

Species Conservation Program

2027-28 Guidelines

Contact Information

For questions regarding the Species Conservation Program, please contact:

Species Conservation Program Team

Email: species.conservation.program@ontario.ca

For questions or technical support with the online Transfer Payment Ontario platform, please contact:

Transfer Payment Ontario Client Care

Telephone: 1-855-216-3090

Email: TPONCC@ontario.ca

1.0 Species Conservation Program

To conserve the province's rich biodiversity and promote environmental stewardship, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks ("ministry") provides annual funding through the Species Conservation Program for projects that contribute to the protection and conservation of species and their habitat in Ontario.

Each year, the Species Conservation Program supports on the ground actions that preserve, rehabilitate and enhance habitats, provide public education and outreach, and make a real difference for Ontario's species at risk. Species experts, conservation groups and other eligible organizations are encouraged to apply for funding to carry out this important work in Ontario communities.

1.1 Species Conservation Program 2027-28 call for applications

For the 2027-28 fiscal year, the ministry is accepting single and multi-year applications (spanning 1-5 years). For the purposes of the program, a "year" is considered April 1st to March 31st. All project activities eligible for funding must begin no earlier than April 1, 2027, and finish no later than December 31, 2031.

1.2 Deadline

Applications must be submitted electronically through the Transfer Payment Ontario ("TPON") portal by 3:00 p.m. (ET) on **December 2, 2026**. Applications submitted after the deadline or not fully completed will not be accepted.

2.0 Applying through Transfer Payment Ontario (TPON)

Applications must be submitted electronically through TPON.

All applicants are required to create a My Ontario Account to register for and access TPON. Please follow the detailed steps outlined at [Ontario.ca/GetFunding](https://ontario.ca/GetFunding). We recommend completing these registration steps as soon as possible, as it may take up to five business days to be granted access.

Once you are registered and have access, the next step is to download and complete the 2027-28 Species Conservation Program Application Form (and supporting documents) and submit through TPON before the deadline.

You are welcome to submit multiple project applications; however, please ensure you create a new TPON case number and download a new application form for each project application you plan to submit.

If you have any questions or difficulties during this process, there are resources to assist at [Ontario.ca/GetFunding](https://ontario.ca/GetFunding) or you may contact the TPON Customer Service Line at 416-325-3408 or 1-855-216-3090, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (ET), or by email at TPONCC@Ontario.ca.

3.0 Program purposes

The purpose of the Species Conservation Program, as outlined in the *Species Conservation Act, 2025*, is to promote protection and conservation activities that relate to species at risk, including to:

- Preserve and rehabilitate habitat, and to enhance other areas so that they can become habitat
- Support public education and outreach programs relating to species conservation
- Support other activities to assist in the protection and conservation of species, such as undertaking actions to mitigate threats, and conducting research and filling knowledge gaps to inform species conservation

4.0 Background for applicants

In Ontario, species are assessed and classified as extirpated, endangered, threatened or special concern by a team of independent experts known as the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO). Projects focussed on all such [classified species](#) are eligible for funding under the Species Conservation Program.

Some species have existing Ontario conservation guidance on [Ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca), including recovery strategies and government response statements, that were developed under the now repealed *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. As a result, these materials contain outdated

references to concepts, definitions, and legislative requirements that are no longer current, including the definition of habitat. Despite these limitations, these documents may still provide helpful background information on the species and actions that may support their conservation, often forming part of the best available information on conservation needs for the species. For example, each government response statement identifies actions deemed valuable to support the protection and recovery of the species, including actions identified as “high priority”. If a review of progress exists for the target species, applicants may also find additional information and advice on actions that have already been completed or could use more attention.

It is important that applicants review the best available information for species when developing project proposals.

To access conservation guidance, please refer to the province’s [Species at Risk in Ontario webpage](#) and select the target species for your project. This will take you to the species’ page, which will typically include links to one or more of the following:

- COSSARO assessment report
- Recovery strategy
- Management plan
- Government response statement
- Review of progress

5.0 Eligibility

5.1 Eligible applicants

Applicants must be legal entities and may be:

- Academic institutions
- Conservation authorities
- Corporations
- Indigenous communities/organizations
- Individuals
- Municipal and local governments
- Non-government organizations

Applicants for land securement projects that involve the purchasing of land are further limited to the following types of entities:

- Conservation organizations (e.g., non-governmental, not-for-profit, charitable corporations whose work focuses on environmental protection, conservation and/or restoration) that have acquired a property for conservation purposes in the past 5 years.

