

The Role of COSEWIC in Assessing Species at Risk in Canada

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(COSEWIC)



Outline

- Background
- Structure
- Roles
- Assessment process
- Criteria



Background

Independent national science advisory body

- = Established in 1977
- = First assessments in 1978
- = Recognized legally in 2003 when the *Species at Risk Act* proclaimed



Structure

31 votes:

4 Federal Government Departments/Bodies

13 Provincial and Territorial Governments

3 Non-government Science Members

1 Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee

10 Species Specialist Subcommittees



Structure

Species Specialist Subcommittees

Amphibians & Reptiles

Arthropods

Birds

Freshwater Fishes

Marine Fishes

Marine Mammals

Molluscs

Mosses & Lichens

Terrestrial Mammals

Vascular Plants



Structure

Independence of COSEWIC members:

- Members do not represent governments, institutions, interest groups
- Assessments **are not** based on affiliation or socioeconomic consequences
- Assessments **are** based on the best available scientific, community and Aboriginal traditional knowledge



Roles

Primary Roles:

- ▣ Assess status of species that may be at risk and identify threats
- ▣ Review status every 10 years or when status may have changed
- ▣ Provide status recommendations to Minister of Environment
- ▣ Communicate status recommendations and rationale to the public



Assessment Process

1. Identify species for assessment

- ▣ Give priority to those at greatest risk of extinction or extirpation from Canada
- ▣ Criteria associated with extinction risk e.g. population size, declines, threats



Assessment Process

2. Commission Status Reports

3. Status Report Reviews

- Reviewed by species specialist subcommittees, range jurisdictions, recovery teams, independent experts, wildlife management boards (2X)
- Reviewed by COSEWIC two months before assessment



Assessment Process

4. Species Assessment

- Species Assessment Meetings
- Observers welcome
- Status designations based on 2/3 majority vote
- Assessment results with rationale made public



Assessment Process

5. Status recommendations to the Minister once/year



Criteria

COSEWIC Assessment Categories

Extinct

**Special
Concern**

Extirpated

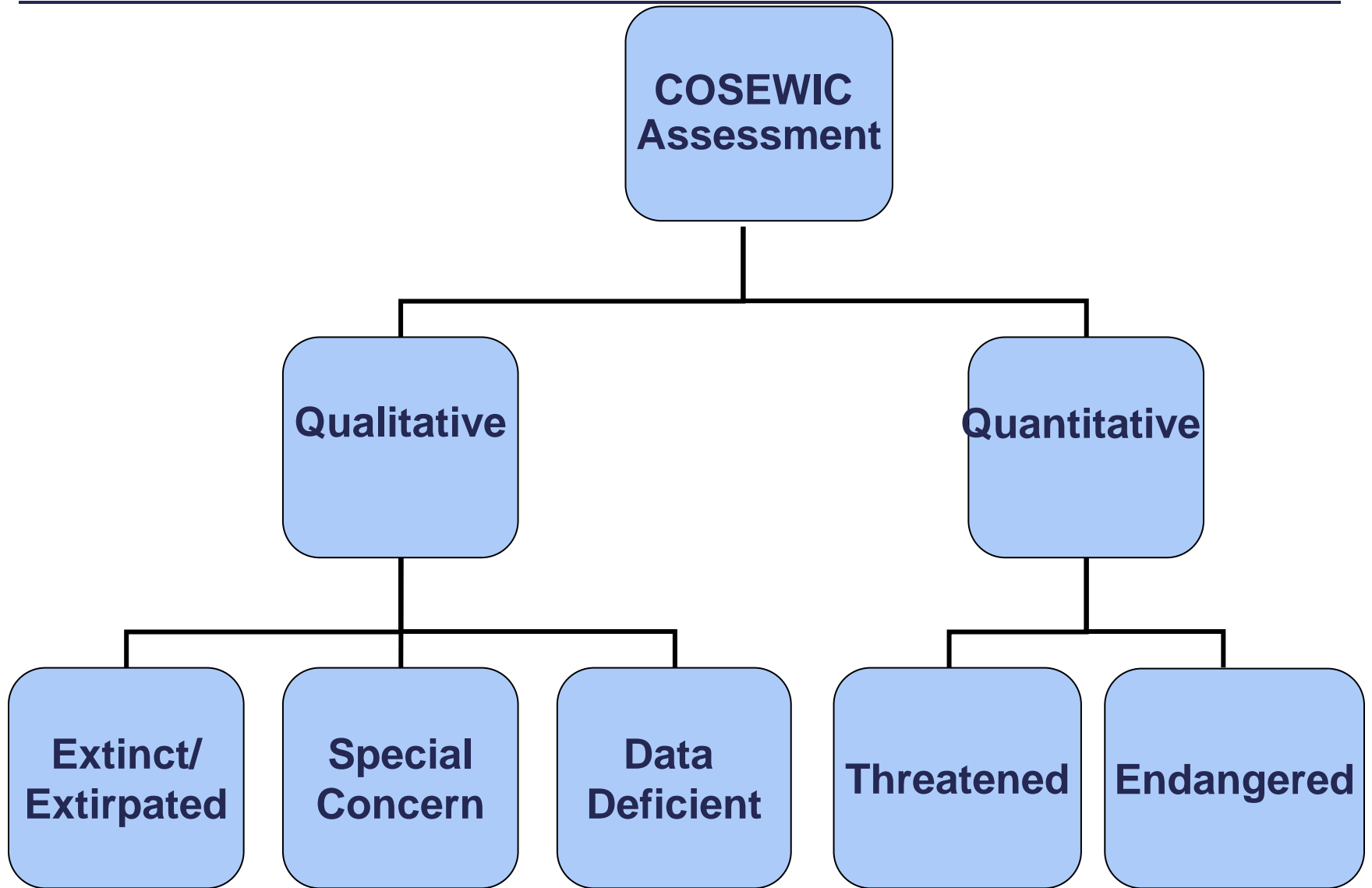
Not at Risk

Endangered

Data Deficient

Threatened

Criteria



Criteria

Quantitative Assessment Criteria

Decline in population

Small distribution & decline or few locations or fluctuation

Small population & decline

Very small or restricted population

Quantitative analysis

Numerical thresholds;
Discussion

Species status

Criteria

Qualitative Criteria

Special Concern if:

- near to qualifying for Threatened status
- qualifies for Threatened status but there is clear indication of rescue effect from outside populations



Criteria

Precautionary Approach

- in the absence of certainty, place species in a higher risk category



Conclusions

- ▣ COSEWIC independent national science advisory body
- ▣ Primary roles to assess species at risk and identify threats
- ▣ Provide status recommendations to Minister of the Environment
- ▣ Communicate status recommendations and rationale to Canadian public



Acknowledgements

Thank you !



COSEWIC

Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada



COSEPAC

Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada