



American Eel

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Information summary and [survey](#) for the consultations on adding the American Eel to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk as Threatened – **Please provide your input by March 18, 2016.**

Consultations

Let your opinion be heard

Canada's *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) provides legal protection for wildlife species at risk to conserve biological diversity. It also acknowledges that all Canadians have a role to play in the conservation of wildlife species.

Before deciding whether the American Eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) will be added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, we would like to hear your opinion, comments, and suggestions regarding the possible ecological, cultural, and economic impacts of listing or not listing this species under SARA.

Adding a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk...

The process of listing a species under Canada's SARA consists of several steps: it begins with a status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) and ends with a Government of Canada decision on whether or not to add a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. Public consultations are conducted to gather the opinions of Canadians and are an important step in this process.

Facts about the American Eel

The life cycle of American Eel involves several stages. It begins in the ocean, in the Sargasso Sea, where all eels spawn. When the eel larva hatches from the egg, it is carried in the Gulf Stream for up to a year. It then changes into a

glass eel (a more elongated, eel-like shape) and migrates to coastal and inland waters where it acquires pigment and becomes an elver (a small version of the adult eel). Elvers grow into yellow eels, which may occupy freshwater, brackish or salt water. They may also migrate between these various habitats. Yellow eels mature into silver eels (after 4 to 23 years) and then migrate back to the Sargasso Sea where they spawn and die.

Yellow and silver eels are no longer fished commercially in the Great Lakes but are still harvested in commercial and recreational fisheries along the St. Lawrence River and throughout the Atlantic Provinces. Elvers are harvested commercially along the Atlantic seaboard in Nova Scotia and the Bay of Fundy. American Eel is an important species for the subsistence fisheries of many Aboriginal communities throughout its range.



Figure 1. American Eel (Illustration by Jeffrey C. Domm)



All American Eels in North America belong to the same population; therefore COSEWIC concluded that American Eels from eastern Canada are part of a single population. Their broad distribution on the western side of the Atlantic Ocean extends from Venezuela to Greenland and Iceland and includes the Sargasso Sea (in the southern North Atlantic), where all American Eels spawn. Their Canadian range includes all freshwater, estuaries and coastal marine waters that are connected to the Atlantic Ocean, from the Great Lakes up to the Labrador coast. American Eels occupy perhaps the broadest range of aquatic habitats of any fish.

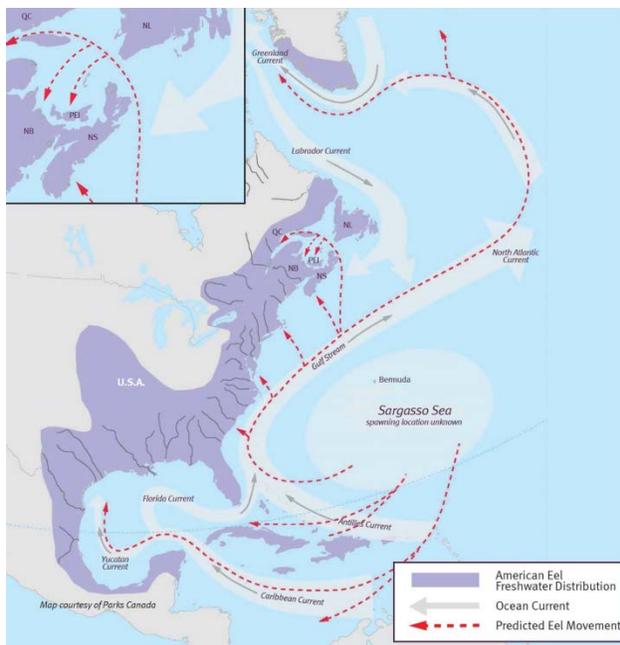


Figure 2. Distribution of the American Eel (Map courtesy of Parks Canada).

Who assigned the Threatened status to the American Eel?

COSEWIC is an independent committee of experts that assesses which wildlife species are in some danger of disappearing from Canada and assigns a status to these species. It

conducts its assessments based on the best available information including scientific data, local ecological knowledge, and Aboriginal traditional knowledge. American Eel was designated as Special Concern in April 2006. The species was reassessed in May 2012 and designated at a higher risk level to Threatened.

Why is the American Eel at risk?

COSEWIC has identified the following threats to the species (note: significance of threats varies within the different areas of its distribution): barriers in freshwater preventing upstream migration, turbine mortality of hydroelectric dams, fisheries, contaminants, swim bladder parasite, climate change and shifting oceanic conditions.

If a species is listed as Threatened under the *Species at Risk Act*...

If the American Eel is listed as Threatened, automatic prohibitions would immediately come into effect and it would be illegal to kill, harm, harass, capture, take, possess, collect, buy, sell or trade American Eel unless authorized by a SARA permit or exempted under a recovery strategy. For example, licensed communal fisheries for food, social and ceremonial purposes would be permitted if an American Eel Recovery Strategy determined that harvest was not a threat to population recovery. A recovery strategy and subsequent action plan(s) would be developed to identify the measures to be implemented to mitigate the known threats from human activity. Critical habitat for American Eel (i.e. the habitat necessary for the survival and recovery of the species) would also be protected once it is identified in a recovery strategy or action plan.



We would like to receive your comments on the potential impacts of adding or not adding the American Eel to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under SARA designated as Threatened.

Your comments are important.

Please fill out the [survey](#): we want to hear from you.

A copy of the 2012 COSEWIC Assessment and Status Report on the American Eel and other information can be found on the SARA Registry at www.sararegistry.gc.ca.

References

COSEWIC. 2012. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the American Eel *Anguilla rostrata* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xii + 109 pp.

Thank you for completing this [survey](#).

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