

Not a second to spare: environmental groups react to Ontario government's plan for recovering endangered eels

Ottawa, Tuesday, January 9 - Ottawa Riverkeeper, the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF), Ontario Rivers Alliance (ORA), and Ontario Nature joined forces today in calling for urgent and immediate action by the Ontario government to reverse the ongoing decline of the endangered American Eel, whose numbers have collapsed by a staggering 99% in Ontario since the 1980s. The call comes in the final days of the province's public consultation on [its draft Government Response Statement](#) – in essence, it's an action plan for recovering this endangered species. While applauding the publication of these long-delayed commitments, the groups and their supporters are urging Ontario to go further – and faster – than what it is proposing.

An urgent need to act

Despite the urgency, the province's action agenda stops short of proposing truly immediate actions – with even many of those labeled “immediate actions” slated to be “undertaken by 2020.”

For Nicolas Lapointe, Senior Conservation Biologist with the Canadian Wildlife Federation, this is too little too late.

“Ontario's remaining 1% of American Eel don't have the luxury of waiting another 2-3 years for improvements to materialize. There have already been decades of delays in addressing this collapse, including the publication of this very action plan which should have been in place in 2014, a legal requirement under Ontario's Endangered Species Act.”

Recommendations

The groups are urging the province to adopt their detailed recommendations to strengthen the proposed action plan. Chief among these are the immediate need to implement actions to reduce the mortality of adult eels as they migrate downstream through hydropower facilities, and to provide upstream passage (e.g. eel ladders) at barriers in the lower reaches of rivers. On the Ottawa River, for example, only one of 19 dams is currently slated for providing upstream passage. Moreover, the groups are calling for more specific approaches for Ontario to work with other jurisdictions.

“Every single eel that's entering or leaving Ontario is migrating through the St. Lawrence River and Québec. Recovery can only work if Ontario has a specific plan for collaborating with stakeholders such as Hydro-Québec and the Québec government, through channels like the Ottawa River Watershed Council,” says Patrick Nadeau, Executive Director at Ottawa Riverkeeper.

Nadeau points to the lack of eel passage at Carillon Dam, which straddles the Québec-Ontario border on the lower Ottawa River, as proof that interprovincial actions must urgently be undertaken.

Call to action

Members of the public are strongly encouraged to make their voices heard during public consultations on the Government Response Statement, which runs until January 11th.

“Ontarians are genuinely concerned about global declines in biodiversity, including the distinct possibility of losing American Eel right here at home. Now is the chance to show the government that there is broad support for immediate actions to turn this around,” says Linda Heron, Chair of the Ontario Rivers Alliance.

Members of the public wishing to provide comments can visit the [Ottawa Riverkeeper](#), [CWF](#), [Ontario Nature](#), or [ORA](#) websites for more information

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