

Alberta Conservation Association 2017/18 Project Summary Report

Project Name: Alberta Wildlife Status Reports

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Project Leader: Lance Engley

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Partnerships

Alberta Environment and Parks

Key Findings

- We published the Arctic grayling update and completed the American bison update, both of which were initiated in previous years. These reports await review by Alberta's Endangered Species Conservation Committee.
- We are working on a new status report on McCown's longspur and an update of the prairie falcon report.
- A species of Alberta's short-grass prairie, McCown's longspurs have declined at a rate of 8.5% each year between 2005 and 2015, amounting to a cumulative ten-year population decline of approximately 59%. Loss of high quality grassland habitat is a concern for this bird species, among other threats.
- We have published 86 status reports (16 updates) on species in Alberta since 1997, including reports on mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and plants.
- Status reports include current information on each species' conservation biology, habitat, population, distribution, limiting factors, and management in Alberta.

Introduction

Every five years, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) reviews the general status of wildlife species in Alberta. These overviews assign "ranks" to individual species that reflect the perceived level of risk to populations. Such designations are determined from extensive consultations with professional and amateur biologists, and from a variety of readily available sources of population data. A key objective of these reviews is to identify species that may be considered for more detailed status assessments.

Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) coordinates the production of the Alberta Wildlife Status Report Series and publishes the reports together with AEP. This series is an extension of the general status exercise and provides comprehensive current summaries of the biological status of selected wildlife species in Alberta. Priority is given to species that are considered *At Risk* or *May Be At Risk* in *The General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2015* (AEP 2017) or that

are considered to be at risk at a national level by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC; www.cosewic.gc.ca).

Status reports are the primary source of information on species at risk used by the Scientific Subcommittee (SSC) (of Alberta's Endangered Species Conservation Committee; ESCC), an independent body of scientists that completes a formal status assessment for the target species using criteria developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The SSC then provides the ESCC (comprised of members from groups representing resource-based land users, corporate and government land managers, conservation organizations, and university scientists) with both the formal status evaluation and conservation recommendations. The ESCC then either concurs or withholds concurrence with the recommended status, which is then provided to the Minister of AEP for determining the legal designation (e.g., *Endangered* or *Threatened* under Alberta's *Wildlife Act*) (see Figure 1; also refer to Fish and Wildlife Division [2008] for more information on Alberta's species at risk process). ACA is a voting member of the ESCC.

Methods

Each spring, ACA and AEP staff meet to prioritize the species that are most in need of a detailed status assessment. We prioritize species based on the general status rank, COSEWIC priorities, the availability of new Alberta data (that will likely change the existing status of a species at risk), and new threats to a species at risk in Alberta.

Once a suite of new species has been decided, ACA contracts species experts (individuals with unique local expertise in the biology and management of the species) to write the status reports. ACA staff manages these contracts, receives and edits the report drafts, develops the current range maps, supervises the external review process, and formats the reports for online publishing (www.ab-conservation.com).

