

Species at Risk Citizen Engagement – Summary of comments

April 29 to August 29, 2018

Background:

In July 2017, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (the Ministry) was given the mandate to develop and enact species-at-risk legislation and to harmonize other laws to ensure they all work toward the goal of protecting our beautiful province.

In the past eight years, the government has held three public discussions about species at risk. These have included the [Task Force on Species at Risk](#) (2010), [the Five-Year-Plan for Species at Risk](#) (2014), and [the Species at Risk Public Engagement](#) (2016).

The Ministry is taking an iterative, open and collaborative approach to engaging with stakeholders and citizens on species-at-risk legislation. We are also working closely with Indigenous Peoples as part of the Province of British Columbia's larger plan to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Our goal is to engage with a diverse range of organizations and individuals, so this legislation is informed by a variety of perspectives.

We are using a three-stage approach to engagement. The goal of the first stage is to better understand the perspectives and concerns of the public, stakeholders, and Indigenous peoples; the second stage focuses on identifying potential solutions based on the feedback we received in the first stage; and the third stage focuses on refining these solutions.

So far, the public engagement process has primarily revolved around a Species at Risk [public engagement website and online discussion](#).

Approach:

The Species at Risk citizen engagement page was launched in April, 2018, and prompted individuals to join the discussion by either sending in written submissions [by email](#) or by providing input on specific policy ideas by commenting on a series of moderated discussion posts. Individuals were encouraged to first read a [primer on protecting species at risk](#) as a way to provide context for the discussion. The first post was published April 27, 2018 and was available for the duration of the online engagement.

Each of the posts solicited public ideas, perspectives and solutions related to species at risk in B.C.:

1) Species at Risk Legislation in B.C. – What does it mean for me? (posted: April 27, 2018)

This discussion provided context and background information about species-at-risk legislation in B.C. and summarized some of the main concerns were brought up in previous

engagement initiatives. It asked members of the public to highlight the concerns they have about this legislation and how those concerns might be addressed. It also asked commenters to provide examples of success stories relating to the protection of species at risk.

2) Stewardship of Species at Risk on private land (posted: May 7, 2018)

This post focussed on the issue of how to manage species at risk on private land. It asked commenters to provide input on how to increase land owners' willingness and ability to participate in conservation efforts.

3) Exploring an ecosystem or multi-species approach (posted: May 14, 2018)

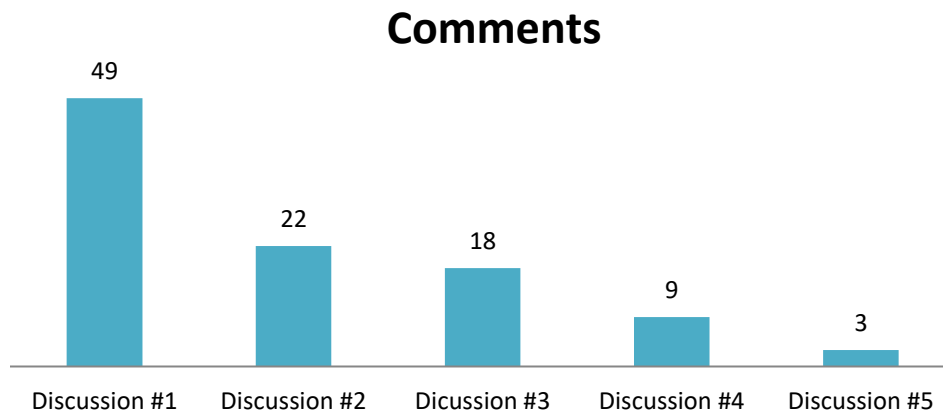
This post introduced the concept of using an ecosystem-based approach for protecting and recovering species at risk. It stated some of the potential benefits and cautions of using an ecosystem approach and asked people to highlight the concerns they have around this approach. It also asked commenters what they thought the goal of an ecosystem -based approach ultimately is.

4) Information needs for species at risk (posted: June 11, 2018)

This post emphasized the importance of collecting and sharing information and data on species at risk. It asked commenters what type of information they would find helpful to support stewardship and have a better understanding of species at risk in British Columbia.

5) How can we make protecting species at risk fair for everyone? (posted: July 31, 2018)

This discussion focussed on the issue of making the protection of species at risk fair for everyone. It provided a hypothetical example and a number of ways to approach the issue of fairness so readers could reflect on these potential options. It asked commenters to state what fairness means to them in the context of protecting species at risk.



