

Summary of the 2016 Species at Risk Engagement

All British Columbians share the important responsibility of ensuring our incredible natural heritage is protected for generations to come. This consultation will provide valuable feedback about what is working well, and innovative solutions to protect B.C.'s species at risk for the long term.

Honourable Mary Polak, Minister of Environment

Between **October 19 and November 30, 2016**, we heard from British Columbians about innovative ways to better protect species at risk in B.C. Fruitful discussions occurred about the Principles for the Protection of Species at Risk. We heard your thoughts on how to increase protection of species at risk on private lands. Ideas were also shared about innovative funding options to support activities such as monitoring, research and stewardship programs for species at risk.

The Ministry of Environment will use the input received to inform options for new policy and programs in the months and years ahead as part of B.C.'s *Five-Year Plan for Species at Risk*.

The [*Five-Year Plan for Species at Risk in British Columbia*](#), released in 2014, committed the Province of British Columbia to work together and consult with all levels of government, First Nations, conservation partners, industry and stakeholders to ensure the successful protection of species at risk. Species at risk recovery is a shared responsibility and we all need to cooperate to ensure that we are working towards effective protection and recovery of species at risk in British Columbia.

Who We Heard From

We heard from all regions of the province and from rural, urban and agricultural private land owners. We also heard from all age ranges and from people that affiliated themselves with a variety of groups: environmental non-government organizations, interest groups, industry, First Nations governments, academic institutions and local governments.

Site visits	4394
Number of user votes placed on comments	1021
Subscribers to email update	169
Total comments	461

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What We Heard¹

Topic 1: Principles for the protection of species at risk

Background

Protecting species at risk is complex and involves many considerations. The Province of BC intends to improve the protection for species and ecosystems at risk using sound science and conservation and public policy principles. We propose the following principles to guide the protection of species at risk in BC.

Questions

Do you agree with these principles for the protection of species at risk?

Are there any key principles that you would add?

Response Summary

Respondents were generally supportive of the direction of these principles.

Principle #2 “Socio-economics” prompted the most discussion, as many respondents felt that weighing the more quantifiable socio-economics against the less measurable benefits of species or habitat would likely favour the former. Respondents noted that species and ecosystems are often much less flexible, and hence more vulnerable, than jobs and the economy, and therefore this principle should explicitly account for the long-term interests of both.

A number of respondents identified the need for more clarity regarding measurement and prioritization of the principles. Specifically for Principle #7 “Proceed on a priority basis”, there were questions as to what would be taken into account when deciding how to prioritize recoveries.

Respondents also suggested adding to the principles – for example, to include ensuring the protection of biodiversity and habitat, stronger wording regarding enforcement, and consideration and inclusion of public education and ethics.

¹ The information in the “Background” section provided under each topic in this document is an abbreviated version of the information provided during the Species at Risk Engagement for each topic area in the “What’s the Issue” and “Background” sections.

Topic 2: Provincial protection of species at risk

Background

Canada has developed a national approach to protecting species at risk. Across Canada, all provinces and territories have developed programs, policies and/or legislation to support their ability to protect species at risk. Some jurisdictions, like BC, use a variety of legislation and policy tools to protect species at risk. Other jurisdictions have stand-alone species at risk legislation.

The Province of BC recognizes that there are gaps in the protection of species and ecosystems at risk. While there are many opportunities through current tools and legislation to protect species at risk, equivalent protection is not available for all species on all lands and is not consistently applied across all sectors.

The Province is interested in hearing your thoughts about what makes a successful species at risk policy framework.

Questions

What are your thoughts on how to improve the current provincial policy and legislative framework for protection of species at risk?

Are you aware of successful initiatives that governments in other jurisdictions have used to support the protection of species at risk?

Do you have any other thoughts on how we can achieve a balance between protecting species at risk and supporting a vibrant natural resource economy?

Response Summary

Many respondents identified the need to knit together the “patchwork” of existing regulations into one cohesive system in order to strengthen the Province’s protection of species at risk. Respondents felt the current framework needs more “teeth” and having multiple tools and legislation that apply to various sectors and stakeholders involved is inefficient. To resolve this, there was significant support for new stand-alone legislation.

