



## HOW IS WILDLIFE FARING IN CANADA'S PARKS?

Canada's national and provincial parks protect some of our country's most spectacular land and seascapes. Not only do these parks provide opportunities for Canadians to connect with and learn about nature, they also protect important habitat for wildlife, making them a cornerstone of Canada's conservation efforts.

However, many of our parks, particularly in southern Canada, are small islands of nature in developed landscapes. And evidence is growing that for parks to effectively protect wildlife, particularly those species that range over large areas, they need to protect big areas of habitat and be connected together into networks of protected lands and waters. They also need to be managed with a primary mandate of protecting or restoring healthy ecosystems.

As 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity, we are focusing this year's annual parks report on how Canada's wildlife species are faring within our parks and marine conservation areas, highlighting examples of parks that are effectively protecting wildlife, as well as those where improvements are needed.

In the past year, Canada has continued to make progress in establishing new parks. Our first deep sea National Marine Conservation Area was established in Gwaii Haanas, off the coast of BC, and significant progress was made on new parks, including on Sable Island in Nova Scotia, and the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve and Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park in Newfoundland & Labrador.

Yet in spite of our existing parks system, overall, the news about Canada's biodiversity is not great. There are over 500 species listed as at risk of extinction, and the list is growing. The majority of species at risk of extinction in Canada are at risk because of a lack of adequate protection for their habitats. Every effort must be made to combat this

trend by creating more and bigger parks and protected areas, connecting them together to enable wildlife movement, and ensuring our parks are managed to maintain or restore healthy ecosystems and wildlife for the future.

### Lessons we have learned from conducting this review:

**Where wildlife species are thriving as part of healthy ecosystems within our parks**, such as Grizzly bears in Alberta's Willmore Wilderness Park, the parks generally protect large areas of habitat, and there are strict limits on such human activities as road building, mechanized vehicle use and commercial and industrial developments.

**Where species are in trouble within our parks**, such as moose in Manitoba's Nopiming Provincial Park, the problems are often human-caused and require management actions to be fixed. Solutions can range from expanding park borders to provide enough protected space for wide-ranging creatures such as Lynx to survive; to establishing conservation corridors to connect parks together, allowing wildlife to move across the landscape; to curtailing harmful activities within parks such as ATV use.

**Reintroduction of extirpated species into parks** has potential to help them recover from the brink of extinction and restore the natural biodiversity within the park's boundaries. Recent examples are the reintroduction that began in 2009 of the endangered black-footed ferret into Saskatchewan's Grasslands National Park, and the planned reintroduction of Plains Bison into Banff National Park. However, this is an expensive, last resort solution that should be avoided where possible by taking preventative action today to protect species and their habitats before they become at risk of extinction.

# UMBRELLA SPECIES

How well are parks protecting these key indicators of healthy biodiversity?

“Umbrella species” such as caribou, grizzly bears and orcas play an important role in conservation. Umbrella species require large areas of intact habitat to survive, so protecting their habitat can protect habitat for many other species in the ecosystem as well. Below we profile three umbrella species, and examine some examples of parks where they live, and the challenges inherent in protecting these species.

## WOODLAND CARIBOU

Woodland caribou, an icon of Canada’s wilderness, are listed as a species ‘at risk’ across Canada’s Boreal forests by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), with the exception of the population on the island of Newfoundland.

### Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve & Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park, NL (proposed)

*Condition: Good | Prognosis: Good*

In February 2010, federal Environment Minister Prentice and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced that they will establish a national park reserve and adjacent waterway provincial park, in collaboration with aboriginal peoples, that together will protect more than 13,000 sq km of eastern boreal forest in the Mealy Mountains region of Labrador. This will create the largest national park in eastern Canada, and the largest provincial park in Newfoundland and Labrador. Together these parks will protect a vast boreal ecosystem that includes Atlantic salmon, most of the range of the 2,000 member Mealy Mountains herd of boreal woodland caribou, harlequin ducks and other waterfowl, and many other species.

### Nááts’ihch’oh National Park Reserve, NT (proposed)

*Condition: Good | Prognosis: Hopeful*

The proposed Nááts’ihch’oh National Park Reserve lies just north of the recently expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve and encompasses the South Nahanni River’s headwaters. If the federal government heeds CPAWS’ recommendation to include the entire headwater region of the South Nahanni watershed in this new park reserve, the prognosis for two major woodland caribou herds in the Nahanni — the Upper Nahanni and Redstone Woodland Caribou herds — is good. Otherwise, their prognosis is uncertain. Nááts’ihch’oh contains important rutting and calving areas for both herds, but unfortunately the park boundaries, as currently proposed, would leave critical areas unprotected and open to mining development.



TED SIMONETTE

## Banff National Park

*Condition: Extirpated | Prognosis: Uncertain*

The last five known Banff woodland caribou died in 2009 in an avalanche. This tragic loss of caribou in Banff was likely the result of habitat fragmentation and high numbers of elk and wolves over a number of years, tipping the predator-prey balance against the caribou. The avalanche was just the final blow for the Banff caribou, showing just how easily a small remnant population can disappear.

On the brighter side, the new 2010 Banff National Park management plan commits to investigate the feasibility of restoring a breeding population of caribou in the park, providing hope that caribou may one day roam again in our oldest and most famous national park.

# GRIZZLY BEAR

Grizzly bears have recently been listed as threatened by the Government of Alberta, and some populations in BC are considered threatened. Grizzly bear populations in the Yukon and NWT are considered healthy.



FIRSTLIGHT IMAGES

## Willmore Wilderness Park, AB

*Condition: Good | Prognosis: Good*

Alberta's Willmore Wilderness Park represents a unique wilderness in a land surrounded by development. It is a gem in the Alberta Parks system, a reminder of what is possible. Located north of Jasper National Park, Willmore's 4,600 km<sup>2</sup> represent some of the last unexploited range of many wildlife species in Alberta. It is one of the rare places in Alberta that prohibits motorized vehicle access. The park has no developed facilities, but random campsites for the experienced hiker and camper exist; recreational opportunities are limited to foot or horseback.

Together with its surrounding landscapes, the Willmore Wilderness is home to Alberta's largest Grizzly bear population: 353 bears live here. The Willmore Wilderness provides excellent habitat for much of Alberta's wildlife because of its large size and the lack of roads, development, and human access into the backcountry. When Alberta's Grizzly bear population status report was released, it was not surprising that Willmore's Grizzly bear numbers were much higher than elsewhere.

## Rocky Mountain Parks, AB

*Condition: Fair | Prognosis: Fair to Poor*

Alberta's western border is defined by several parks and protected areas, both federally and provincially managed. But are these protected areas effectively managing Alberta's grizzly bears to contribute to population recovery? Since 2007, six grizzly bears have been killed by trains in Banff National Park. Grizzly bears who wander out of protected areas face a higher chance of dying at the hands of people, partly due to the lack of effective movement corridors and dismal public education efforts. Other protected areas, such as the Castle Special Place, are not legislated as parks and are managed to prioritize logging rather than core habitat security. Core protected areas that have an abundance of secure habitat (away from roads and trails) are essential to grizzly bear survival in Alberta. A male grizzly bear can roam over 1000 km<sup>2</sup> to find all the food,

shelter, and mates he needs in his lifetime. Banff National Park is 6641 km<sup>2</sup> — not enough space for a healthy, viable population to survive. To the north, Banff is connected to Jasper National Park, and to the South the Kananaskis Country, which contains some protected areas. Connecting this complex of protected areas further south is key to the success of this species. Legislating the Castle as a protected area is crucial to this connection. Effectively managing mortality in our existing protected areas is equally important. The problems facing Alberta's grizzly populations are diverse and cross many jurisdictional boundaries, the solutions to recover them must be equally diverse and comprehensive. We are at a crisis point with this species and if concerted actions are not taken today, there will not be an Alberta grizzly tomorrow.



# ORCA

Orcas, also known as “killer whales”, are a flagship species of Canada’s west coast. Four BC orca populations are listed as species at risk under federal legislation.

## Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area, BC

*Condition: Fair | Prognosis: Hopeful*

Federal Environment Minister Jim Prentice and Haida Nation President, Guujaaw, announced the establishment of this 3,000 km<sup>2</sup> National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) off the shore of Haida Gwaii in June. Canada’s first deep sea NMCA, this is an extremely positive step towards ensuring the long-term health of several threatened populations of Orcas, alongside 16 other whale and dolphin species that are found in these waters. Orcas and other marine mammals face numerous threats outside the conservation area, including pollution, over-fishing of their food sources, entanglement in fishing gear, vessel collisions, and oil spills. Some orcas travel great distances, from California to Alaska, and need reliable sources of food and calving areas. Solutions include ensuring that the management plan for Gwaii Haanas is strong and protects the food upon which the orcas depend, and that a network of MPAs is established along BC’s coast.

