

Ontario failing to protect endangered species: report: Province's outdated legislation in need of overhaul

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Pat McGrath, The Ottawa Citizen

A handful of Ontario environmental groups have banded together to push the Ontario government to adopt stricter laws aimed at protecting endangered species.

More than 77 per cent of Ontario's endangered plant and animal species receive little or no protection from the province's current Endangered Species Act, according to Wildlands League, Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature and Sierra Legal Defence Fund.

(The barn owl), American badger, northern bobwhite and redbreasted nuthatch, are among the Ontario species that are endangered, according to a new report.

The groups say climate change, habitat loss and pollution are killing many Ontario endangered species.

They have launched a new website, at www.saveontariospecies.ca, to help spread their message.

"Ontario's endangered species law was passed when disco ruled the airwaves," said Rick Smith, executive director of Environmental Defence. "We owe our endangered plants and animals protection worthy of the 21st century."

The website says animals such as the spiny softshell turtle, the northern bobwhite grassland bird and the redbreasted nuthatch, a small fish that feeds on small insects and is found in running streams, are all at risk.

Also making the list are barn owls, monarch butterflies, polar bears, woodland caribou and the American badger.

The conglomerate of environmental groups said that Ontario has committed to protecting the province's endangered species, but has not followed through on those commitments.

Provincial government officials signed the federal government's National Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk in 1996.

"Clearly, Ontario is failing to live up to its national obligations," said Robert Wright, managing lawyer, Sierra Legal Defence Fund.

Mr. Wright said, a failure to support the federal act has led to a lawsuit against the provincial government in British Columbia, over protection offered to the habitat of the endangered spotted owl.

The group is calling on Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty to address the issue quickly.

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