



# SPECIES AT RISK ACT

## CONSULTATION WORKBOOK on the addition of a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk



# The Harbour Seal

(Lacs des Loups Marins subspecies)

December 2008

Aussi disponible en français



Pêches et Océans  
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# CONSULTATION WORKBOOK

## The Harbour Seal

### (Lacs des Loups Marins subspecies)

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## SUMMARY

### **ADDING THE HARBOUR SEAL OF THE LACS DES LOUPS MARINS TO THE LIST OF WILDLIFE SPECIES AT RISK - WHY ARE WE HAVING THESE CONSULTATIONS?**

The *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* was proclaimed on June 5, 2003, by the Government of Canada. The Act provides a framework for actions across Canada to promote the survival of wildlife species, subspecies and distinct wildlife populations. It requires Canada to provide for the recovery of ‘*threatened*’ or ‘*endangered*’ species, and to manage ‘*species of special concern*’ to make sure they do not become ‘*endangered*’ or ‘*threatened*’. SARA is the result of the *Canadian Strategy on Biodiversity*, developed in response to the United Nations *Convention on Biological Diversity*.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has proposed that the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins be placed on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. This proposal is based on available scientific assessments and Aboriginal traditional knowledge.

To determine whether a species should be added to the list of species protected under SARA, the Government of Canada carries out a series of public consultations aimed primarily at groups directly concerned by the species or for whom the species holds a special interest. A decision is taken only after careful examination of information received from the consultations and of factors such as the potential social and economic impacts of adding the species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk.

Aquatic species at risk fall under the purview of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans which is presently seeking your views to assist in making an informed decision on whether to add the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk of the Species at Risk Act (SARA).

Though each and every Canadian shares in the responsibility to protect threatened species, the impact of SARA on you or your organization will vary according to the species concerned and according to the nature of your activities. Your ideas, understanding, and advice will assist the government in assessing the impacts of adding this species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk.

## CONSULTATION WORKBOOK

This workbook provides background information on government requirements for adding a species to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, and on the nature and application of SARA provisions. This general information is outlined in Part 1. Part 2 describes the current status of the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins, based on assessments provided by the COSEWIC. Part 3 (detachable) consists of a questionnaire to be filled out and returned. It is intended to assist you in articulating your concerns and advice.

A downloadable workbook is available at:  
[www.registrelep.gc.ca/involved/consultation/default\\_f.cfm](http://www.registrelep.gc.ca/involved/consultation/default_f.cfm).

Your views on whether to add the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins to the SARA List of Wildlife Species at Risk are important to this consultation process. Your opinion will be read carefully and will be taken into serious consideration.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To promote participation in the public consultation process, the SARA Public Registry ([www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca)) provides information on the application of SARA provisions. Additional information can be found on the Fisheries and Oceans Canada Species at Risk website ([www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/)) and on the website of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) ([www.cosewic.gc.ca](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca)).

## SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS

Please send your comments on the addition of the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk **before March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009**.

SARA Coordinator  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
Québec Region  
P.O. Box 1000, 850, route de la Mer  
Mont-Joli, Québec  
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1-877-775-0848

## 1. WHAT IS THE *SPECIES AT RISK ACT*?

The *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* was created to ensure the survival of wildlife species and the protection of our natural heritage. It requires Canada to provide for the recovery of species at risk owing to human activity, and to manage species of '*special concern*' to make sure they do not become '*endangered*' or '*threatened*'. The Act provides protection for species, their residences and critical habitat.

In analyzing the implications of adding a species to the official List of Wildlife Species at Risk, we must consider the impacts that the subsequent management strategies may have on:

- upholding the automatic prohibitions provided by the Act concerning the particular species listed as '*extirpated*', '*endangered*' and '*threatened*';
- meeting the objectives of the recovery plan.

### 1.1 Legal Listing - What does this mean?

A species is not protected under SARA until it is included on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk (Schedule 1 of the Act).

COSEWIC assesses the status of candidate species for inclusion on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk and submits its proposals for the listing to the federal government. Following receipt of COSEWIC assessments and public consultations, the federal government must do one of the following:

- a) Accept the assessment and add the species to the List;
- b) Decide not to add the species to the List; or
- c) Refer the current assessment back to COSEWIC for further information or consideration.