## Proposed Southern Strait of Georgia NMCA, BC

*Condition: Poor | Prognosis: Unclear*

Killer whales are an icon of BC’s wild Pacific coast—but one population is declining dangerously. Southern resident killer whales have been federally endangered for almost a decade. Their population has fluctuated greatly, and in 2006 they numbered just 87 individuals (COSEWIC Report 2009). Because their habitat is also used by millions of humans, the killer whales are at threat from over-fishing and declines in Chinook salmon, their primary food source. Other threats they face include pollution, noise from vessel traffic, and entanglement in fishing gear. The long reproductive cycle of the killer whale, and their small population, also means that the loss of just one individual can have a devastating impact on the entire population.

The federal and provincial governments signed an agreement in 2003 to assess the feasibility of designating a National Marine Conservation Area in the Southern Strait of Georgia, which could enable protection for about half of the whales’ critical spring and summer habitat. Seven years later, we are still waiting for the feasibility study to be completed. CPAWS recommends that the BC and federal governments work together on completing the feasibility study and signing a provincial/federal agreement to protect the waters of the Southern Strait of Georgia.

# GOOD NEWS STORIES

LORI LABATT



## EASTERN WOLF

*Algonquin Provincial Park, ON*

The eastern wolf once ranged across much of eastern North America, but due to habitat loss and a concerted extermination effort over the past 200 years, they are now found only in a narrow band from central Manitoba to Quebec. To this day, there are few restrictions on the hunting and trapping of wolves in Ontario or Quebec. As a top level predator, the eastern wolf plays a vital role in the maintenance of healthy ecosystems. Wolves control hyper abundant populations of white tail deer which can cause problems for the regeneration of certain species of trees by over browsing. Wolves also remove weaker and unhealthy elements of these populations, thereby strengthening the whole.

CPAWS played a key role in establishing a permanent wolf protection zone in the counties surrounding Algonquin Park, where it is illegal to hunt and trap wolves or coyotes. Recent studies confirm that the protection zone is working. While the actual number of wolves in the park remains constant, pack structures are much stronger since fewer members are lost to hunting and trapping. The actual numbers are not increasing though, which could mean that offspring are moving to other areas adjacent to the park. We are urging federal and provincial governments to follow through on its legal commitment to do more to protect this important part of Canada's wilderness.



JOHN GOSSE, PARKS CANADA

## NEWFOUNDLAND MARTEN

*Terra Nova National Park, NL*

The Newfoundland Marten is one of only 14 mammals native to the island. Marten were historically distributed throughout most forested regions of the island, including Terra Nova National Park, but are now restricted to a few isolated areas. Only 300 animals are estimated to remain on the island and it has been designated as “endangered” by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Originally, the Newfoundland Marten’s main threat was hunting and trapping for fur, which decimated population numbers until the early 1900’s when trapping of the Newfoundland subspecies became outlawed. Since then, habitat loss (due primarily to logging) and accidental trapping have continued to diminish the population to the hundreds that remain today.

Terra Nova National Park is playing an important role in protecting the species. Recovery teams have been established along with community based working groups to create awareness of the problem and to educate to the public. The goal of the recovery project in Terra Nova National Park is to establish a population of 50 animals by the year 2010. Since the project began, marten numbers have increased from just 5 in 1996, to approximately 25-30 in 2004 and again to approximately 45 - 50 in 2007. Though the population is still well below viability, the trend in Terra Nova is encouraging and highlights the critical role parks play in protecting wildlife.



NOAA

## DEEP SEA CORALS

*The Gully Marine Protected Area, NS*

Canada’s oceans are home to many species of cold-water corals—over 80 species on the Pacific coast and 30 on the Atlantic coast. These corals tend to be long-lived, slow growing, and like their tropical relatives, they provide habitat for a variety of fish and other species. They are very sensitive to physical disturbances, especially bottom trawling.

In Atlantic Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has implemented a number of conservation measures to protect cold-water coral habitats. Fisheries closures were established in two areas, the Northeast Channel Coral Conservation Area and the Lophelia Coral Conservation Area, to minimize the impact of bottom fishing gear on these key coral habitats. In 2004, the Gully Marine Protected Area, a deep submarine canyon on the Eastern Scotian Shelf, near Sable Island, was established under Canada’s Oceans Act. One of its objectives is to protect the high diversity of cold-water coral species present in the 2,364 km<sup>2</sup> area.

In 2006, Canada committed to implement the United Nations agreement to protect cold water corals and other vulnerable marine ecosystems from bottom fishing and to establish conservation measures to protect such areas. The actions to protect cold-water corals in Atlantic Canada are a welcome first step, but Canada’s international commitments call for greater action. CPAWS recommends that these remarkable cold-water coral ecosystems be protected in all three of Canada’s oceans, as part of a comprehensive network of marine protected areas.