New legislation was also cited as a solution to other issues respondents identified, including the need for more funding, enforcement, and increase in efficiency in how the various regulations are managed. Respondents frequently observed that many other provinces/territories have stand-alone species at risk legislation.

Respondents often commented that a successful protection system must focus not just on the species, but on their habitats and the province’s biodiversity overall.

Respondents challenged the possibility of “achieving a balance between protecting species at risk and supporting a vibrant natural resource economy.” They suggested that species at risk must be protected first under legislation. It was also suggested that the Province could look at

ways to diversify the economy through bio-tourism and research into renewable technologies to stem the threat of climate change. Some respondents cited research that estimates the long-term financial benefits of pursuing these activities outweigh those gained from resource extraction.

Topic 3: Protection of species at risk on private land

Background

A high proportion of the species at risk in British Columbia are found on private land. The Province of BC recognizes that there are gaps in provincial protection of species at risk on private land. Protection of species at risk is a shared responsibility and requires a stewardship approach to their management. There may be opportunities to support improved protection of species at risk on private lands.

The Province is interested in supporting local governments, private landowners, industry (e.g., agriculture, private forest lands) and non-government organisations in stewardship efforts to recover and protect species at risk and their habitats on private lands. The Province understands that private landowners are motivated to protect species at risk on their lands in different ways.

Questions

What motivates you to protect species at risk where you live?

Please provide examples of effective monetary and non-monetary incentives that the Province might consider.

Response Summary

Most respondents described their general appreciation of the natural world and its intrinsic value as their primary motivation for striving to protect species at risk. Respondents suggested that educating communities about species at risk could be one way to rally support for the voluntary protection of species at risk.

Some respondents suggested government offer tax incentives to encourage private landowners to protect species at risk, though not everyone supported this idea. Respondents discussed other monetary incentives, with most supporting the idea of government programs that would subsidize habitat restoration, improvements and protections on private lands through tax breaks and grants.

Respondents often cited changing regulations and red tape as disincentives to involving government in protecting species at risk on private land.

Finally, respondents generally agreed that species at risk should be protected regardless of whether their habitat is on private land, public land, or treaty land, and that this should be captured in legislation.

Topic 4: Funding for species and ecosystems at risk

Background

The recovery and protection of species and ecosystems at risk requires long-term, stable funding to support activities such as research, monitoring, reporting and stewardship. The Province's challenge is to provide long-term, stable funding options to meet our conservation goals for species at risk - while at the same time balancing fiscal priorities across all sectors of government.

Conservation projects throughout North America have been supported through a variety of approaches such as trust funds, licence fees for resource users, voluntary initiatives and taxation. The Province of BC is interested in investigating innovative funding sources that would provide long-term, stable funding to support conservation of species at risk.

Questions

Do you have examples of other innovative funding opportunities that have worked well for conservation projects on a stable, long-term basis?

Of the models presented or of others that you are aware of, which do you prefer and why?

Response Summary

The majority of respondents echoed the need for stable funding to protect species at risk in B.C. and overwhelmingly identified tax revenue as the most stable source of funding.

Many respondents showed a strong preference for increasing the taxes paid by resource companies (e.g. timber, mining, gas, etc.) or by creating a new "conservation tax." Respondents also expressed their wariness that private citizens would bear a disproportionate increase in taxes compared to resource intensive industries, which were largely identified by respondents as the cause of habitat destruction and climate change.

For other funding sources, respondents were generally supportive of private donations and trust funds, but the majority saw these as secondary sources, with core funding provided by the government.

Respondents put forward a number of innovative funding ideas. Many described different methods to tax resource industries, while others proposed ideas for securing funding to protect species at risk through various fees and charges.

Respondents were generally concerned that any new funding, whether voluntary (e.g. donations) or involuntary (e.g. taxes, fees, etc.) could be absorbed into the Province's general revenue fund, and therefore would not be a stable funding source. As a solution, respondents suggested species at risk legislation could designate specific funding for species at risk programming.