

Response Statement - Northern Riffleshell

December 2, 2010

Common Name: Northern Riffleshell

Scientific Name: *Epioblasma torulosa rangiana*

Status assessment by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): Endangered

How the Minister of the Environment intends to respond to the assessment: The above assessment confirms the classification of this wildlife species in Schedule 1, the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* as Endangered. Activities will continue to be undertaken in a manner consistent with the purposes, and according to the timelines identified in, the *Species at Risk Act*.

Reason(s) for status designation provided by COSEWIC: This small freshwater mussel is restricted to two rivers in southern Ontario. Since the original COSEWIC assessment (2000), a small, possibly reproducing population was discovered in the Ausable River although only 16 live individuals, including one juvenile, have been found over the last 10 years. Recruitment is occurring at several sites along the Sydenham River and the population appears to be stable, but the perceived recovery could be due to increased sampling effort over the past 12 years. The main limiting factor is the availability of shallow, silt-free riffle habitat. Both riverine populations are in areas of intense agriculture and urban and industrial development, subject to siltation and pollution. Only four populations in the world, including the two in Canada, show signs of recruitment.

Occurrence: Ontario

Competent Minister(s):

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

Applicable federal legislation: Fisheries are managed and fish habitat is protected under the *Fisheries Act*.

Conservation activities underway: A recovery strategy for five freshwater mussel species, including Northern Riffleshell, was developed in 2006 and is currently being implemented. Additionally, the species is also included in the ecosystem-based recovery strategies for the Ausable River and the Sydenham River. In 2009, studies were conducted to evaluate the Round Goby, an invasive species, as a threat to the critical habitat of freshwater mussels at risk including the Northern Riffleshell in Ontario. Habitat Stewardship Funds were provided to the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority to promote habitat stewardship in the Sydenham River ecosystem which contains 14 aquatic species at risk including the Northern Riffleshell. Activities included: decrease nutrient and sediment loading through hands on habitat improvement; increase knowledge of species at risk, the causes and solutions to landowners and students; evaluate the impact of stewardship initiatives in past and present years through benthic sampling, water quality testing and electrofishing. Northern Riffleshell was previously listed as Endangered under the *Species at Risk Act* and therefore the *Species at Risk Act* prohibitions already apply.