# GOOD NEWS STORIES



KELLY COLGANAZAR

## IPSWICH SAVANNAH SPARROW

*Sable Island National Park, NS (proposed)*

In May 2010, the Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia announced that the iconic Sable Island — a 40 km long crescent island off the coast of Nova Scotia will be protected as a national park. Sable Island supports the world's largest congregation of breeding Grey Seals, virtually the world's entire population of the vulnerable Ipswich Savannah Sparrow, and of greatest renown, hundreds of wild horses that were introduced shortly after 1738 and have become a part of the Sable Island ecosystem. Designating Sable Island as a national park will add another layer of protection measures to the island, which will help the Ipswich Sparrow.

## BLACK DOGFISH

*Laurentian Channel, Area of Interest for MPA, NL*

Fisheries and Oceans Canada has identified an area of rich biodiversity within the Laurentian Channel as an Area of Interest for consideration as a Marine Protected Area. The Laurentian Channel is a deepwater gully running more than 1,200 kilometres from the Tadoussac, past the Gaspé Peninsula and through the Gulf of St. Lawrence into the Atlantic. Nutrient rich salty waters originating in the Atlantic are brought in along this channel from the edge of the continental shelf, forming a deep water layer which is generally warmer than the surface layer.

This future Marine Protected Area contains the highest concentration of black dogfish in Canadian waters and is the only place where pupping occurs; it is also an important spawning, nursery and feeding area for a variety of species including porbeagle shark, smooth skate, monkfish, pollock and white hake; and it is a critical migration corridor for marine mammals moving in and out of the Gulf of St. Lawrence.



BRYAN HAGERTY / USFWS

## BLACK-FOOTED FERRET

*Grasslands National Park, SK*

The black-footed ferret is one of North America's rarest mammals. This small nocturnal hunter had completely disappeared from the wild in Canada. However, 2009 marked the return of the black-footed ferret to their natural habitat on the Canadian Prairies thanks to an international conservation effort involving governments, NGOs, universities, zoos and others. Last October, 34 black-footed ferrets were reintroduced to the native prairie of Saskatchewan's Grasslands National Park where most of the remaining wild colonies of black tailed prairie dogs—the ferrets' essential food source—are found. Reintroducing species after they have disappeared from the wild is a challenging and expensive task that doesn't always succeed. Project team members were delighted to confirm this spring that most of the ferrets had successfully survived their first winter in the wild, leading to renewed optimism that it may be possible to restore a healthy population of black-footed ferrets to the protected prairie ecosystem of Grasslands National Park.

## PLAINS BISON

*Banff National Park, AB*

Historically, wild plains bison (also called buffalo) were a natural part of the Banff Park ecosystem until they were hunted to extinction in the 19th century. The 1997 Banff Management Plan included a recommendation to study the reintroduction of wild bison in the park. The 2010 park management plan now contains strategic direction to move ahead with re-establishing a breeding population of extirpated plains bison into Banff by 2014—great news for this iconic species.



# NEEDS IMPROVEMENT



LORI LABATT

## MOOSE

*Nopiming Provincial Park, MB*

The moose population in Nopiming Provincial Park has dropped by an estimated 65 percent, from close to 1800 to just over 700 of these majestic animals, since 2000. This is largely due to an imbalance in the park's natural ecosystems. A huge spike in the number of wolves and coyotes, which prey on moose and spread disease, is a major factor in the moose population decline. Increased human access to moose habitat caused by past forestry activities is also playing a significant role.

The good news is that the province recently imposed a moose hunting ban within the park and surrounding Lac du Bonnet area. However, some are concerned that unregulated Aboriginal hunting in the region will negatively affect rehabilitation efforts. Manitoba Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Ron Evans recently said that aboriginals are concerned about the problem and willing to help correct it. "All concerned parties must work together to manage the moose population," stated Evans. CPAWS agrees and recommends the province develop a plan with all involved to bring Nopiming's moose population back to healthy numbers.



ROGER TURENNE

## LITTLE BROWN BAT

*Proposed Fisher Bay provincial park, MB*

Dr. Craig Willis, a wildlife biologist from the University of Winnipeg, has stated the Fisher Bay area of Lake Winnipeg is home to the most important bat hibernation site in the province, as well as ideal summer habitat for tree-roosting little brown bats. The Manitoba government has committed to establishing Fisher Bay Provincial Park by October 2010. At issue is determining the final boundaries. The boundaries proposed by Fisher River Cree Nation and CPAWS are based on the best marriage of ecological, cultural, and economic considerations. The danger is that the boundaries may be compromised by a lack of political will within the Manitoba government. As the Manitoba Conservation Data Centre lists little brown bats as vulnerable to extirpation in Manitoba, protecting the area with the right boundaries is critical to keeping our mosquito-eating friends healthy and well.

