

# Species Conservation Program 2026-27 Guidelines

## Contact Information

For questions regarding the Species Conservation Program, please contact:

**The Species Conservation Program Team**

**Email:** [species.conservation.program@ontario.ca](mailto: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](mailto:TPONCC@ontario.ca)

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## 1.0 Species Conservation Program

To conserve Ontario's rich biodiversity and promote environmental stewardship, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks ("ministry") will provide annual funding through the newly created 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 will support 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 2026-27 call for applications

For the 2026-2027 fiscal year, the ministry is accepting multi-year applications (spanning 1-5 years). For the purposes of the program, a "year" is considered April 1<sup>st</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>. All project activities must begin no earlier than April 1, 2026, and finish no later than December 31, 2030.

## 1.2 Deadline

Applications must be submitted electronically through the Transfer Payment Ontario ("TPON") portal by 3:00pm (ET) on Thursday, November 27, 2025. 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 in order to register for and access TPON. Please follow the detailed steps outlined at [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 2026-27 SCP 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](#) 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](mailto:TPONCC@Ontario.ca).

## 3.0 Program Objectives

The objectives of the SCP are to:

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

## 4.0 Background for applicants

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

For some species, the government has created relevant conservation documents to support a species protection and recovery. These documents include:

- Recovery strategies, which are scientific advice on the steps that should be taken towards a species' recovery
- Government response statements (GRS), which identify the provincial recovery goals for a species, and summarize the actions the government intends to take to support the protection and recovery of the species
- Review of progress reports which summarize the progress that has been achieved towards the protection and recovery of species

If a species has an Ontario government response statement, it is important the application addresses the actions identified in the GRS (rather than those in the recovery strategy or management plan). Also, if a review of progress report exists for the target species, applicants may find additional information and advice on actions that have already been accomplished or could use more attention. It is important that applicants review and reference the most current provincial conservation documents.

Please note that the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) was amended on June 5, 2025, and as a result, conservation documents and policy guidance that were developed prior to the June 5, 2025 amendments may contain some aspects that are no longer relevant or applicable under the amended legislation.

To access the following provincial conservation documents, 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 conservation documents:

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

## 5.0 2026-27 Priorities

General priorities have been established for the 2026-27 funding year, with applications that address multiple species or priorities preferred:

- Projects that address conservation actions identified in species-specific conservation documents, such as a GRS, with preference for on-the-ground habitat and threat management actions, including those identified as high priority in a GRS or recommended for further implementation in a review of progress report
- Projects that address threats and knowledge gaps for species at risk, including those that:
  - » incorporate Indigenous knowledge and cultural values, and enable and strengthen Indigenous relationships and experiences
  - » protect habitat and restore degraded habitats through habitat enhancement, threat mitigation, or removal of factors

that compromise the suitability and/or availability of habitat

- » monitor species or conduct research activities to improve understanding of species distribution, population trends, migration timing, and habitat use, including research activities in collaboration with industry associates to evaluate trade-offs and identify custom mitigation techniques
  - » develop best management practices (BMPs) to support minimization of adverse effects of activities on species at risk, such as BMPs for translocation of plants, creation of artificial habitat for animals, and reducing mortality from wind or hydroelectric energy generation
- Projects that address ecosystem-based threats and/or enhance habitat for multiple species at risk. In particular, the creation, enhancement or maintenance of the following ecosystem types, that support one or more threatened or endangered species:
    - » grasslands
    - » alvars
    - » oak woodlands/savannah
    - » wetlands in Ontario's Mixedwood Plains ecozone
    - » Carolinian forest

Applicants are required to demonstrate how projects will make a meaningful impact on species at risk conservation in Ontario.

## 6.0 Eligibility

### 6.1 Eligible applicants

Eligible applicants must be legal entities. For example, applicants may be:

- Academic institutions
- Corporations

- Indigenous communities/organizations
- Individuals
- Municipal and local governments
- Non-government organizations

Land securement projects (that involve the purchasing of land) are further limited to the following 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

Prior to signing a TPA, 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.

## 6.2 Non-eligible applicants

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

## 6.3 Eligible activities

To be eligible for SCP funding, project activities must directly target one or more of the program objectives found in Section 3 listed above.

