



COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEPAC
Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada

Emergency Assessment concludes that BC's Interior Steelhead Trout at risk of extinction

(Vancouver, February 13, 2018) Following a seldom-used fast-track process, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) concluded today that two populations of sea-going Steelhead Trout breeding in the Thompson and Chilcotin river systems in British Columbia are at imminent risk of extinction. Both populations were assessed as Endangered and COSEWIC recommended an emergency listing order under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. A mere 177 fish returned from the sea to the Thompson River in late fall 2017, and only 58 returned to the Chilcotin River. This is an all-time low since records began in 1978, and the endpoints of downward trends that started over a decade ago. The main threats include inadvertent bycatch of adults by net fisheries targeting Pacific salmon and poor ocean conditions.

Steelhead Trout are a form of Rainbow Trout that are born in fresh water, but that migrate to the ocean as juveniles, much like salmon. Also like salmon, they return as adults to their natal streams to breed. Steelhead Trout are typically much larger than their freshwater Rainbow Trout counterparts, and contribute to highly valued catch-and-release sport fisheries.

Both COSEWIC and the public have been concerned for some time about the Steelhead Trout that breed in the British Columbia Interior. Two recently submitted citizens' applications to COSEWIC precipitated the emergency assessment. COSEWIC only rarely decides that the gravity of a situation necessitates a fast-track process. The last time was in early 2012, when the committee recommended that three bat species decimated by fungal disease in Eastern Canada should be listed as Endangered under an emergency order. The bats eventually received legal protection in late 2014.

The new COSEWIC assessments have been forwarded to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, The Honourable Catherine McKenna, who will now make a decision on the recommendations for Emergency Listings of the two wildlife species. The record small numbers of overwintering BC Interior Steelhead Trout begin to lay their eggs later this spring.

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The document "Technical Summaries and Supporting Information for Emergency Assessments of Steelhead Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (Thompson River population and Chilcotin River population)" is also available upon request from the COSEWIC Secretariat at ec.cosepac-cosewic.ec@canada.ca.



BC Steelhead Trout © Ernest Keeley, Idaho State University

About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and community knowledge provided by experts from governments, academia and other organizations. Summaries of assessments are currently available to the public on the COSEWIC website (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/committee-status-endangered-wildlife.html>) and are submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Full status reports and status appraisal summaries are also made publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

There are now 755 wildlife species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 331 Endangered, 177 Threatened, 224 Special Concern, and 23 Extirpated (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition to these wildlife species that are in COSEWIC risk categories, there are 16 wildlife species that are Extinct.

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Nature), three Non-government Science Members, and the Co-chairs of the Species Specialist and the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittees.

Definition of COSEWIC Terms and Status Categories:

Wildlife Species: A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

Endangered (E)*: A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

**denotes a COSEWIC risk category*

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