

Species at Risk in Ontario, Canada: Habitat Fragmentation, a Threat to Survival

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Abstract:

Ontario is over one million km² in area (i.e., larger in area than Spain and France combined) and has a population of over 13 million people, 80% of which are found in urban centers, most of which are located within the Great Lakes Basin. Over 220 federally-listed species at risk occur in Ontario, and the majority of these species also occur within the Great Lakes Basin. The human population continues to grow in Ontario, as does the number of federally-listed species at risk, and habitat loss and fragmentation due to development and associated road infrastructure remain key threats to the survival of wildlife species in Ontario. Declining numbers of herpetofaunal species found in urban centres and increased incidents of wildlife road mortality are documented and there is growing public concern regarding the protection of wildlife in natural habitats adjacent to road networks in southern Ontario. Stewardship programs are underway and various tools are being developed and implemented in Ontario to mitigate habitat fragmentation effects including the development of a ‘How Much Habitat is Enough?’ guidance document; habitat improvement projects (e.g., creation of nesting sites and hibernacula, use of fencing to prevent access to major highways); road ecology workshops led by key non-government groups; and the use of wildlife passages. Although awareness is increasing surrounding the effects of habitat fragmentation on wildlife species in Ontario, there is still a need to prevent further habitat loss and fragmentation in Ontario landscapes and incorporate effective protection and mitigation measures into landuse planning activities, environmental assessment reviews, and provincial and federal permitting processes. This presentation will focus on some species at risk threatened by road mortality and mitigation measures underway to protect these species and their habitats in Ontario.