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. Examples of eligible activities are included for each category.

Projects or studies that are required by law are not eligible, including activities that are being undertaken to fulfill legal requirements or conditions identified in an authorization or regulation under the ESA or *Species Conservation Act, 2025* (SCA) when it comes into effect.

## Habitat management/restoration

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

## On-the-ground direct threat mitigation

- Development and/or implementation of best management practices (BMPs) to minimize impacts on species and their habitats during land or resource use
- Implementation of features that reduce, mitigate or eliminate threats to species such as exclusion fencing or wildlife passages

## Field-based survey, inventory or monitoring

- Conducting species' inventories (for example, presence/absence/abundance surveys) for species, especially within targeted areas of high conservation value
- Performing priority species and/or habitat monitoring

## Outreach and education

- Outreach activities that increase awareness and knowledge about species, and encourage stewardship actions to targeted audiences or areas
- Promoting the use of best management practices that minimize impacts on species and their habitats during land or resource use

## Research

- Filling biological knowledge gaps to inform species' conservation
- Assessing the effectiveness of conservation activities using scientific rigour

## Local and traditional ecological knowledge

- Where applicable, projects can consider opportunities to engage Indigenous communities or reflect traditional Indigenous knowledge and cultural values

## Other

- Development of site-specific or regional plans targeting species and their habitats
- Land securement for the long-term protection of species at risk and areas with habitats of high conservation value
  - » For projects involving land securement, preference will be given to those projects that have a minimum 1:1 ratio of matching contributions at a rate of \$1.00 from non-provincial sources for every dollar of SCP funding.

## 6.4 Eligible Costs

The following expense categories are eligible for funding. Please refer to the 2026-27 SCP application form and accompanying budget table spreadsheet for further details on each expense category.

- **Staff:** includes 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 broken-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 Expense Directive](#). Funds requested for transportation of meeting attendees must be included in the application budget as its own line item. Transportation costs will 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.

- **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 Expense 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 Expense 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:** 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:** 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 pro-rated accordingly. Pro-rating should be based on an estimate of staff time devoted to administrative ("support services" category) or project delivery ("staff" category) activity.
- **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.

Additional requirements to be met for land securement costs to be eligible include:

- » At least one species classified as extirpated, endangered, threatened or special concern by COSSARO is confirmed present on the property during 2 of the last 5 years.
- » Minimum size of 5 ha
- » At least 75% of the property must have natural land cover or will be restored to natural land cover during the lifespan of the project. '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 be appropriate for at least 10 years of stewardship following the end of the project. Program funds can be used for this purpose.
- » Preference will be given to projects that have a minimum 1:1 ratio of matching funds.

**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.**

**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 an audited financial statement as part of their final report. The cost of this audit can not use Species Conservation Program funds.

## 7.0 Additional information for applicants

- Applicants should consult species experts and partners for advice in developing project applications.
- If proposing to work in a provincial park or conservation reserve, please contact Ontario Parks at [PASCIENCE@ontario.ca](mailto:PASCIENCE@ontario.ca).
- 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 and their habitats, and not result in the provision of good or services to the Government of Ontario (including Ontario Parks).
- 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) at all stages of the assessment process. Not all criteria listed below are applicable to all applications, depending on the scope and nature of the work proposed.

- **Alignment with SCP objectives**
  - » Overall, the proposed project directly addresses Species Conservation Program objectives.
- **Alignment with annual SCP priorities**
  - » Overall, the proposed project directly addresses annual priorities, or most of the proposed activities address priorities.
- **Value of the project to species protection and conservation**
  - » Applicant has demonstrated how the project will make a meaningful impact on species at risk conservation in Ontario.
  - » Activities will directly benefit targeted species, their habitat and/or the targeted ecosystem.
  - » Activities are relevant, fill a demonstrated need, and/or address an impending threat or knowledge gap.
  - » Project is part of, links to and/or complements a larger species conservation or habitat protection initiative.
- **Project design and workplan**
  - » Work plan is detailed, clear and appropriate for the scope of work proposed.
- » Objectives, design and methods are practical, appropriate, and scientifically sound.
- » Project is feasible and has a high likelihood of success given the information provided.
- » Project results or products, such as best management practices or survey protocols, 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.).
- » 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.
- **Expertise, partnerships, and value for money**
  - » Numerous partners are engaged in and support the project in order to maximize available resources and knowledge.
  - » There is a high likelihood for long-term benefits and continued work through established partnerships.
  - » Applicant has proven experience, expertise and capacity (financial and operational) to complete the project.
  - » Project budget is detailed 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 support is encouraged, with financial being evaluated more



favourably. For land securement projects, 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.

