

Common Five-lined Skink – Carolinian and Southern Shield Populations

Ontario Government Response Statement



Photo: Rob Tervo

PROTECTING AND RECOVERING SPECIES AT RISK IN ONTARIO

Species at risk recovery is a key part of protecting Ontario's biodiversity. Biodiversity – the variety of life on Earth – provides us with clean air and water, food, fibre, medicine and other resources that we need to survive.

The Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA) is the Government of Ontario's legislative commitment to protecting and recovering species at risk and their habitats. As soon as a species is listed as extirpated, endangered or threatened under the ESA, it is automatically protected from harm or harassment. Also, immediately upon listing, the habitats of endangered and threatened species are protected from damage or destruction.

Under the ESA, the Ministry of Natural Resources (the Ministry) must ensure that a recovery strategy is prepared for each species that is listed as endangered or threatened. A recovery strategy provides science-based advice to the government on what is required to achieve recovery of a species.

The Common Five-lined Skink is the only lizard native to Ontario. It is black or grey with five cream-coloured stripes along its back and a blue tail in juveniles. Females typically lay their eggs under cover objects, such as logs or rocks.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STATEMENTS

Within nine months after a recovery strategy is prepared, the ESA requires the Ministry to publish a statement summarizing the government's intended actions and priorities in response to the recovery strategy. The recovery strategy for the Common Five-lined Skink was completed on September 10, 2010 (http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Species/2ColumnSubPage/STDPROD_066837.html).

The response statement is the government's policy response to the scientific advice provided in the recovery strategy. In addition to the strategy, the response statement is based on input from stakeholders, other jurisdictions, Aboriginal communities and members of the public. It reflects the best available traditional, local and scientific knowledge at this time and may be adapted if new information becomes available. In implementing the actions in the response statement, the ESA allows the Ministry to determine what is feasible, taking into account social and economic factors.

MOVING FORWARD TO PROTECT AND RECOVER COMMON FIVE-LINED SKINK

The Common Five-lined Skink is included on the Species at Risk in Ontario List as two geographically distinct populations – the Carolinian population, which is found in southwestern Ontario, and the Southern Shield population, which is found in central Ontario.

The Common Five-lined Skink (Carolinian population) is listed as an endangered species under the ESA, which protects both the animal and its habitat. The ESA prohibits harm to or harassment of the species and damage to or destruction of its habitat without authorization. Such authorization would require that conditions established by the Ministry be met.

The Common Five-lined Skink (Southern Shield population) is listed as a special concern species under the ESA. A special concern species is one with characteristics that make it sensitive to human activities or natural events.

The main threats to the Common Five-lined Skink include habitat loss and degradation as well as disturbance from the removal of cover objects used by the species, such as logs or rocks.

The government's goal for the recovery of the Common Five-lined Skink is to ensure the long-term viability and survival of both designated populations in Ontario.

Protecting and recovering species at risk is a shared responsibility. No single agency or organization has the knowledge, authority or financial resources to protect and recover all of Ontario's species at risk. Successful recovery requires intergovernmental co-operation and the involvement of many individuals, organizations and communities.

In developing the government response statement, the Ministry considered what actions are feasible for the government to lead directly and what actions are feasible for the government's conservation partners to undertake with government support.

GOVERNMENT-LED ACTIONS

To help protect and recover the Common Five-lined Skink, the government will directly undertake the following actions:

- Develop a survey protocol to be used by proponents and partners to detect the presence or absence of Common Five-lined Skink.
- Educate other agencies and authorities involved in planning and environmental assessment processes on the protection requirements under the ESA.
- Encourage the submission of Common Five-lined Skink data to the Ministry's central repository at the Natural Heritage Information Centre or to the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas Project.
- Undertake communications and outreach to increase public awareness of species at risk in Ontario.

- Protect the Common Five-lined Skink (Carolinian population) and its habitat through the ESA. Develop and enforce a regulation prescribing the habitat of the species.
- Support conservation, agency, municipal and industry partners in undertaking activities to protect and recover the Common Five-lined Skink. Support will be provided through funding, agreements, permits (including conditions) and advisory services.
- Establish and communicate annual priority actions for government support in order to encourage collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.

GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED ACTIONS

The government endorses the following actions for the protection and recovery of the Common Five-lined Skink. Actions identified as "high" will be given priority consideration for funding or for authorizations under the ESA. The government will focus its support on these high-priority actions over the next five years.

Carolinian population:

Focus Area: **Protection and Management**

Objective: Develop and implement measures to protect sites, reduce identified threats and increase available habitat.

Actions:

1. (HIGH) Maintain and, where necessary, increase the amount and quality of habitat and microhabitat (i.e., cover objects) that is available for Common Five-lined Skinks.
2. Identify and implement approaches to reduce threats such as road mortality, highly subsidized predator* populations and disturbance of cover objects.
3. Develop and deliver communications to targeted groups (e.g., landowners, members of the pet trade and park visitors) to promote public awareness of protection provisions, stewardship opportunities and habitat requirements of the Common Five-lined Skink.
4. As opportunities arise, support the securement of lands that contain Common Five-lined Skink sub-populations through existing land securement and stewardship programs.

Focus Area: **Research**

Objective: Improve understanding of the spatial ecology of the Common Five-lined Skink and clarify uncertain threats.

Actions:

5. (HIGH) Conduct studies into the habitat use, typical movements and dispersal abilities of the Common Five-lined Skink.
6. Determine if natural succession to less open habitats is a significant threat to occupied sites and which techniques are beneficial to maintaining or enhancing the suitability of Common Five-lined Skink habitat.

* These are predators that exist at unnaturally high levels because of "subsidies" (e.g., food waste or crops) that humans provide.

Focus Area: **Inventory and Monitoring**
Objective: Determine the distribution, abundance and associated trends of the Common Five-lined Skink in Ontario.

Actions:

7. **(HIGH)** Implement a standardized survey protocol for estimating the abundance over time of Common Five-lined Skinks in the Carolinian population.
8. Develop a prioritized list of historic locations and sites where the species potentially occurs, and survey for the presence of Common Five-lined Skinks.

Southern Shield population:

Actions:

1. **(HIGH)** Implement a standardized survey protocol for estimating the distribution and abundance of Common Five-lined Skinks in the Southern Shield population.
2. Maintain the amount and quality of habitat and microhabitat that is available for Common Five-lined Skinks.
3. Develop and deliver communications to targeted groups (e.g., landowners, members of the pet trade and park visitors) to promote public awareness of stewardship opportunities and habitat requirements of the Common Five-lined Skink.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Financial support for the implementation of actions may be available through the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program or Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program. Conservation partners are encouraged to discuss project proposals related to the actions in this response statement with the Ministry. The Ministry can also advise if any authorizations under the ESA may be required to undertake the project.

Implementation of the actions may be subject to changes in priorities across the multitude of species at risk, availability of resources and the capacity of partners to undertake recovery activities. Where appropriate, the implementation of actions for multiple species will be co-ordinated across government response statements.

REVIEWING PROGRESS

The ESA requires the Ministry to conduct a review of progress toward protecting and recovering a species not later than five years from the publication of this response statement. The review will help determine whether adjustments are needed to achieve the protection and recovery of the Common Five-lined Skink.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all those who participated in the development of the “Recovery Strategy for Common Five-lined Skink – Carolinian and Southern Shield Populations in Ontario” for their dedication to protecting and recovering species at risk.

For additional information:

Visit the species at risk website at
ontario.ca/speciesatrisk

Contact your MNR district office

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