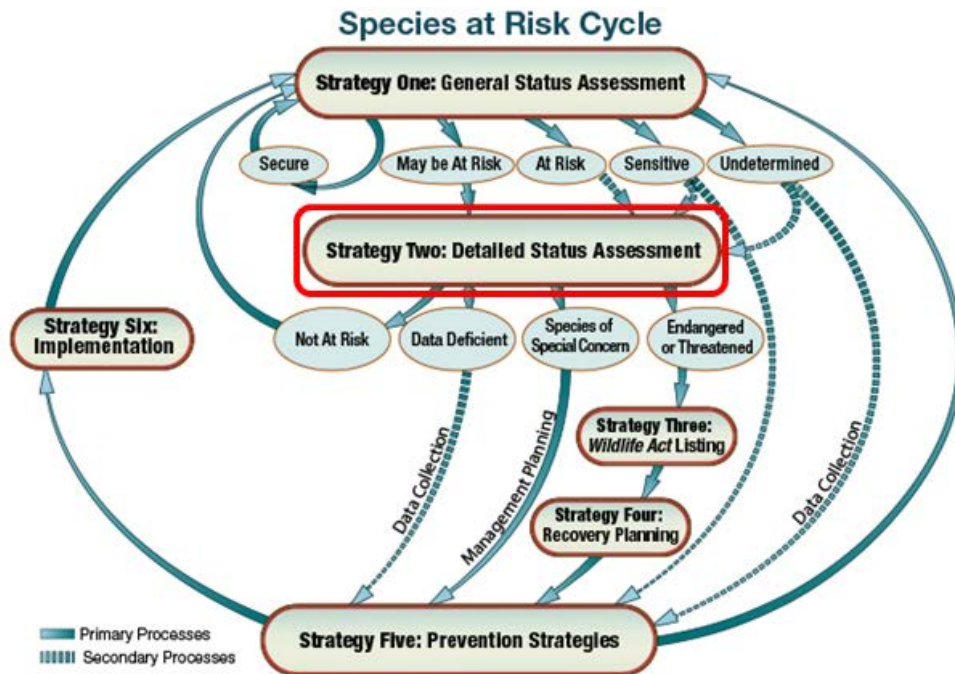


Figure 1. This flowchart, taken from Alberta Environment and Parks (2016), shows the species at risk process; the box outlined in red is where the Alberta Wildlife Status Report Series (and hence, Alberta Conservation Association) plays a key role.

Results

In 2017/18, we initiated two reports (McCown’s longspur, prairie falcon update) and continued our work on a third report (western wood-pewee) for review by Alberta’s ESCC. We also published the Arctic grayling update and completed the American bison update, both of which were initiated in previous years. In total, we have published 86 reports on species at risk in Alberta in this series since 1997, including reports on mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and plants (Figure 2). This includes updates to 16 older reports, revised with new information.

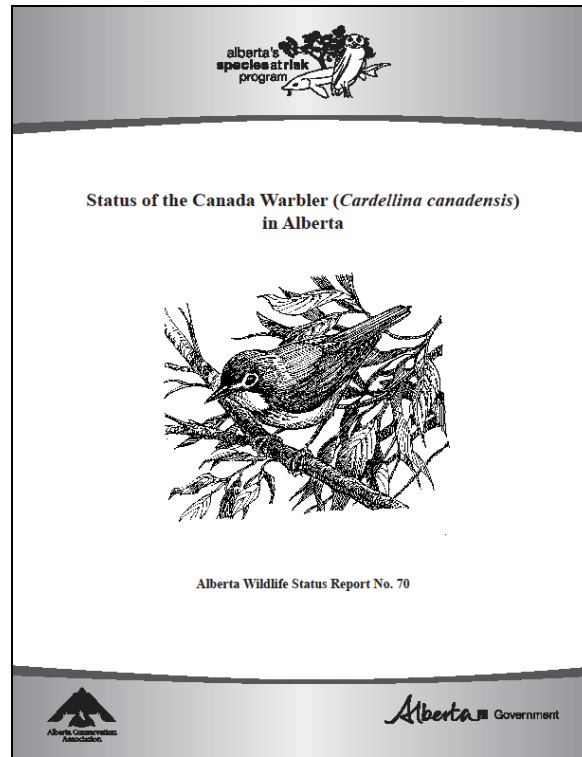


Figure 2. Example of a status report cover.

Conclusions

The Alberta Wildlife Status Report Series plays a key role in identifying *Endangered* and *Threatened* species in Alberta that need legal protection to keep them from becoming extinct or extirpated. As well, *Species of Special Concern* and those that are *Data Deficient* are identified using status reports, instigating the necessary actions to either prevent their decline or to obtain the information needed to further clarify their status in the province.

Communications

- All status reports are available online (ACA and AEP websites); reports published until 2011 are also available as hard copies.
- The status report series editor promoted ACA's involvement with status reports and species at risk in Alberta through formal and informal venues (e.g., article in our *Conservation Magazine* [fall 2017 issue], U of A career fair [Sept. 2017]), and through environmental education initiatives (e.g., Strathcona Wilderness Centre [Oct. 2017]).

Literature Cited

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP). 2016. Alberta's species at risk strategies. Available online: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/species-at-risk/albertas-species-at-risk-strategy/default.aspx>.

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Fish and Wildlife Division. 2008. Alberta's strategy for the management of species at risk (2009 – 2014). Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. 30 pp. Available at: <http://aep.alberta.ca/fish-wildlife/species-at-risk/documents/StrategyManagementSpeciesRisk2009-14.pdf>.