

Finding Balance in the Endangered Species Act and Crown Forest Sustainability Act

Submitted by the Timmins Chamber of Commerce; Co-sponsored by the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce, and Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce

Issue

Species recovery strategies and conservation plans created under the Endangered Species Act are not subject to socio-economic impact analyses and, as a result, may have significant negative impacts on Ontario's forestry industry and the communities that rely on its vitality. This, combined with efforts to harmonize the ESA with the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, has the potential to harm the industry's access to fibre.

Background

Ontario's Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA) prohibits damage or destruction of habitat for species classified as 'endangered' or 'threatened' on the list of Species at Risk in Ontario. Corresponding government strategies such as conservation plans and recovery strategies are not subject to socio-economic impact analyses, despite their potential impact on Ontario's forestry industry, which employs 200,000 workers across 260 communities.

The need for such analyses when developing conservation plans under the ESA is best demonstrated by the problems inherent in the Caribou Conservation Plan (CCP). Produced under the Endangered Species Act in 2009, this plan is designed to guide caribou conservation and recovery efforts in Ontario through means that include limiting access to Crown fibre. Among the CCP's guiding principles is the "consideration of social, economic and environmental concerns in the context of long-term caribou survival." However, the action plan does not mandate the completion of a socioeconomic analysis, nor has there been any indication that the government intends to do so.

This is in addition to challenges arising from other related policy elements that dictate how endangered species are managed, such as the general habitat description - a technical document that provides greater clarity on the area of habitat protected for a species based on the ESA – and forest management planning documents such as the provincial Boreal Landscape Guide.

These challenges regarding a general lack of transparency and socioeconomic impact analysis overlap with ongoing efforts to harmonize the ESA with the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, which, all told, have the potential to substantially reduce wood supply. This could result in the loss of thousands of direct and indirect jobs, severely hampering the forest industry and the communities it supports.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Conduct a full review of current caribou conservation initiatives, using a publicly reviewed socio-economic impact assessment and scientific data to determine caribou range boundaries, with the intent of subjecting all future conservation plans to the same standard; and

2. Work with industry to minimize potential disruptions to business throughout the ongoing efforts to harmonize the Endangered Species Act and the Crown Forest Sustainability Act.

Estimated Financial Impact to the Province

Entail a small cost to government (less than \$10M)

OCC Policy Committee Position: This is a sunseting resolution. The submitting chamber updated the resolution to reflect the current context. The Policy Committee supports this resolution.