\_date=&enddate=&#ot33

It includes all wildlife species assessed by COSEWIC since its inception up to and including October 2021.