

## Background: Prognoses for various species in Canadian parks

### Good news stories

The future of the **Ipswich savannah sparrow**, which summers and breeds in the proposed Sable Island National Park, **Nova Scotia**, is more assured thanks to a government commitment to protect its breeding habitat in a park. The bird is vulnerable because of the limited range of its breeding area. Other species that are part of the island's ecosystem are wild horses, introduced in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, and a significant population of breeding grey seals.

Conditions are looking brighter for the **black dogfish**, which belongs to a diverse ecosystem in the Laurentian Channel of the river and Gulf of the St. Lawrence, **Quebec**. This deep nutrient-rich gully is the spawning and feeding ground for species of sharks, skate, monkfish, pollack, hake, and migrating marine mammals. The area is being considered for a Marine Protected Area, a move which is crucial for the health of the dogfish that spawn and raise their young pups here.

Park managers in Banff National Park, **Alberta**, are moving ahead with a program to restore **plains bison** to their historic ecosystem. The bison were hunted to extinction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Now the park has committed to working towards establishing a breeding population in the next several years.

The **eastern wolves** of Algonquin Provincial Park, **Ontario**, are remnants of a population that once ranged in large numbers across most of eastern North America. Habitat loss, hunting and trapping have taken their toll. CPAWS was active in pushing to establish a wolf protection zone in the area around the park. The zone helps the wolf maintain its numbers and packs. As a top predator, the wolf keeps the population of white tail deer in check and the park ecosystem balanced and healthy.

**Saskatchewan's black footed ferret** is making a comeback. After the species had totally disappeared from the wild, the ferret was re-introduced to Grasslands National Park in 2009. The animal survived its first winter. Conservationists hope that the park's black-tailed prairie dogs, the ferret's favorite food, will assure the species' continued survival. The CPAWS review notes that re-introduction of a species is a difficult measure that is not always successful. It is usually simpler and more cost-effective to pro-actively protect habitat to keep wildlife healthy before they get into trouble, rather than to take corrective measures after a species is lost.

he **Newfoundland marten**, a sub-species of the American marten, has made some progress thanks to smart conservation efforts. Recovery teams in Terra Nova National Park are working with local communities to educate them about the problems of habitat loss from logging and other activities for the threatened marten.

For **deep sea corals** in **Nova Scotia**, a number of protective measures including fishery closures and the Gully Marine Protected Area, are improving the chances of corals on the Atlantic Coast. Still more needs to be done, CPAWS recommends, to protect cold water corals in all Canada's oceans.

### Needs improvement, but guardedly hopeful

In the Hudson Bay region of **Quebec** there is a remarkable population of **freshwater seals** – the only seals in the world that live entirely in fresh water.

The seals' numbers are down to just 100-150 animals, a dangerously low level. SNAP, the Quebec chapter of CPAWS, has been lobbying to have the seals recognized as threatened and for the creation of a new park, called Tursujuq, to protect seal habitat. The province is expected to formally announce the new park soon. While this will be the largest provincial park in Quebec, there is worry that it may not protect enough of the river watershed to assure the seals' survival.

The **American badger** is one of a number of species at risk that live in Canada's endangered "pocket desert" ecosystem, the South Okanagan-Similkameen of **British Columbia**. This ecosystem is a prime candidate for a new national park, as CPAWS has stated for many years. The region is under heavy pressure from development by wineries, retirement homes, and other recreational facilities. A national park feasibility study, begun in 2003, is expected to be completed soon. CPAWS is hopeful that a new national park will get the green light -- before the precious habitat of the American badger and other desert species is lost forever.

**Moose** of Nopiming Provincial Park, **Manitoba**, face a guardedly hopeful future, thanks to a recent moose hunting ban in the park and surrounding area. This is the kind of good park management that helps maintain biodiversity. The reason for concern about the moose is that its population has dropped from 1800 in 2000 to just over 700 animals today. A huge spike in the population of wolves and coyotes, which prey on the moose and spread disease, and past forestry activity are major factors.