There was a total of 3,732 visits to the engagement site during this discussion period.

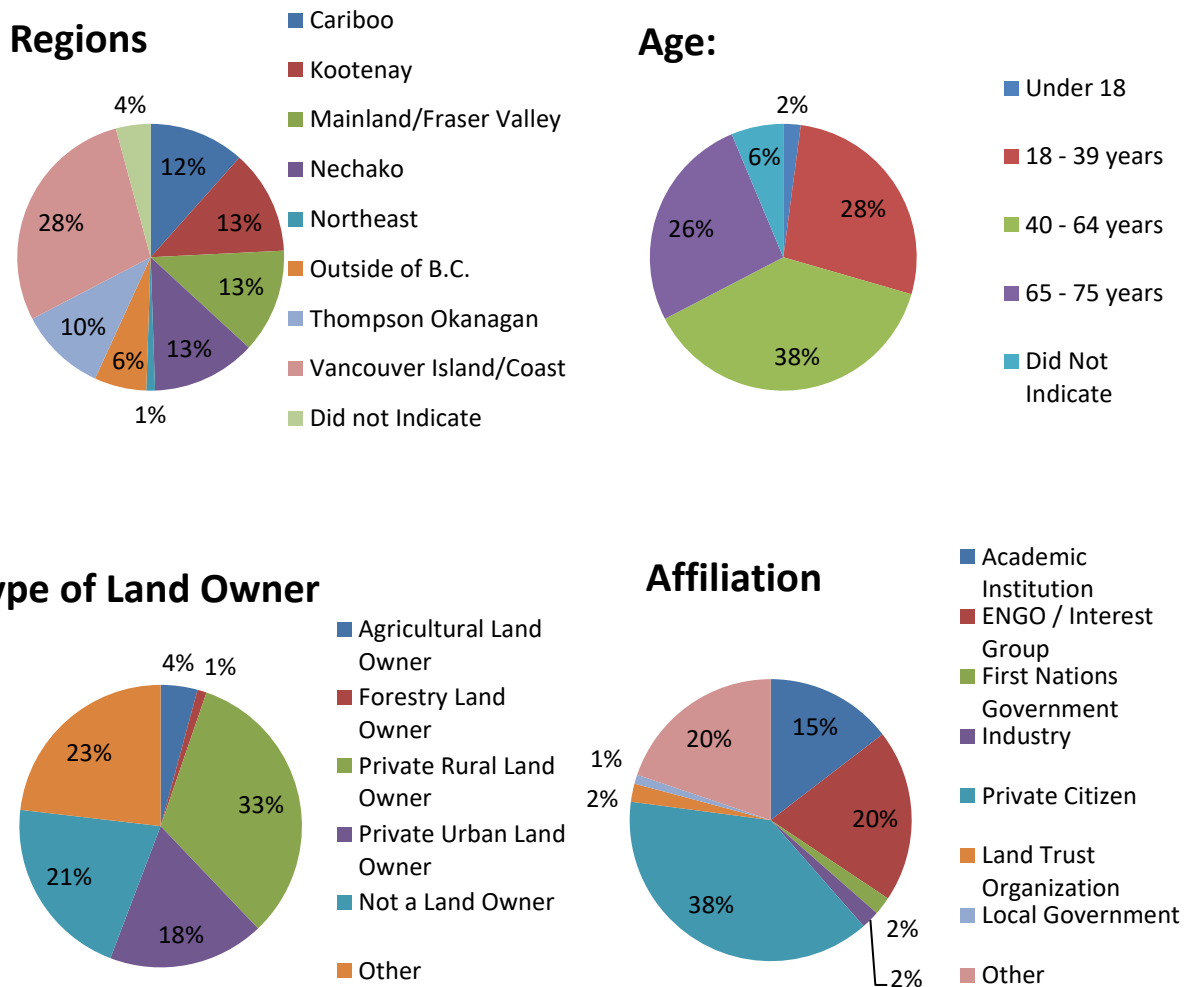
The link to the website was included in several news articles, such as:

- [Province announces public consultation on new species at risk legislation](#) – CHEK News, April 29, 2018
- [Consultation begins on new species at risk legislation](#) – e-KNOW, April 30, 2018
- [Public consultation begins on new species at risk legislation](#) – Clearwater Times, May 4, 2018
- [Time to rein in British Columbia's Wild West loopholes](#) – New Westminster Record, May 7, 2018
- [It's time for B.C. to start legally protecting endangered species](#) – The Narwhal, May 23, 2018

There were also a total of 9 [stakeholder submissions](#) received and posted on the Species at Risk engagement website.

