

Q & A: Critical Habitat Identification and Protection for SARA-listed Species

1. Who is responsible for identifying Critical Habitat?

- The identification of critical habitat under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) is a federal responsibility.

2. Where are Critical Habitat areas in B.C.?

- Locations of critical habitat areas in BC can be found in the individual species' Recovery Strategy or Action Plan posted on the federal [Species at Risk Public Registry](#) as “Final” and “Proposed” (pdf and HTML formats).
 - Fisheries and Oceans Canada has prepared additional static maps that display “Final” critical habitat for aquatic species across the country. These are available to the public (as of December 2016) at: <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especies/fpp-ppp/index-eng.htm>

3. How can I access Critical Habitat spatial data in B.C.?

- Critical habitat data for terrestrial and aquatic species at risk can be accessed in a number of ways. Please see part two of this document: *Accessing Critical Habitat Maps and Spatial Data*.

4. Who protects Critical Habitat and how?

Terrestrial species at risk:

- Environment and Climate Change Canada is responsible for the protection of terrestrial species at risk on federal lands and species identified as migratory birds under the Migratory Birds Convention Act.
- Where any listed species faces imminent threats to its survival and recovery the Minister may make a recommendation for an emergency order to protect the species and its critical habitat on non-federal lands.
- Under the *Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk*, provincial, territorial and federal governments agreed to undertake actions to protect and recover terrestrial species at risk under their respective jurisdictions.
- Local government bylaws can include habitat protection.
 - Some local governments have Official Community Plans designating Environmental Development Permit Areas (EDPAs). In these areas, the assessment of wildlife values (including species at risk) and consideration of natural habitats may be required as part of the development permit approval process.

- Regardless of laws, landowners are encouraged to consider species at risk and their habitat when making land-use decisions. Where species occur on private lands, cooperative, voluntary measures are the first approach to recovery implementation, especially with respect to protection of habitat.

Aquatic species at risk:

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada is responsible for the protection of aquatic species at risk wherever they are found (with exception of areas administered by Parks Canada).
- Critical habitat can include aquatic and riparian components.
- Critical habitat protection will almost always occur through the establishment of a Critical Habitat Order which will invoke the prohibition against destruction of critical habitat.
- SARA prohibits the killing, harming, harassing, capturing and taking of extirpated, endangered or threatened aquatic species at risk. Activities that destroy critical habitat are also likely to kill, harm or harass individuals. A SARA Critical Habitat Order provides additional protection.

All species at risk:

- Information regarding the steps and process for the establishment of SARA Critical Habitat Orders is best provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada for terrestrial species, or Fisheries and Oceans Canada for aquatic species (see last section for contact information).
- The Province has a number of statutes that collectively govern how species and ecosystems at risk and their habitats are managed (e.g., *Wildlife Act*, *Forest and Range Practices Act*, *Oil and Gas Activities Act*, *Ecological Reserves Act*, *Park Act*, amongst others).

5. Is there guidance available on Critical Habitat identification and protection?

All species at risk:

- [Species at Risk Registry](#) – to access federal recovery documents
- [A Guide to the Species At Risk Act \(SARA\): Information for Private Land Owners](#)

Terrestrial species at risk:

- [Species at Risk Act Implementation Guidance for Recovery Practitioners: Critical Habitat Identification Toolbox](#)
- [SARA Policy on Critical Habitat Protection on Non-federal Lands \[Proposed\]](#)

Aquatic species at risk:

- [Directive on the identification of critical habitat for aquatic species at risk](#)

- Permitting:
 - If you are undertaking a construction or development project in or near fish habitat that may contain aquatic species at risk, please visit DFO's [Projects Near Water](#) or contact ReferralsPacific@dfo-mpo.gc.ca.
 - If your project is scientific research, environmental enhancement, or another project that is not a construction or development project, please visit [Permitting under SARA](#) or contact sara@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca.
- [Measures to avoid causing harm to fish and fish habitat](#)
- [Guidelines for working in or around fish habitat and guidance for planning proposed activities](#)
- General information regarding SARA:
 - [A Guide to the Species at Risk Act](#)

