

COMMENTARY »

## David Suzuki: Ontario's wildlife needs continued protection

by [David Suzuki](#) on May 21st, 2013 at 4:15 PM

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When habitat needs to be protected to ensure the survival of a species inhabiting this "blue marble", government and industry often balk and backpedal.

In the early 1970s, a significant shift occurred in the relationship between North Americans and the world we live in. People started to recognize that nature's bounty isn't bottomless and that human activities often strain the Earth's limits. Across Canada and the U.S., faced with society's

*straight*

EVENTS

GUIDES

A [1970 Vancouver benefit concert](#) against nuclear testing in Amchitka, Alaska, launched Greenpeace. Earth Day also started that year. The famous picture taken from space by *Apollo 17* astronauts, revealing the Earth to be a finite and vulnerable “[blue marble](#)”, was shared with the world in 1972.

In 1973, the U.S. recognized that resource extraction, development, and land conversion were destroying wildlife homes and ranges to the point that their continued existence was at risk. It passed the Endangered Species Act, to protect plants and animals from extinction as a “consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation.”

Canada’s [Species at Risk Act](#) wasn’t passed until 2002. But Ontario, in keeping with the trend of the times, introduced legislation in 1971, and then revised it, passing an improved [Endangered Species Act](#) in 2007, which scientists and conservationists now consider the gold standard of wildlife protection law in Canada and beyond. Unlike the U.S., much of our country is crown land, managed by provincial governments on behalf of citizens. In other words, government stewards nature on our behalf.

The primary mandate of these acts is to protect the areas species need to survive. In Canada, habitat loss and degradation are the primary causes of decline for more than 80 percent of listed species.

Sadly, we seem to be entering a new phase: environmental deregulation. Now, when habitat needs to be protected to ensure the survival of a species, government and industry often balk and backpedal. This signals a failure to understand that we depend on nature for our well-being and survival. The web of living things cleanses, replenishes and creates air, water, soil and photosynthetic energy. Species in danger of extinction inform us that our activity is undermining the very life support systems of the planet.

Witness the sage grouse in Alberta: almost 90 percent of its Canadian population died off between 1988 and 2006 because of habitat destruction caused mainly by oil and gas development. But the Alberta government refuses to curb economic growth and protect the areas it needs to survive and recover. Witness the changes the federal government made last year to the Fisheries Act, controversially weakening the law so only a few select categories of fish will receive legal protection from industrial development. And now, Ontario is [poised to weaken its Endangered Species Act](#) by creating a range of exemptions so industry will not have to follow its habitat-protection requirements.

A recently released scientific study proves that endangered species legislation really works.

recovery for more than 100 at-risk species, including the American crocodile, whooping crane, and black-footed ferret.

Despite the evidence that endangered species laws are effective, governments in Canada are proceeding with deregulation and abdicating their responsibilities for wildlife habitat protection, often quietly. After all, only a few environmental watchdogs such as the David Suzuki Foundation are looking out for creatures that otherwise have no voice.

But our governments underestimate the public. The federal government likely wagered few would pay much attention when it stripped protections from the Fisheries Act and Environmental Assessment Act. But concerned citizens not only noticed, they [protested loudly across the country](#).

Now, we have an opportunity to be heard *before* a change is made, as the government of Ontario has not yet passed its proposed exemptions to the Endangered Species Act. Politicians need to know that people care about at-risk plant and wildlife populations. You can make a difference by calling cabinet ministers or MPPs to let them know you oppose the deregulation trend.

Visit [www.protectendangeredspecies.ca](http://www.protectendangeredspecies.ca) to learn more.

*Written with contributions from David Suzuki Foundation Ontario Science Projects Manager Rachel Plotkin. Learn more at [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org).*

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#### HIGHLIGHTED THINGS TO DO

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### Susan Hiller: Altered States

The Polygon Gallery



### North Shore Jazz Series

BlueShore Financial Centre for the Performing Arts