The decision on whether to add a species to the List takes into account the COSEWIC assessment, information received from consultations, and factors such as the potential social and economic impacts of the listing.

Species that COSEWIC proposes the government adds to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk fall under one of the following categories: ‘*extinct*’, ‘*extirpated*’, ‘*endangered*’, ‘*threatened*’, or of ‘*special concern*’.

**SPECIES ON THE LIST OF WILDLIFE SPECIES AT RISK**  
**- OFFICIAL STATUSES -**

***Extinct*** - A wildlife species that no longer exists.

***Extirpated*** - A wildlife species that is no longer found in the wild in Canada but may be found elsewhere.

***Endangered*** - A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

***Threatened*** - A wildlife species likely to become Endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors threatening it.

***Special Concern*** - A wildlife species that may become a Threatened or Endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Once a species is legally listed as extirpated, endangered, or threatened, specific protection measures come into effect barring any harmful actions against species at risk. In addition, a recovery process must be completed within timelines prescribed by SARA.

## **1.2 What protection does the Act give to legally listed species?**

Once species are legally listed as ‘*extirpated*’, ‘*endangered*’ or ‘*threatened*’, automatic prohibitions apply. SARA has general prohibitions against killing, harming, taking, possessing, capturing, and collecting legally listed species, and damaging or destroying their residences.

Enforcement measures apply immediately to ensure respect of the automatic prohibitions. The implementation of a recovery strategy is a more long-term endeavour. The recovery process will be initiated after another series of public consultations.

### 1.3 Recovery strategies

The recovery process is designed to improve the status of species at risk. There are two parts to the recovery planning process for species listed as either '*extirpated*', '*endangered*' or '*threatened*':

- 1) the development of a recovery strategy which identifies threats to species, describes recovery objectives for that species, and identifies the species' critical habitat;
- 2) the development of an action plan which describes activities to be carried out to reduce threats to the species, protect its critical habitat and promote the recovery of the species.

For species of special concern, management plans establish the measures that must be implemented to protect the species and their habitats.

The timeline for establishing recovery strategies will be one year from the time of legal listing for '*endangered*' species, two years for species listed as '*extirpated*' or '*threatened*', and three years (for a management plan) for species of '*special concern*'.

The recovery strategy and action plans are prepared in cooperation and consultation with Wildlife Management Boards, Aboriginal organizations that are directly affected by the recovery strategy, and jurisdictions such as provincial or territorial governments who are responsible for the management of the species. Landowners and other stakeholders will also be consulted.



## 2 THE HARBOUR SEAL (LACS DES LOUPS MARINS SUBSPECIES)

### 2.1 Status

Endangered

### 2.2 Last evaluation by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)

In November 2007, COSEWIC designated the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups marins as an endangered species. The Government of Canada is presently considering adding the harbour seal to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk under the *Species at Risk Act*. On the other hand, COSEWIC has determined that the Atlantic and the Eastern Arctic harbour seals, and the Pacific coast harbour seal are not endangered species.

### 2.3 Species biology and distribution

In North America, COSEWIC has identified three distinct subspecies of harbour seal. One subspecies is found on the west coast (*Phoca vitulina richardsi*), and another along the Atlantic and Arctic coasts (*Phoca vitulina concolor*). The present consultation is concerned with the subspecies of harbour seals found in the Lacs des Loups Marins, who live exclusively in fresh water and who are considered a distinct subspecies: *Phoca vitulina mellonae*. In Inuktitut, the harbour seal is known as “qasigiaq”. The Cree of Northern Quebec know it as “nuchimu-achikw” or “achikunipi”, the latter being the more ancient or traditional name.

It is estimated that the harbour seal population of the Lacs des Loup Marins became separated from the population of ocean-dwelling harbour seals at least 3000 years ago. Today, this harbour seal is distinguishable from its closest relatives by its behaviour and genetic make-up and also by its morphology. For example, the harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins reproduce earlier in the season, which may make it impossible for them to reproduce with the Atlantic and Arctic harbour seals. It is not, however, known to what extent this trait is hereditary or is caused by local environmental conditions.