- **Application quality and additional considerations**
  - » The proposed project avoids duplication of effort by using existing materials and established best management practices, survey protocols or a creative approach to species protection or conservation.
  - » Application is complete in full and aligns with the Species Conservation Program Guidelines.
  - » Application outlines how proposed activities build on past work (if applicable). Projects will only be evaluated on information included in the application.
- **Long-term conservation value for money (land securement only)**
  - » Land has high conservation value, with preference for land that provides habitat to multiple species and to threatened or endangered species.
  - » Purchase price is appropriate given the location, size and quality of the land.

**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 the kinds of projects proposed, the number of projects funded per organization, and types of organizations applying in order to support a variety of projects, species at risk and recipients across the province. The Ministry may elect not to consider an application containing misrepresentations or any inaccurate or misleading information.

## 9.0 Notification

All applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of their application. Following application approval, all 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 for the funding, eligible 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, 2027**. 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.
- Applicants will be required to attest that they are in good standing with tax, labour and environmental laws.

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](mailto:species.conservation.program@ontario.ca).

## 11.0 Legal authorizations

All applicants must review this section before applying.

### Authorizations and other requirements

Applicants are responsible for identifying and obtaining any authorizations required for the project. Projects cannot proceed without obtaining the required authorizations.

The following includes information on authorizations and other requirements that may be required for projects being funded. There may be various authorizations needed depending on your project. These guidelines are designed to help develop your application as completely as possible. Note that authorizations (for example, permits) do not have to be in place to submit your application. However, having an authorization, if required, will enable your project to start on time.

**Disclaimer:** Applicants must note that the following is for illustrative purposes only and does not constitute advice of any kind from the ministry on how an applicant must comply with any requirements of law. Applicants must not rely on the following information as being a comprehensive list of authorizations or other requirements that may be required for their project and should consult with their own legal counsel or other relevant advisors in this regard.

Applicants should also note that the ministry will not give preferential treatment for any authorization issued by the ministry. The ministry 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.

Please note that the ESA is in force as of the time of this call for proposals. However, the ESA is anticipated to be repealed and replaced with the SCA in 2026. The timing of this change is not yet known, and may occur prior to the start date of approved projects on April 1, 2026.

If your project involves a species listed as extirpated, endangered or threatened under the Species at Risk in Ontario List (O. Reg. 230/08) or on [COSSARO's classification list](#), you may wish to contact the Species at Risk Branch of the ministry at [SARontario@ontario.ca](mailto:SARontario@ontario.ca) for information on whether an authorization under the ESA (or SCA, once it comes into effect) may be required. Early contact with the Species at Risk Branch during your project planning process may enable you to amend your project plan to avoid adverse impacts to species at risk and their habitats and allow you to determine the need for an authorization under the ESA (or SCA). The Species at Risk Branch may be able to provide information on the following:

- i. What conditional exemptions, registerable activities or exceptions are available under Ontario's species at risk legislation;
- ii. Whether a permit or registration may be required before undertaking the funded activity; or,
- iii. Whether your proposed activity may not require an authorization under the ESA or SCA.

All projects must avoid and/or minimize adverse effects to species at risk and their habitat. An ESA (or SCA, once it comes into effect) authorization is required for activities that kill or harm a protected species, damage or destroy their habitat or otherwise contravene the ESA (or SCA). For more details, contact [SARontario@ontario.ca](mailto:SARontario@ontario.ca).

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](mailto:PAScience@ontario.ca).

## 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 2026-27 application form is being collected by the ministry to be used for the purposes of the proper administration of the SCP, 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 SCP team at [species.conservation.program@ontario.ca](mailto: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.