

**Law listings discriminate against fuzzy, tasty endangered species**

Canada's Endangered Species Act (SARA) is supposed to offer protection for species at risk of extinction in Canada. A survey of the fate of proposed listings reveals poor odds of protection both for fish and for northern mammals. Deficient cost-benefit analyses may be behind this prejudice.

These are the conclusions drawn in a paper written by a Canada-wide group of biologists just published by the international journal *Conservation Biology* (on-line date April 17, 2007). An independent scientific body, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) assesses the status of species and proposes those that it considers to be at risk for legal listing under SARA. The researchers looked at the characteristics of 30 species subsequently rejected by the Federal Ministers for the Environment from 2003-2006 and compared them with 156 species that were accepted. Very clear patterns emerged. While all twelve endangered birds that were proposed were accepted, only one of eleven imperiled marine fish was. While all twenty-six at-risk reptiles and amphibians were given legal protection, twelve of thirty mammals needing help were denied listing - including polar bear, grizzly bear, Peary caribou, wolverine, several populations of beluga whales and the Atlantic Harbour Porpoise.

Species that are harvested commercially had little chance of getting legal help to ward off extinction. The imperiled porbeagle shark, which has declined by 90% and is fished by only a handful of boats in the entire country, was kept off the list.

Other results were more surprising. Species (primarily mammals) that live mainly in the north, where the effects of global change are expected to be severe, were unlikely to be offered protection. According to author Dr. Laura Prugh, "We hadn't anticipated this. Given what we know about global climate change and its effects on Canada's North, this is quite disturbing."

The causes of this bias are economic and political. The authors expressed concern about a federal provision that calls for cost-benefit analysis to be done before listing an imperiled species. This analysis, called a RIAS (Regulatory Impact Assessment Statement) is critical, but scrutiny of RIAS by the federal government itself has raised questions: while costs of proposed government action are readily estimated, benefits are rarely quantified. The authors ask that (i) these RIAS be made more open, and that (ii) the government evaluate the benefits to society of saving species from extinction and the costs of letting them go extinct. As put by Dr. Arne Mooers, another author, "The resulting decisions make it look as if Canadians value milksnakes and dromedary jumping slugs more than they value polar bears, beluga whales, and coho salmon. That's hard to believe. The value of every species should be considered carefully, especially given we are the ones threatening their very existence."

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