# NEEDS IMPROVEMENT



TOM TIETZ

## AMERICAN BADGER

*Proposed South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Reserve, BC*

The badger, known for the “badges” on its cheeks, is considered endangered in British Columbia. Loss of habitat is the main culprit. In the South Okanagan-Similkameen, just 45 badgers are thought to remain. But the badger is just one of the many troubled creatures in that region. Over one-third of British Columbia’s species at risk make their home in the South Okanagan-Similkameen, which includes Canada’s “pocket desert” ecosystem. Because of the unique landscape, many of these species are found nowhere else in Canada. If we don’t protect them here we may lose them entirely.

Unfortunately, this is one of Canada’s most endangered ecosystems and it is under significant threat of development by wineries, retirement homes, ranchettes and golf courses. The national park feasibility study—initiated in 2003 and forecasted to take two years—is now coming to completion. CPAWS is hopeful that Parks Canada and the province of British Columbia will now proceed with the establishment of a national park reserve before the land is lost to development. If they act soon, enough of this precious ecosystem can be protected to save some space for the threatened plants and animals that live there.



MIKE BAIRD

## FRESHWATER SEAL

*Proposed Tursujuq Provincial Park, QC*

In the Lac des Loups Marins area east of Hudson Bay in Nunavik, lives the only population of harbour seals in the world who live permanently in freshwater. Fewer than 500 seals remain, and they are listed by COSEWIC as endangered. However, Quebec has not yet recognized the seals as a threatened or vulnerable species. SNAP (CPAWS) Québec is asking that the province designate this species as threatened, and that it protect the seals’ habitat within the proposed Tursujuq Provincial Park. The current proposed park boundaries do not include the majority of the seals’ habitat, as the Nastapoka River watershed is excluded. Many stakeholders, including the local Inuit community, have expressed their support for the inclusion of the watershed within the park.

# OF SERIOUS CONCERN



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

## AMERICAN MARTEN

*Mount Carleton Provincial Park, Fundy National Park, NB*

The American marten is not listed as endangered or threatened in New Brunswick. However, there is concern among conservationists about the ability of New Brunswick's forests to sustain marten populations, given recent decisions to reduce old forest conservation on public lands. The American marten needs the kinds of habitats found in old forest for denning, breeding and hunting its prey. Mount Carleton Provincial Park, a large wilderness park in northern New Brunswick, is likely protecting habitat for marten. However, there is no certainty that those habitats will be conserved from one year to the next, because Mount Carleton Park does not have a conservation management plan, nor is there a mandate to protect ecological integrity within its boundaries.

Recent approvals of developments that are contradictory to conservation in provincial parks have resulted in CPAWS recommending that the New Brunswick Parks Act be revised to require ecological integrity management and conservation plans to sustain habitat for marten and other wildlife.

Most parks in New Brunswick, including Mount Carleton and Fundy National Park, are acknowledged by wildlife and conservation experts to be too small to by themselves protect populations of wildlife such as the marten. The New Brunswick government decision to reduce old forest conservation on public land has raised concerns that the marten are at further risk of being lost from the province. Now that the provincial government won't be conserving as much old forest around Fundy, CPAWS believes it is even more critical to expand permanent protection around Fundy National Park.



ALAN D. WILSON

## NORTHERN GANNET

*Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, NL*

This case demonstrates how important the natural health is of not just a particular park that houses a migratory species, but of the entire corridor upon which the species relies for its survival. There are only six Northern Gannet colonies in North America, three in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and three in the North Atlantic off Newfoundland.

While conditions for gannets within Canadian parks such as Cape St. Mary's are good, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill is potentially disastrous for them. The total Canadian population of Northern Gannets is roughly 88,000 breeding pairs (based on 2009 surveys); their population in general has been steadily increasing since the 1970s. Breeding birds are protected in Quebec's Migratory Bird Sanctuaries and NL's Provincial Seabird Ecological Reserves.

It's a bit premature to speculate what the impact of the Gulf spill may be, although it is likely that gannets from Canada (probably immature ones) have been oiled. There is concern that the gannets going back to their wintering grounds in the Gulf will encounter oil and/or a depleted environment with poor food availability, threatening their survival and potentially leading to declining breeding populations in coming years.



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