

Cucumber Tree

Ontario Government Response Statement



Photo: Allen Woodliffe

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 government on what is required to achieve recovery of a species.

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 Cucumber Tree was completed on September 10, 2010 (http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Species/2ColumnSubPage/STDPROD_066838.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 modified 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.

The Cucumber Tree is the only native species of Magnolia in Ontario. It is named for the slight resemblance of its immature fruit to a cucumber. This tree grows in rich, well-drained soils in deciduous forest habitats and can reach heights of about 30 metres.

MOVING FORWARD TO PROTECT AND RECOVER CUCUMBER TREE

The Cucumber Tree is listed as an endangered species under the ESA, which protects both the plant 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.

In Ontario, the Cucumber Tree occurs only in the Regional Municipality of Niagara and in Norfolk County. Key threats to the tree include forest clearing and fragmentation and changes to groundwater flow and soil moisture. Since many populations are small and isolated from one another, opportunities are reduced for cross-pollination and seed dispersal. This can decrease the species' ability to adapt to change and can compromise its long-term viability.

The government's goal for the recovery of the Cucumber Tree is to conserve and achieve a self-sustaining population 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 Cucumber Tree, the government will directly undertake the following actions:

- Educate other agencies and authorities involved in planning and environmental assessment processes on the protection requirements under the ESA.
- Encourage the submission of Cucumber Tree data to the Ministry's central repository at the Natural Heritage Information Centre.
- Undertake communications and outreach to increase public awareness of species at risk in Ontario.
- Protect the Cucumber Tree and its habitat through the ESA.
- Support conservation, agency, municipal and industry partners in undertaking activities to protect and recover the Cucumber Tree. 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 Cucumber Tree. 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.

Focus Area: Protection and Management

Objective: Protect and manage existing natural populations and their habitats.

Actions:

1. **(HIGH)** Encourage stewardship of Cucumber Trees, including landowner participation in the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program and the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program.
2. **(HIGH)** Promote forest management practices that encourage natural recruitment of the Cucumber Tree.
3. As opportunities arise, support the securement of land where Cucumber Trees occur through existing land securement and stewardship programs.

Focus Area: Habitat Restoration

Objective: Enhance the ability of populations to be self-sustaining by restoring habitat connectivity.

Actions:

4. Assess best opportunities for restoring connections between small populations to increase recruitment.
5. Co-operate with existing initiatives to connect and expand forest fragments to increase potential suitable habitat.

Focus Area: Research

Objective: Improve understanding of this species’ biology and ecology.

Actions:

6. Conduct detailed pollination, demographic and seed dispersal studies and determine the genetic composition of populations.
7. Investigate the potential impact on the Cucumber Tree of land-use activities that alter drainage patterns, groundwater and soil moisture.

Focus Area: Awareness

Objective: Increase public awareness of the Cucumber Tree and the protection of its habitat.

Actions:

8. Develop and provide information to landowners, forestry associations and other sectors to increase awareness and promote protection and recovery of the species.

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, Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program or Conservation Land Tax Incentive 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 Cucumber Tree.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all those who participated in the development of the "Recovery Strategy for Cucumber Tree 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
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