- Indigenous communities
- Municipal governments

Organizations must have less than three current Species Conservation Program projects to be eligible for funding.

5.2 Non-eligible applicants

- Provincial government ministries
- Federal government departments and agencies
- Unincorporated informal groups or clubs (non-legal entities)

5.3 Eligible activities

To be eligible for Species Conservation Program funding, project activities must directly address one or more of the program purposes found in Section 3 listed above.

Projects or studies that are required by law are not eligible, including activities that are being undertaken to fulfill regulatory requirements.

All project activities must plan to deliver tangible results and be of benefit to one or more species classified by COSSARO and fit into at least one of the categories listed below.

Habitat management or restoration, such as:

- Shoreline restoration or wetland creation.
- Prescribed burns to manage tallgrass prairie for species.
- Reconnecting core species habitat by planting habitat corridors.
- Creation or installation of species habitat features such as hibernacula or nesting sites.

On-the-ground direct threat mitigation, such as:

- Implementation of features that reduce, mitigate or eliminate threats to species such as exclusion fencing or wildlife passages.
- Management and/or removal of invasive species and other threats to a species at risk or its habitat.
- Development and/or implementation of best management practices to support species and habitat stewardship.

Land securement

- Land securement for the long-term protection of species at risk and areas with habitats of high conservation value. Requirements for land securement activities to be eligible are:
 - At least one species classified as extirpated, endangered, threatened or special concern by COSSARO is confirmed present on the property, or property contains species at risk habitat or provides functional connectivity between properties that

contain species at risk habitat.

- Minimum size of 5 hectares (cumulative, if multiple parcels).
- At least 75% of the property must have natural land cover or will be restored to natural land cover. 'Natural land cover' refers to the ecosystems present on the landscape. This includes forests, prairie, wetlands and other types of ecosystems where native vegetation and natural features predominate with minimal human impacts.
- Applicant must be the organization that will own the land.
- A property management plan must be developed as part of the project if one does not already exist. The property management plan must provide for at least 10 years of stewardship following the end of the project. Program funds can be used for this purpose.

Other activities

- Field-based surveys, inventory or monitoring, especially for priority species and habitats, and within targeted areas of high conservation value.
- Outreach and education activities that increase knowledge about species conservation, encourage stewardship actions, and promote the use of best management practices to minimize impacts on species and their habitats.
- Research to fill key biological knowledge gaps to inform species' conservation and assess the effectiveness of conservation activities.
- Where applicable, projects can consider opportunities to engage Indigenous communities or reflect traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultural values.

5.4 Eligible Costs

The following expense categories are eligible for funding. Please refer to the 2027-28 Species Conservation Program Application Form and accompanying budget table spreadsheet for further details on each expense category.

- **Staff:** includes reasonable wages and mandatory benefits for staff that will be directly involved in the implementation of the project; this includes wages for project managers directly involved in project implementation. Project oversight/supervision and accounting are excluded from eligible staff costs but may be included under support services (see below). If you are a consultant or consulting company applying for funding, it is important that you itemize your project costs by the budget categories provided. Rates that include costs other than wages (for example, oversight, travel) must be separated out and included in the relevant categories listed below rather than captured under staff.
- **Goods:** includes materials and supplies required for the project.
- **Services:** includes third party costs such as a contractor to excavate a wetland, or a design company to develop communication materials. Costs for some types of services may include reasonable disbursements in addition to fees if commonly

charged for such services.

- **Consultants:** includes third party advice or expertise. Consultant costs may include reasonable disbursements in addition to fees if commonly charged for such consulting services. However, funds may not be used for costs that would otherwise be ineligible or beyond reasonable limits set by the program (for example, travel and hospitality limits). If you are a consultant or consulting company applying for funding, you must itemize your project costs by the budget categories provided. This category is only for third party advice or expertise.
- **Transportation:** may include transportation for meetings or events for project staff, contractors or meeting/event attendees. Funded amounts must align with the [Ontario Government's Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive](#). Funds requested for transportation of meeting attendees must be included in the application budget as its own line item. Transportation costs must be by the most practical and economical method.
- **Accommodation:** may include appropriate/economical accommodations for meetings or events for project staff, contractors or meeting/event attendees. Funds requested for accommodation of meeting attendees must be included in the application budget as its own line item. The [Ontario Government's Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive](#) provides advice on appropriate overnight accommodation.
- **Food and beverage:** may include costs for food or beverages for project staff or contractors during project meetings/events held with the public. Costs must be calculated according to the rates in the [Ontario Government's Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive](#). Collecting and retaining itemized receipts to verify the expenditure will be required. Funds requested under this budget category may not be used for: non-meal food and beverages; alcohol; meals when the travel period is less than 5 hours; or meals during travel when travel is a part of the regular job duties of the staff or contractor.
- **Hospitality-public meetings/events:** may include costs for food or beverages during project meetings/events held with the public. Costs must be calculated according to the rates in the [Ontario Government's Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive](#). If funds are being requested to pay for non-meal food and beverages (for example, coffee, water, snacks) during public project meetings or events, the amount cannot exceed \$5 per day per person for a half-day public meeting/event or \$10 per day per person for a full day public meeting/event. Collecting and retaining itemized receipts to verify the expenditures will be required. Funds cannot be requested for alcohol.
- **Equipment/other capital items:** the province may approve the purchase instead of the rental of equipment or capital items if: (i) the equipment or capital item is being used on multiple occasions throughout the project; (ii) total rental costs are greater than the one-time purchase cost; and (iii) without the project, it is unlikely that the recipient would purchase the equipment or capital item.
- **Administration expenses:** may include costs that are part of the normal

