



For Immediate Release

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No Time to Lose, Extinction is Forever:

All political parties urged to put aside politics and ensure Bill passes by summer

Toronto, Ontario – Ontario's revised *Endangered Species Act* proceeded to second reading yesterday. Bill 184 is the result of extensive public and industry consultations carried out by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). With opposition parties now calling for even more delay, Ontario's leading environmental groups today are underlining the necessity for quick action.

"It's obvious that some special interests want to slow or stop this Bill. This is a win-win piece of legislation for the people of Ontario and its wildlife. If this Bill isn't passed in this legislative session, it will likely become extinct, just like many of our treasured species of plants and animals," says Aaron Freeman, Policy Director for Environmental Defence.

The proposed package of new legislation and programs, which includes a new \$18 million stewardship fund to assist landowners in protecting wildlife habitat, is intended to provide effective protection for Ontario's approximately 200 endangered species and their habitats. Action is urgently needed, say the groups, because for those plants and animals for which trends are known, over 75% are either already gone from Ontario or are on their way to disappearing.

"We have no time to lose," explains Wendy Francis, Director of Conservation and Science for Ontario Nature. "There are about 200 endangered plants and animals in Ontario, which is nearly 40% of all of the endangered species across Canada. In other words, we have the dubious distinction of having the most work to do to protect and recover endangered species. Let's get on with it!"

"Politicians come and go, but extinction is forever," adds Janet Sumner, Executive Director of CPAWS-Wildlands League. "Every day that we delay, species like the Woodland Caribou lose more and more of the forests upon which they depend for survival. If certain politicians and interest groups succeed in delaying effective legislation, the public will hold them accountable for exacerbating Ontario's endangered species crisis."

The groups point out that the calls for more consultation lack substance. Pre-bill consultation began in May 2006 with a detailed discussion paper distributed to all interested stakeholders. This was followed by a two-month public consultation period required by Ontario's Environmental Bill of Rights. Then a nine-member government-appointed panel of scientists and legal experts was struck to identify the best options for a revised *Endangered Species Act*. It produced a report, which was released to the public for comment in November 2006

(http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/mnr/speciesatrisk/ESA_Advisory_Panel_Report.pdf). Further stakeholder input sessions were then convened, followed by another 30-day public consultation period under the Environmental Bill of Rights in December 2006 and January 2007. Meanwhile, the MNR carried out a separate Aboriginal community consultation process. After all of this, Minister of Natural Resources, David Ramsay tabled the revisions to the *Endangered Species Act* on March 20, 2007. (The details of the public consultation to date, including a summary of the hundreds of public comments received, is found at: <http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/mnr/speciesatrisk/input.html> and in Environmental Bill of Rights File# AB06E6001 at www.ebr.gov.on.ca).

The Bill will soon proceed to Legislative Committee hearings where further public input can be provided.

"We strongly support public consultation and congratulate Minister Ramsay for having done extensive consultation even before the Bill was introduced," says Rob Wright, Counsel for Sierra Legal. "The Premier and the Minister listened to input from all stakeholders and the advice of the Panel. We look forward to the committee hearings to fine-tune the Bill before it is passed."

"We call on all parties to support Bill 184 – a lifeline desperately needed by Ontario's nearly 200 endangered plants and animals," says Rachel Plotkin, Policy Analyst for the David Suzuki Foundation.

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About Save Ontario's Species (www.saveontariospecies.ca): S.O.S. is a collaboration among CPAWS Wildlands League, Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature, Sierra Legal and the David Suzuki Foundation. ForestEthics and Western Canada Wilderness Committee also support the S.O.S. Campaign.