

February 9, 2007

## Nearly 90 per cent of Alberta's wild species in good shape

### *Status report looks at provincial wild species, from roses to robins and reptiles*

Edmonton... A new provincial report on the status of more than 2,800 of Alberta's wild species indicates that nearly 90 per cent of the species assessed are either 'secure' or not in any risk category.

"Alberta's co-operative approach to conservation is working," said Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. "The *General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005* report is proof positive that the province, organizations and many individuals work together as committed stewards of our natural resources."

The province updates the general status report every five years, which helps provincial wildlife biologists set action plans for protecting and conserving species at risk. Research for the report is conducted through co-operation between provincial staff, conservation groups, academic researchers, scientific classification experts and naturalists.

This new report contains information on more than triple the number of species assessed for the 2000 report. For the 2005 report, assessments were expanded to include species such as clams, snails, dragonflies and mostly plants (1,868 species). Although most species assessed are in good shape, the report is valuable in directing which species require additional information or action.

Conservation projects like this report contribute to maintaining biological diversity and supporting the development of a provincial Biodiversity Strategy, which is a key provincial mandate led by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

Alberta also produces the report as part of its commitment to the *Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk*. Through this national agreement, Canadian provinces and territories are required to produce a wild species status report every five years. This information is incorporated into an overview of Canada's wild species, produced by the federal government: *Wild Species: The General Status of Species in Canada*.

The *General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005* report is available on the website of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development at [www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/wildspecies](http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/wildspecies).

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### **Backgrounder attached**

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## ***The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005***

### **Background**

Under Canada's *Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk* (1996), provinces and territories produce a wild species status report every five years. Alberta first produced a report in 1996. Subsequent reports were produced in 2000 and 2005.

### **Report objectives**

Alberta's wild species status report helps the province identify species that need attention, as well as make informed decisions to protect and conserve such species.

The report is designed to:

- provide information and raise awareness about the current status of wild species in Alberta,
- stimulate public input to more clearly define the status of individual species,
- identify potential species for more detailed status evaluations, and
- provide a reference for provincial wild species' conservation and management programs.

Determining the general status of species is the first step in evaluating and reporting on the biological status of Alberta's wild species.

Provincial wild species that 'may be at risk' receive a detailed status assessment and much more detailed evaluation.

### **Highlights of report findings**

*The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005* contains status assessments for 2,811 species, including birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, fish, butterflies, and four groups never before assessed: vascular plants (plants with a dedicated transport system for water/nutrients, e.g., wild roses), bivalves (e.g., clams), gastropods (e.g., snails) and odonates (e.g., dragonflies).

Plants comprise the largest species group studied (1,868 species), followed by birds (411 species), butterflies (163 species), gastropods (97 species), mammals (93 species), odonates (72 species), fish (61 species), bivalves (28 species), amphibians (10 species) and reptiles (eight species).

Summary results indicate that where status could be determined, most of Alberta's wild species (about 56 per cent) are 'secure' throughout the province.

Fewer than 11 per cent of provincial wild species are in risk categories: 'at risk' (about one per cent) and 'may be at risk' (10 per cent – a significant number of which are rare plants). Species considered 'at risk' (24) include piping plover, swift fox, five fish species and others. Species considered as 'may be at risk' (298) include mainly rare plants (273), prairie rattlesnake, Canadian toad, short-eared owl and others.

The remaining species assessed are in categories that range from 'undetermined' to 'accidental/vagrant' or 'sensitive,' and are of no immediate conservation concern.

### **Methodology**

*The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005* report was produced through extensive collaboration by Fish and Wildlife Division staff of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre, the academic research community, and many knowledgeable individuals (scientific classification experts, and local and regional naturalists).

Assessments were based on the best available information on population sizes, trends, distribution and threats. These assessments are repeated every five years to develop a picture of trends in species status.

Each status report aims to incorporate new data, address gaps in coverage for species previously assessed, and increase the number and variety of species assessed.

- **1996 report:** A total of 482 species were assessed, which included four species groups: amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds.
- **2000 report:** A total of 812 species were assessed, which included eight species groups: amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds, fish, lepidopterans (e.g., butterflies and moths), ferns and orchids.
- **2005 report:** A total of 2,811 species were assessed, which included 10 species groups: amphibians, reptiles, mammals, birds, fish, gastropods, bivalves, odonates, butterflies and vascular plants.

### **Endangered Species Conservation Committee**

Alberta has a well-developed approach to manage species at risk, with suitable legislation and policies to handle the recovery or conservation of these species where needed. This approach includes the activities of the provincial Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) and its scientific arm, the Scientific Subcommittee. Both were created under the auspices of the *Wildlife Act* in 1997.

The ESCC assesses the level of risk of extinction for species based on the best available scientific knowledge

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of the status of these species. The ESCC reviews species' status assessments in *The General Status of Alberta Wild Species* report, mainly those on the 'may be at risk' list. If the committee orders a detailed assessment of species, more rigorous assessment criteria are used than for the general status exercise.

Following a detailed status assessment, the ESCC recommends to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development whether a species should be considered for legal designation (under the *Wildlife Act*) as 'threatened' or 'endangered.' Recovery plans are established for all 'threatened' or 'endangered' species, generally within a year or two of their designation.

### **Success in species conservation**

Alberta's co-operative approach involves working with government, industrial, aboriginal, academic and public sectors when implementing conservation actions. With the support of Albertans, the province has achieved success with programs for species including:

- peregrine falcons,
- swift fox,
- western blue flag iris,
- trumpeter swan, and
- American white pelicans.