

Species at Risk Act

Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger

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Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Protecting species at risk is a major priority for the people of the Northwest Territories. In September 2006 the Department of Environment and Natural Resources released a public consultation document outlining the major elements proposed for NWT species at risk legislation.

The proposed Species at Risk Act is a result of collaboration with land claim organizations during the drafting process. It was created to promote the effective management of species and prevent them from becoming at risk in the NWT.

The draft also ensures residents are involved in decisions regarding the management, protection and conservation of species at risk. The success of this draft sets the stage for the development of the Northwest Territories Wildlife Act and speaks to the issue of northern control over northern resources. Northerners need to be involved in the decision-making processes. Decisions concerning the North should be made by Northerners with the North in mind.

The proposed act is guided by the knowledge that wild species are important to residents and should be managed wisely. It also recognizes that all residents in the Northwest Territories have a responsibility to prevent species from becoming at risk.

The draft legislation builds on our unique wildlife co-management processes and recognizes the roles and responsibilities established under land claim agreements. It also recognizes the importance of traditional and local knowledge in managing species at risk and that responsibility for conservation and recovery of species at risk in the NWT is shared between wildlife comanagement boards, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Tlicho government and the Government of Canada.

Under the act conservation measures to protect, manage and recover species at risk will be considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure they are appropriate to the species. Regulations under the proposed act could require actions be taken to conserve a species or prohibit activities that may adversely affect the species.

Regulations could also regulate, restrict or prohibit killing, harming, harassing, taking, buying, selling, trading or possessing species at risk. In some cases there may be habitats that are essential to the survival and recovery of a species at risk. In most cases habitats will be designated under the Species at Risk Act, and no person would be allowed to destroy any part of the designated habitat.

The draft act also fulfills a number of GNWT commitments under the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk⁸, a national program to protect all species in Canada from becoming extinct as a result of human activity. It is our intention to introduce legislation in the fall session.

Mr. Speaker, protection is a joint responsibility. As stewards of our environment I encourage all residents to review this document and discuss it in their communities. At the appropriate time today I will be tabling the proposed legislation. Mahsi.