



Natural Resources
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Biodiversity

Species at risk

Approximately two thirds of Canada's estimated 140 000 species of plants, animals and micro-organisms are found in the forest. Each forest-associated species plays a unique role in forest ecosystems, but over 300 of them are currently at risk. In response to this threat, Canada's National Forest Strategy has identified the conservation of forest biological diversity as a priority. The Canadian Council of Forest Ministers' framework of Criteria and Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management provides eight indicators to assess the state of biodiversity within Canada's forests. One of the core indicators in this framework is the [status of forest-associated species at risk](#).

A forest-associated species is one that is measurably dependent on a forest ecosystem for any aspect of its life history (included are indirectly dependent species which consume forest-based or derived resources). The status of forest-associated species is often used to monitor ecosystem and genetic diversity, forest structures and patterns, and key ecological processes. The status of these species serves as a barometer, since a decrease in a species population can signal an imbalance in a biological system that may damage the long-term health of our forests and lead to productivity losses.



The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada ([COSEWIC](#)), an independent scientific committee, evaluates species suspected of being at risk. COSEWIC assigns national status designations to these species based on the best scientific information available. The COSEWIC national list of species at risk is divided into five categories, from "extinct" to "special concern."

When a species is put on the COSEWIC List of Wildlife Species at Risk, the federal Cabinet consults with stakeholders and other groups before deciding whether it should be legally protected under the national [Species at Risk Act](#) (SARA). Recovery strategies are prepared within a year after listing for the threatened species, and within two years for endangered and extinct species.

COSEWIC Status Categories

| Category | Definition |
|-----------------|---|
| Extinct | A species that no longer exists |
| Extirpated | A species no longer existing in the wild in Canada, but occurring elsewhere |
| Endangered | A species facing imminent extirpation or extinction |
| Threatened | A species likely to become endangered if limiting factors are not reversed |
| Special concern | A species that may become threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats |

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