Who We Heard From:

During this discussion period, we received a total of 101 comments from a variety of different perspectives.



What Was Said:

Although there were varying perspectives on many of the issues, there were some common themes:

Accountability and Transparency: Many comments emphasized the importance of transparency and government accountability. There were concerns government’s approach may end up being “all talk and no action” or the legislation on paper may not actually result in any changes in practice. Respondents expressed a desire for government to communicate the reasons for their decisions, so everyone can understand why certain actions are necessary. People suggested access to transparent, easy-to-interpret information will help engage members of the public and ensure there is a sense of ownership and accountability. Other commenters stressed decisions should be evidence-based and grounded in objective science, not social opinion or politics.

“Access to information (except where this may pose a threat to species at risk) should play a complementary role in implementing and enforcing the law”

Collaboration: Various commenters recognized legislation will cross several ministries and therefore should involve a more coordinated approach. Others suggested government work in collaboration with land trust organizations, local governments, environmental NGOs, and land users to manage and raise awareness about issues related to species at risk. Also, respondents felt stakeholders, members of the public, and Indigenous peoples should be engaged throughout the development and the implementation of the supporting programs, policies, and regulations. Respondents indicated a preference for new legislation to align with, and be complementary to, the ongoing work of the conservation community.

Clarity: There were several comments about a lack of clarity with regard to the current legislative framework in B.C., only “scattered rules” are in place, and request the Province to provide clear leadership and guidance on the status and management of species at risk. Many individuals pointed out there is currently not a definitive process in place for landowners to report a species at risk on their property nor is there clarity regarding the consequences of disclosing this information. Some suggested the Province provide for access to expert advice, perhaps in the form of a hotline, to ascertain whether there is a species at risk on their property and if so, what next steps to take. Others suggested providing publicly accessible mapping software, so it is clear where species at risk occur. Many comments stressed the need for increased public education for all ages, by providing public information at the library, tourist information centres, and other public spaces, and providing research funding to universities. The goal of this education and awareness would be to communicate the value of species at risk and the implications of losing a species.

Ecosystem-based Approach: Many commenters indicated a single-species approach to species-at-risk management is inadequate, instead favouring a multi-species or ecosystem-based approach as well. The majority of comments expressed support for a mixed approach of both single-species and ecosystem-

based management. On one hand, people acknowledged an ecosystem-based approach can be an effective and cost-efficient way of protecting multiple species at once, and this approach considers ecosystems are comprised of interconnected and interdependent species. On the other hand, some were concerned an ecosystem-based approach would not be adequate to protect individual species on the brink of extinction and therefore need emergency protection measures. Another concern expressed was the difficulty in defining measurable outcomes and evaluating if conservation actions are achieving the desired targets. Various individuals suggested listing of species should happen on an individual basis, whereas management and recovery planning should happen on an ecosystem basis.

Financial Incentives: There was a significant amount of support for providing financial incentives to organizations and land owners who participate in stewardship activities. Many comments suggested stewardship incentives such as property tax deductions, awards, or public recognition, should be available for private landowners who protect critical habitat or carry out conservation activities on their land. Commenters stated the legislation should work to recognize the presence of species at risk on private land as a positive feature that adds value to the land and therefore not a liability for landowners

“Focus on the positive rather than punitive measures and cast (SAR) in a way that encourages cooperation and reporting”

and land managers. Several comments suggested incentive programs to provide funding in advance of or early in the implementation stage; and a robust incentive program would require stable, long-term funding to support the legislation. Some expressed support for an increase in property taxes to create this kind of program.

Indigenous Involvement: Various comments emphasized the importance of incorporating Indigenous knowledge in any approach to protecting and recovering species at risk. Some comments suggested Indigenous groups should be offered the opportunity to co-design the legislation, so it incorporates Indigenous legal principles related to conservation. Several commented the legislation should be science-based, but also consider Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. Some commenters stated British Columbia is a complicated mix of private land, provincial ‘crown land,’ First Nation treaty territory, and Indigenous lands. Some suggested an ecosystem-based approach to species-at-risk management may be more compatible with Indigenous practices than a single-species approach.