The **little brown bat**, under threat throughout North America, breeds and hibernates in the thousands in the Fisher Bay area of Lake Winnipeg, **Manitoba**. However the bats are in danger of disappearing from Manitoba unless their habitat is protected. The province needs to create a provincial park, of adequate size to protect hibernation sites and nursery areas. That decision on the park is expected this fall.

### **Serious concern**

In **New Brunswick**, the **American marten** is an animal at risk. The marten is a species which needs old forests for denning, breeding and hunting. For the marten to survive, parks need to do their job of protecting old forest habitat. Better conservation of old forests in Mount Carleton Provincial Park and expanded boundaries for Fundy National park would help assure the marten's future.

In **Atlantic Canada**, the **northern gannet** is a seabird that summers in colonies in **Newfoundland** and **Quebec** and spends its winters in the Gulf of Mexico. The oil spill in the Gulf may spell disaster for the gannet and other Canadian birds that migrate south.

### **Protecting Umbrella Species such as Woodland Caribou, Grizzly Bears and Orcas**

The report examines some of the challenges faced in trying to protect wide-ranging species in parks, noting that large areas of protected habitat are required, and that they should be well-connected to other wilderness areas to assure these species survival. Effective park management is also required.

In **Newfoundland and Labrador**, the future of the Mealy Mountains herd of **Boreal woodland caribou** has a better prognosis, thanks to the proposed new Mealy Mountain National Park and adjacent Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park. In the **Northwest Territories**, CPAWS is urging the federal government to ensure critical calving and breeding habitat of the Nahanni woodland caribou herd is protected in the proposed Nááts'ihch'oh National Park. The new park would be created adjacent to the already enlarged Nahanni National Park Reserve.

In Banff National Park, **Alberta**, the situation for caribou is dire. After many years of decline, the last five woodland caribou were killed in an avalanche more than a year ago. This highlights just how vulnerable small, isolated populations of animals can be. To restore a sustainable population of caribou will require a heroic effort of re-introduction and other supportive measures. Parks Canada has committed, in their recently released management plan for Banff, to examining the feasibility of such a re-introduction.

**The grizzly bear** is a species on the threatened list in both Alberta and British Columbia. Alberta's **Willmore Wilderness Park** provides the grizzly with the kind of large undisturbed habitat it needs – free of development, road access and vehicles. It's a habitat where the grizzlies appear to be thriving.

But the situation in the **Rocky Mountain Parks** of Alberta is a different story. The region is a patchwork quilt of jurisdictions, federal and provincial. The grizzlies are dying from run-ins with people and trains and inadequate protected habitat. The parks need to work together and coordinate their strategies for protecting wildlife. To ensure the survival of grizzlies, there has to be more public education, legislated protection for the Castle Special Place that puts grizzlies ahead of logging, and large movement corridors of protected habitat so that grizzlies can range freely.

**Orcas**, also called killer whales, face difficult conditions in coastal waters in **British Columbia** and the entire west coast. That is one of the reasons why the recent creation of the **Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area**, in Haida Gwaii, is such a significant move. The Area protects 3,000 sq. km. of waters for the orcas and 16 other whale and dolphin species. CPAWS notes that a strong management plan is now needed for the area, as well as action to complete a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) along the BC coast, that will provide the far-ranging orcas with the extensive safe habitat they need.

Time is running out for a tiny population of killer whales that resides in the **Southern Strait of Georgia** in BC. Numbering just 87 individuals, the orcas have to contend with traffic, pollution, the decline of Chinook salmon, and a host of other challenges. The group was listed as federally endangered more than a decade ago. In 2003 the federal and provincial governments agreed to study the feasibility of a National Marine Conservation Area in the waters. Seven years have past and the feasibility study has not been done. CPAWS calls on the BC and federal governments to complete the study and protect this critical marine habitat for the orcas.