operations of an applicant's organization, but which can be reasonably attributable to the project. Administration expenses are comprised of disbursements such as postage/courier charges, photocopying charges, office supplies and financial institution service fees incurred in carrying out the project. Funds may not be used for avoidable financial institution service fees (for example, nonsufficient fund charges). For clarity, administration expenses do not include items such as salary and wages, rent, travel, accommodation and meal expenses, computers, legal fees, audit fees, engineering fees and other professional fees.

- **Support services:** may include the time spent by staff in human resources, finance, information technology, and communications departments providing administrative support that can be reasonably attributable to the project. Project managers that have a key role in project implementation and key project participants are not included under support services. However, managers/positions that are solely involved in the oversight and planning of the project (such as principals, executive directors, academic supervisors) should be included under support services. Staffing costs where staff performs both administration and direct project delivery functions should be prorated accordingly. Prorating should be based on an estimate of staff time devoted to administrative ("support services" category) or project delivery ("staff" category) activities.

Requested funds for administration expenses and support services (combined) cannot exceed 10% of total funds requested, or \$20K per year (averaged across all years), whichever is less.

- **Land securement:** includes fee simple land purchase costs, including the purchase price of the land, land transfer tax, legal fees associated with the acquisition, appraisal cost and property survey.

Note:

- Funding from the ministry may be applied to the non-refundable portion of HST only.
- The ministry will not reimburse any expenses beyond the approved funding amount.
- Funding is to cover costs incurred and does not include a profit component for recipients.
- Projects that receive more than \$750,000 in Species Conservation Program funding will be required to submit audited segmented financial information as part of their final reporting. The cost of this audit cannot be paid for using Species Conservation Program funds.

6.0 2027-28 Priorities

For 2027-28, priority will be given to:

- Projects that undertake on the ground actions to mitigate threats to Ontario's species at risk where there is a demonstrated conservation need.
- Projects that undertake habitat enhancement, rehabilitation, restoration, or creation for

Ontario's species at risk where there is a demonstrated conservation need.

- Projects that address threats and/or habitat management needs for multiple species at risk, in particular ecosystem-based conservation projects that restore, enhance or maintain the following rare ecosystem types: grasslands, alvars, oak woodlands and savannah, wetlands in Ontario's Mixedwood Plains ecozone, and Carolinian Forest.
- Land securement for the long-term protection of species at risk and areas with habitats of high conservation value, with priority given to the following types of property:
 - Large tracts (minimum 20 hectares; larger is preferred) of contiguous forest within the Lake Erie – Lake Ontario, Lake Simcoe – Rideau, and Georgian Bay [ecoregions](#).
 - Properties occupied or habitually occupied by one or more species at risk with extremely limited distribution (defined as an index of area of occupancy less than 10 km² or fewer than 5 locations in the province).
 - Beach, dune and other waterfront properties that are habitually occupied by one or more species at risk.
- Activities that target reducing road mortality of species at risk, through measures such as determining novel approaches to roadway design, construction and/or mitigation.
- Activities that focus on developing and testing species at risk plant translocation methods, including genetic testing and preservation of genetic materials such as seeds and pollen.
- Other high priority actions that support the conservation of Ontario species at risk as identified in Ontario conservation guidance on [Ontario.ca](#).

As specified in Section 8.0 Application evaluation, preference may be given to projects that:

- Provide broad conservation benefits,
- Address the needs of multiple species, and
- Focus on species listed on the [Protected Species in Ontario List](#).