According to the Cree, the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins is smaller and darker than its marine counterparts. The Cree have also observed a noticeable difference in the taste of the meat, which they prefer to the other harbour seals. The Inuit believed that the pelt of this fresh-water seal is not only darker but also softer and shinier than that of the other seals. Its skull, too, apparently has a distinctive shape.

The harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins feeds on whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*), lake char (*Salvelinus namaycush*) and brook char (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). During the winter, the strong ice-free currents, the cracks in the ice, and the air pockets in the complex ice formations allow the seal to breathe.

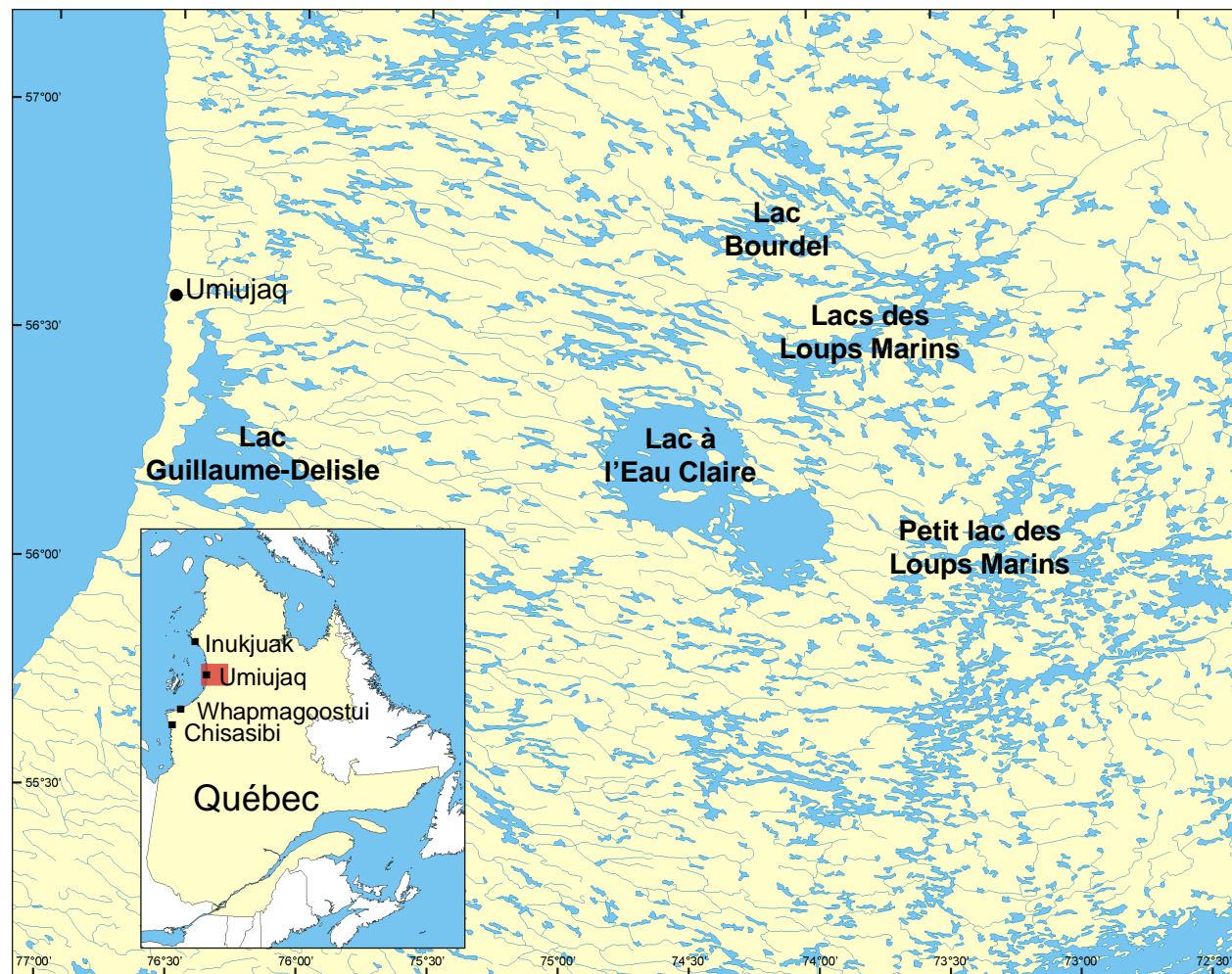
In May, females give birth to a single pup. Though harbour seals are generally known to give birth out of the water, no birth has of yet been observed on the still-frozen lake surfaces during the breeding season. This has led to the belief that these seals have the peculiar characteristic of giving birth in chambers beneath the ice.

## **2.4 Where are the harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins found?**

The harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins constitute the only harbour seal population in the world which spends the entire year confined to fresh water. They range over approximately 670 km<sup>2</sup> of lakes and rivers in the Ungava Peninsula (Canada). The Cree and the Inuit believe that the population is currently spread out into the Lacs des Loups Marins, the Petit Lac des Loups Marins and Lac Bourdel.

They have been spotted by local inhabitants in Lac à l'Eau Claire, Lac Guillaume-Delisle and Lac Tasialuk, as well as in the Nastapoka, Bomiface, Niagumaq, Kuunga and Longland Rivers. There were also historical sightings (1918, 1946) in Lac Minto and Lac Beneta. However, the entire present distribution area could be limited to Lac Bourdel, the Lacs des Loups Marins and possibly the Petit Lac des Loups Marins.

Harbour seals in general are characteristically sedentary animals. This could also be the case for the harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins. There is, in effect, no proof that they can get past the falls in the Nastapoka River or migrate towards Hudson Bay and Ungava Bay.



**Figure 1. Main distributin of the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins, *Phoca vitulina mellonae* (Gilles Fortin, MPO).**

## 2.5 How many seals are there?

Estimates on the size of the present population are imprecise, ranging from 100 to 600 individuals. The last survey (1991) puts the figure at approximately 100. COSEWIC considers it improbable that other harbour seals would migrate to the Lacs des Loups Marins area where the population remains isolated both geographically and at the reproductive level. Further surveys are required to better assess the size and distribution of the harbour seal population in the Lacs des Loups Marins area, along with their attachment to particular sites and their seasonal displacements.

The toponymy, observations recorded by 19<sup>th</sup> century explorers, and Aboriginal traditional knowledge lead us to believe that the population at one time must have been greater and more widely distributed than it is now.

## 2.6 Threats to the population of harbour seals of the Lacs de Loups Marins

Presently, the only known cause of mortality among the harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins is occasional subsistence hunting. However, the development of hydroelectric installations, such as the Grande-Baleine project, constitutes a real threat to the survival of the harbour seals in the region. Among the impacts associated with hydroelectric projects are the disappearance of under-ice shelters and ice-free zones, changes in the availability of prey and mercury contamination. The fact that these seals reside in a relatively restricted area makes them particularly vulnerable.

## 2.7 Why does COSEWIC consider the harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins an ‘*endangered*’ species?

COSEWIC has determined that this subspecies, which is found nowhere else in the world, is threatened with imminent extinction. Its present population could be as low as 100 individuals. The population declined in the past because of hunting, which is perhaps still being carried on today. Hydroelectric development could cause considerable changes to harbour seal habitat, contributing to the decline in population.

## **2.8 What will happen if the harbour seal population of the Lacs des Loups Marins is added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk?**

If the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins is added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk, a strategy for the recovery of the population must be prepared within one year of the legal listing, in collaboration with the principal stakeholders. The recovery plan will also be submitted to public consultation. For more information on the provisions of the *Species at Risk Act* and the consequences of its implementation, please consult Part 1 of the present workbook.

### 3 LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

The following questionnaire invites you to reflect on the implications of adding the harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk (Schedule 1 of SARA) with the '*endangered*' species status. Your answers and comments will tell us what you think about the protection and recovery of this unique population, and especially about the possible effects the decision to add it to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk would have.

You can also supply your answers and express your point of view in another format of your choice.

If you wish to keep the other sections of this workbook, please feel free to detach them and return only the questionnaire.