Non-Habitat Threats: Although most comments expressed support for habitat conservation to protect species at risk, some suggested there is a need to address threats not directly related to habitat loss. For example, many comments requested more consideration be given to external factors such as pollution and climate change. Some responses identified environmental change as an added risk and all species need to be evaluated in this context to account for cumulative effects. Some commenters stated invasive species management in British Columbia is deficient and any SAR legislation needs to do more to protect native species from invasive and feral species. Some expressed concerns over the effects of current practices such as spraying glyphosate and herbicides or fish farming practices, while others expressed concern over roadkill as a threat to species. Overall, the comments acknowledged protecting natural habitat is essential for protecting species at risk.

Private Land: In general, commenters were supportive of legal measures applied fairly and consistently across all resource sectors and land types. Specifically, many comments stated legislation should apply to all lands and waters; including public, private, leased or blocks of land leased to forestry, mining, or agricultural companies. Respondents cautioned, based on other jurisdictions, successful legislation should be crafted and implemented in a way that also works on private land. Many commenters felt all private land owners have a responsibility to protect habitat and species at risk on their land, and suggested programs to educate landowners about conservation and to compensate them for setting aside the land. However, a few comments did not entirely support application of the legislation on private land and expressed the opinion that the focus of legislation should be on provincial crown lands first.

Proactive and Strong Legislation: Most commenters stated the legislation needs to be strong and British Columbia needs to be proactive rather than reactive when it comes to protecting species at risk. Some commenters described the current legislative framework is inadequate and ineffective, and therefore the new legislation must focus on protecting all remaining habitat for endangered species and reversing the cause of decline. Many commenters advocated for strong fines and penalties for those who do not comply, with no exemptions granted where an at-risk species is identified and that these fines should be based on the actual harm to a species at risk, not whether harm was intended. These respondents emphasized ensuring there are no loopholes as well as independent monitoring and enforcement., Some commenters expressed support for legislation that enables government to say 'no' to permit submissions when it is clear the proposed project poses an unacceptable threat to the recovery of species at risk. Commenters also requested legislation that is resilient and designed to survive changes in government.

Socio-Economics: There were differing perspectives regarding the extent to which socio-economic factors should be considered in the legislation. Some commenters acknowledged the need for protecting species at risk but also maintain a strong economy and standard of living. Others stressed the importance of granting equal and unfettered access to the backcountry for tourist organizations, as eco-tourism is a significant contributor to the economy in British Columbia. Others are concerned socio-economic factors might be considered more important than the preservation of species and ecosystems at risk. There were concerns resource extraction industries may have a disproportionate voice in the decision-making process, resulting in a lack of species protection. Many felt socio-economic factors should not be considered at the listing stage; instead the process should be purely science-based. Some commenters expressed a desire to transition from a consumption culture to a conservation culture in order to make real progress towards protecting species at risk. One concern was the legislation may end up targeting individuals, who have a relatively low impact, rather than large, commercial operations that may have more impact on species at risk.

Success Stories: There were a variety of comments on the first two discussion posts which asked for examples of success stories relating to the protection and recovery of species at risk. Some felt the recovery of the Vancouver Island Marmot can be cited as a success story in B.C.; however, others commented the government actions had very little to do with this success. Comments suggested British Columbia look to the United States Endangered Species Act, or to other provinces in Canada (especially

those that include ecological communities at risk in their legislation) as examples of how to successfully manage species at risk. Other examples offered include: the Agricultural Land Reserve, the MULTISAR project in the Grassland Natural Region of Southern Alberta, and a [project](#) led by the Kalispel Tribe to protect endangered Selkirk caribou. Government also received a [submission](#) from three conservation groups (Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Nature Trust of B.C.) providing examples of their partnership's success in conserving habitat on private lands. Some respondents stated British Columbia has few success stories for species at risk in B.C. and there were many specific concerns about the current state of caribou in the province.

Next Steps:

The discussion posts were open for comment from April 29 to August 29, 2018 at 4PM.

This was the first stage of citizen engagement and will not be the last opportunity for individuals to provide input relating to the proposed species-at-risk legislation.

Based on the feedback from stakeholders, Indigenous peoples, and citizens, government is preparing a discussion paper outlining key components of consideration for proposed legislation.

The summary reports from the first stage of the stakeholder and Indigenous engagement process can be found on our website, along with a list of [who we met with](#).

Upon its release, the government will invite all British Columbians to comment on the discussion paper in spring 2019.

We will also carry out additional engagement activities, as we move from drafting the legislation to implementing it and developing supporting regulations, programs, and policies.

Any questions or additional submissions with input regarding the proposed legislation can be directed to Species.At.Risk.BC@gov.bc.ca.