7.0 Additional information for applicants

- Applicants should demonstrate that they have consulted with species experts and partners for advice in developing project applications.
- Projects focusing on multiple species, ecosystems or single species will all be considered for funding.
- While provincial and federal governments may, in certain circumstances, be able to support projects through in-kind and financial contributions, they are not able to receive any direct funding from an approved project.
- Project activities must be intended for the conservation of species at risk and their habitats, and not result in the provision of goods or services to the Government of Ontario.

- If proposing to work in a provincial park or conservation reserve, please contact Ontario Parks at PASCIENCE@ontario.ca.
- Applicants are responsible for obtaining landowner permission to access private property to undertake proposed activities.
- In the context of most projects, successful applicants are strongly encouraged to submit species observation records and habitat information to the Natural Heritage Information Centre ([NHIC](#)).
- The Government of Ontario is not bound to act based on any findings that are produced during a project. Any results of a project are for the voluntary use of stewardship organizations only. The methods and results of a project will not necessarily be endorsed by the ministry nor the Government of Ontario for use in future habitat identification or land use decisions.

8.0 Application evaluation

All applications undergo a comprehensive, multi-staged assessment process. Applications are evaluated against multiple criteria, outlined below.

- **Application quality and completeness**
 - Application is complete in full, with all required components including an application form, budget and threats and knowledge gaps table. All eligibility requirements are met.
- **Alignment with annual Species Conservation Program priorities**
 - The proposed project aligns with 2027-28 priorities, clearly targeting and addressing at least one 2027-28 priority.
- **Value of the project to species protection and conservation**
 - Activities address identified species protection and conservation actions, needs and/or knowledge gaps from the best available information for the target species as applicable in Ontario, with clear reference(s) to the source(s) provided.
 - Activities will directly benefit targeted species, their habitat and/or the targeted ecosystem (e.g., the creation, expansion and/or restoration of habitat, direct threat mitigation, species introductions and/or augmentation).
 - Project is part of, links to and/or complements a larger species conservation or habitat protection initiative to benefit species at risk more broadly.
 - Activities have a high likelihood of providing long-term conservation benefits for the target species.
- **Project design and workplan**
 - Project personnel (applicants, contractors, etc.) are identified to have proven experience, expertise, suitability and capacity to successfully complete the project.

Partners are engaged, where appropriate, to support in the project and maximize available resources and knowledge.

- Work plan is detailed, clear and appropriate for the scope of work proposed with all necessary steps, timelines and sequencing included.
- Objectives, design and methods are practical, appropriate and scientifically sound for the intended outcomes.
- Project is feasible (legally, logistically, within stated timeframes, etc.) and has a high likelihood of success given the information provided.
- Performance measures and evaluations are built into the project to assess the effectiveness of the activities. For outreach and awareness activities there is a plan to measure changes to levels of awareness, behaviours and/or actions towards species conservation. Projects will be required to report on number of jobs created, number of volunteers involved, hectares of habitat restored or created, and number of species at risk recovery actions supported by the project.

- **Contribution to other conservation work**

- Application outlines how proposed activities build on past work (if applicable). Efficiencies are realized through the use of existing materials, resources, best management practices or survey protocols.
- The proposed project avoids unnecessary duplication of effort relative to past, ongoing or expected conservation activities.
- Project results or products, such as best management practices or survey protocols (if generated), will be made publicly available to further the protection and conservation of the species (for example, published and promoted via website, peer reviewed journal, etc.).

- **Value for money**

- Project budget is detailed, clear and appropriate for the scope of work proposed.
- Multi-year requests show a demonstrated need for annual funding and demonstrate how subsequent years build on previous years' progress.
- Matching funds and/or support from a variety of sources has been identified. A combination of both in-kind and financial (cash) support is encouraged, with financial being evaluated more favourably.
- Project demonstrates excellent value for money for the outcomes and benefits it will provide.

- **Long-term conservation value for money (land securement only)**

- Land has high existing conservation value to species at risk, with preference for land that provides habitat to multiple species and to threatened or endangered species.
- Land has high potential future conservation value for species at risk, with high

suitability for future habitat restoration, creation and/or maintenance.

- Purchase price is appropriate given the location, size and quality of the land. Preference will be given to projects that have a minimum 1:1 ratio of matching funds. Land values cannot be used as in-kind matching funds.

Whether or not to provide funding and who funding is provided to is within the sole discretion of the ministry. In its final evaluation, the ministry may also consider other factors, including the kinds of projects proposed, the number of projects funded per organization, and the types of organizations applying, in order to support a variety of projects, species at risk and recipients across the province. The ministry will not consider applications containing misrepresentations or misleading information. If requests for funding exceed the annual Species Conservation Program budget, the province may prioritize species that are on the [Protected Species in Ontario List](#).