6. Is there other information I should know about for species at risk?

- For more information, please visit the Government of B.C.'s [Species and Ecosystems at Risk website](#) or the [BC Species & Ecosystems Explorer](#).
- Provincial [best management practices](#) and complementary documents:
 - [Managing Species at Risk in British Columbia Guidance for Resource Professionals \(2009\)](#)
 - [Develop with Care 2014](#)
 - [Supporting Information - Air Quality](#)
 - [Guidelines for Amphibians and Reptile Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia \(2014\)](#)
 - [Best Management Practices for Amphibian and Reptile Salvages in British Columbia](#)
 - [Best Management Practices for Bats in British Columbia \(2016\)](#)
 - [Best Management Practices Guidelines for Pacific Water Shrew in Urban and Rural Areas](#)
 - [Guidelines for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia \(2013\)](#)
 - [Region-specific Guidelines and BMPs](#)
 - [Stewardship Centre of BC](#) for voluntary stewardship guidance
- [Provincial recovery documents for species at risk](#)

7. Who should I contact if I have more questions about Critical Habitat identification and protection?

- Terrestrial species at risk (including migratory birds):

- Environment and Climate Change Canada / regional Canadian Wildlife Service office in Delta: Email: ec.ep.rpy-sar.pyr.ec@canada.ca; Phone: 604-350-1900
- Aquatic species at risk:
 - Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Vancouver: sara@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Accessing Critical Habitat Maps and Spatial Data

The identification of critical habitat under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) is a federal responsibility. Critical habitat maps represent *areas within which* critical habitat is found. To know what is considered critical habitat within a polygon, one must also refer to the federal recovery strategy or action plan to find out the required habitat features/attributes for a particular species.

Critical Habitat Maps in Recovery Documents

Static maps pertaining to “Final” and “Proposed” critical habitat are publically available in the individual species’ Recovery Strategy or Action Plan found on the federal [Species at Risk Public Registry](#) (pdf and HTML formats).

Terrestrial Species - BC Tools: iMap & Data Distribution Service

Critical Habitat identified for terrestrial species under the federal *Species at Risk Act* within British Columbia is available via the BC Geographic Warehouse to all of BC government (as of Aug 2015) and to the public (as of Jan 2016). Note: critical habitat identified for aquatic species within BC is not currently available through BC Tools.

This data includes both “Final” and “Proposed” critical habitat, as depicted in recovery documents that have been posted on the [Species at Risk Public Registry](#) by Environment and Climate Change Canada or Parks Canada. Note that the federal government is the custodian of this data.

[Metadata](#) provides a description of this data and links to the tools to access it.

Access this critical habitat data using either of these tools:

- A. [iMapBC 2.0](#)
 - Look in the layer library under “Fish, Wildlife and Plant Species” Group. Choose the layer “Critical Habitat for Federally-Listed Species at Risk – Posted”. Note that critical habitat polygons will only be shown when zoomed to a scale of 1:800,000 or larger.
- B. [Data Distribution Service](#): Download or connect to the data.

Terrestrial Species - ECCC's Data Portal

Environment and Climate Change Canada has made the geospatial files for “Final” and “Proposed” critical habitat (data from Parks Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada) available as “Open Data”. This data is available to the Public.

Note! This data is the same critical habitat data that is available through the BC Geographic Warehouse. The easiest way to access this data is through use of provincial tools (e.g., iMap). This is also the best source for the metadata.

Here is [this link](#) to the EC Datamart. The site has individual species shapefiles, as well as a geodatabase with all species (scroll to the bottom of page for the geodatabase).

For access to additional federal data (not restricted to critical habitat data) visit the Government of Canada [Open Data website](#). Click on the Open Data Portal link to download data, or use the Open Maps link to view data in a variety of applications.

Aquatic Species - DFO's Static Maps and Data Portal

Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has made static maps that display “Final” critical habitat for aquatic species across the country available to the public (as of December 2016). It is available here: <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/fpp-ppp/index-eng.htm>.

DFO has made the geospatial files for “Final” and “Proposed” critical habitat viewable (not downloadable yet) on the interactive Government of Canada [Open Data website](#). This website also provides access to additional federal data (not restricted to critical habitat data). Use the Open Maps link to view data in a variety of applications.