Return the completed questionnaire or your comments by mail, fax or E-mail to the following address:

SARA Coordinator  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Québec Region  
P.O.Box 1000, 850, route de la Mer  
Mont-Joli, Québec  
G5H 3Z4  
E-mail : [especesperilqc@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:especesperilqc@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)  
Fax: 418-775-0542  
Toll-free: 1-877-775-0848

Please submit comments by  
**March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009**

**THANK YOU!**

## Consultation on the Harbour Seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins

### QUESTIONNAIRE

**1. In what capacity are you completing this questionnaire?**

- ☐ Individual
- ☐ Individual, member of an aboriginal people, please specify (optional):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Representative of an organization or company (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other (please specify):  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Your name (optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Where do you live (if individual)? / Or, what territory does your organization or company cover?**

- ☐ Province of Québec
- ☐ Region or locality of Northern Québec / Nunavik
- ☐ Outside Québec, specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Which sectors do you represent? Check all that apply.**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal Affairs   | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit Organization - economic, social and community development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture, Forestry  | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Fishing   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting, Fishing and Trapping  | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Sector - public administration, health and social welfare    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce   | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Sector - tourism, culture                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction   | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Sector - transportation and communications                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hydroelectric or Wind Energy - exploration, production, transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):<br>_____                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mines, Oil and Gas - exploration, exploitation, transportation         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-profit Organization - environmental, sustainable development       |   |

Please return this questionnaire by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009

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**5. How familiar are you with the *Species at Risk Act*?**

- ☐ I am not familiar with the Act
- ☐ I know this Act well
- ☐ I have heard about this Act in the media
- ☐ I have gathered some information on this Act  
(pamphlets, websites, consultation workbooks, etc.)
- ☐ I have participated in information sessions or public consultations relating to  
this Act
- ☐ Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**6. a) Do you think the Government of Canada should add the harbour seal  
of the Lacs des Loups Marins to the *List of Wildlife Species at Risk* under  
SARA with the status “endangered species”?**

- ☐ Yes                      ☐ No                      ☐ Undecided

**b) If you have answered “Yes” or “No”, please indicate the reasons for  
your answer. If possible, please provide information which could help us in  
deciding whether to add the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins to  
the List of Wildlife Species at Risk:**

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**Please return this questionnaire by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009**

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c) If you have answered “Undecided”, please indicate why:

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7. Based on your understanding of the *Species at Risk Act*,

a) how would your activities be affected if the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins were added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk?

☐ Positive Effect    ☐ Negative Effect    ☐ No Effect    ☐ Not Sure

b) If you believe the effect would be **NEGATIVE**, please describe how your activities would be negatively impacted. What suggestions would you make to minimize these effects?

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Please return this questionnaire by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009

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**c) If you believe the effect would be POSITIVE, please describe how your activities would be favourably impacted.**

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**8. Do you have any other comments concerning the legal listing of the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins on the List of Wildlife Species at Risk? (include additional sheets, if necessary)**

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**Please return this questionnaire by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009**

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**9. Which of these options best reflect your agreement or disagreement with the following statements concerning the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins:**

<b>The harbour seals of the Lacs des Loups Marins</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Indifferent</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
They are of social, cultural and traditional importance in my community (e.g. for ceremonial purposes)						
They are, or have been, an important subsistence food source						
They have economic value (e.g. commerce, hunting)						
They create job opportunities (e.g. tourism) in the local economy						
They play an important role in maintaining a healthy freshwater ecosystem						
They are an important part of the Canadian heritage						
They will be a valuable resource for future generations						
I value them, though I have never seen them						
Other (please specify):						

Please return this questionnaire by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009



**The following questions are optional**

**10. Has this workbook helped you**

a) understand how the listing process works under SARA?

☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ Undecided

b) understand the important issues concerning the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins?

☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ Undecided

c) find an effective way to communicate your views on the potential listing of the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins?

☐ Yes    ☐ No    ☐ Undecided

**11. What changes or additions can we make to the workbook to make it easier to understand and more user-friendly?**

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**THANK YOU!**

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**Please return this questionnaire by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009**

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Please submit your comments on the addition of the harbour seal of the Lacs des Loups Marins to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk by mail, fax or electronic mail to :

SARA Coordinator  
Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
Québec Region  
P.O. Box 1000, 850, route de la Mer  
Mont-Joli, Québec  
G5H 3Z4

Email: [especiesperilqc@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:especiesperilqc@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)  
Fax: 418-775-0542  
Telephone (toll-free): 1-877-775-0848

The last day to submit your comments is  
**March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009**



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Please return this questionnaire by March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009

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