9.0 Notification

All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application. Following project approval, successful applicants are required to enter into a transfer payment agreement with the Province, before any payments will be made. Applicants should not proceed with a project on the expectation that it will be funded without an executed agreement with the ministry.

10.0 Agreement and Payment

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a transfer payment agreement which includes the terms and conditions of the project, expenditures and reporting requirements. The terms and conditions of the funding will be set out in detail in the transfer payment agreement. Generally, those terms and conditions will be consistent with the following:

- Payments will be made following the completion of milestones and ministry approval of required project reporting. An initial payment may be available upon signing of the transfer payment agreement.
- For single-year projects, the final date to submit all final reporting and financial documentation is **February 15, 2028**. For multi-year projects not in their final year, an interim report with financial documentation is due April 15 of each year of the project, or on other date(s) negotiated with the ministry.
- Applicants approved for funding will be required to submit certificates of insurance to confirm insurance coverage in accordance with the terms of the transfer payment agreement.
- Prior to signing a transfer payment agreement, successful applicants will be required to have valid attestations in TPON that they are in good standing with labour and environmental laws and a valid tax compliance verification in TPON. Attestations are valid for one year.

If you would like to see an example of the detailed transfer payment agreement before applying, please contact us at species.conservation.program@ontario.ca.

11.0 Legal authorizations

All applicants must review this section before applying.

Authorizations and other requirements

Disclaimer: The below does not constitute advice of any kind from the ministry on how an applicant must comply with any requirements of law. Applicants should consult with their own legal counsel or other relevant advisors in this regard.

Applicants are responsible for identifying and fulfilling any requirements that may be necessary to lawfully undertake the project. This may include obtaining any necessary authorizations from various levels of government. Requirements (such as obtaining authorizations) do not need to be fulfilled prior to submitting your application. However, they must be fulfilled prior to undertaking any project activity for which they are required.

Activities that receive notice that they will receive funding under the Species Conservation Program are excepted from the requirement to register or obtain a permit under the *Species Conservation Act, 2025* provided the requirements set out in the [Excepted Activities - No Permit or Registration Regulation](#) (O. Reg. 61/26) are met.

If your project will be occurring in a provincial park or conservation reserve, you may require additional authorizations. You can apply for a research authorization online at [Ontario Parks research](#), or if you have any questions about working in provincial parks and conservation reserves, please email PAScience@ontario.ca.

Applicants should also note that the province will not give approved Species Conservation Program projects preferential treatment for any authorization issued by the province. The province is under no obligation to issue authorizations and retains authority to refuse issuing authorizations if it is reasonable to do so, based on the information provided.

12.0 Recognition

Successful applicants will be required to acknowledge the receipt of financial assistance from the Government of Ontario.

13.0 Freedom of information and protection of privacy

Personal information provided on the 2027-28 application form is being collected by the ministry to be used for the purposes of the proper administration of the Species Conservation Program, including to contact you for clarification or further information about your project proposal.

The collection, use and disclosure of this information are governed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

Questions about this collection, use or disclosure of personal information should be directed to the Species Conservation Program team at species.conservation.program@ontario.ca.

14.0 Auditing

To ensure integrity in the use of public funds, the Province of Ontario reserves the right to require independent verification of reported information as required in the terms of the transfer payment agreement. The terms as set out in a transfer payment agreement must be satisfied to receive payments. The successful applicant shall provide, if requested by the province, any necessary permissions to access the property where the project activities took place and make available any records, documents and/or information that may be required for this purpose.

15.0 Terms of reference

The following provisions apply to this application process:

- (i) this application process is not intended to create a formal legally binding procurement process and shall not give rise to the legal rights or duties applied to a formal legally binding procurement process;
- (ii) the ministry reserves the right to seek clarification, and supplementary information relating to the clarification, from applicants. The response received by the ministry from an applicant shall form an integral part of the applicant's submission;
- (iii) at the conclusion of this process, selected applicants will be expected to enter into a transfer payment agreement with the ministry (please see section 10.0 of the guidelines for further information);
- (iv) neither party shall have the right to make claims against the other with respect to this application process, the selection of any applicant, the failure to be selected to enter into a transfer payment agreement, or the failure to honour applications prior to the execution of such an agreement;
- (v) the ministry may make public the names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, website addresses, project description and funding amount, if applicable, of any or all applicants; and
- (vi) the ministry will not consider an applicant whose application is found to contain misrepresentations.