



## Weasel Waypoints Challenge Options:

- **SPECIES STATUS REPORT.**

Choose a living species that is meaningful to your group of students and, using the template provided on the COSEWIC website, prepare a Status Report on that species. Given the fact that a status report is a long document containing a lot of information, you might want to streamline it for use in the classroom by deleting some of its more technical elements. The research within the status report can then be divided among individual students or small teams. The end product will be a report with a lot of interesting information on the chosen species. Basing themselves on different sources of information (First Nations and community knowledge, conservation groups, governments, etc.), students can also have a lively debate on if the species should be classified by the Species at Risk Act (SARA) as not at risk, a **special concern, threatened, endangered, extirpated** or **extinct**.

COSEWIC Status Report template:

[http://www.cosepac.gc.ca/eng/sct2/sct2\\_2\\_e.cfm](http://www.cosepac.gc.ca/eng/sct2/sct2_2_e.cfm)

*Species at Risk fall into these four categories:*

- **Special concern:** A wildlife species that may become a threatened or an endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats. (ex. eastern wolf, black-tailed prairie dog, harlequin duck)
- **Threatened:** A wildlife species that is likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction. (ex. wood bison, northern wolf fish, short-tailed albatross)
- **Endangered:** A wildlife species that is facing imminent extirpation or extinction. (ex. swift fox, whooping crane, leatherback sea turtle)
- **Extirpated:** A wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere. (ex. Atlantic population of grey whale, gravel chub, black-footed ferret)

- **WARM-UP ACTIVITY.**

Make a list of all the species present in your area – mammals, reptiles, fish, plants, etc – and ask students to assemble them into a web of life. This can be done using pictures or drawings, and be sure to demonstrate each and every relationship between individual species with a marker line or string. Start by removing one or two species from the web of life and ask students what will happen. Remove a couple more and ask them again what will happen next. They should quickly realize that taking only a few species from the web of life threatens the life of the collective. They should realize the importance of protecting each and every living thing, even lichen!



- **WRITING AND DRAWING.**

Divide students into groups representing different Species at Risk categories: **Not at risk, Special Concern, Threatened, Endangered, Extirpated** or **Extinct**. Ask them to search the SARA Species List and find as many species that fall within their category as possible. Once they have a sufficient list, groups can:

- Create Species at Risk information posters with drawings of the animals to be displayed in the classroom or school.
- Create a brochure informing the public on the plight of one or many animals in their category.
- Create a comic strip illustrating the joys and/or struggles of a species on their list
- Choose a species within their list and write a story detailing its personal history, e.g. its daily trials and tribulations, its joys, what it has gone through to survive.
- Choose a species within their list and write a story describing what its life will look like in 2025.

**SARA Species List:**

[http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/default\\_e.cfm](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/default_e.cfm)

- **PUBLIC SPEAKING.**

Ask students to go through the SARA Species List and choose a species that appeals to them personally. This can be done alone or in small groups. Basing themselves on that species' fact sheet, they can accomplish one of the following tasks and present their work in front of the class.

- Create a news report detailing that species' plight and perspectives for the future.
- Create a ½ page rap limerick detailing their chosen species' daily trials and tribulations. When presenting their work in front of the class, students can play voiceless rap beats in the background to add to the atmosphere.
- Prepare a speech that is to be read at a hypothetical Species at Risk rally. This Speech needs to deliver pertinent facts about Species at Risk and motivate people in attendance to do more to help protect threatened species.

**SARA Species List:**

[http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/default\\_e.cfm](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/default_e.cfm)

- **TRACK TRANSECT.**

Parks Canada staff used the relatively inexpensive method track transects to monitor marten populations after the reintroduction in 1991. Measure the health of a chosen species in your area by conducting your very own track transects.

Track Transects

A track transect consists in regularly observing a specifically designated area for the presence of a targeted animal print. Track transects should be conducted in wintertime and, to be effective, data must be recorded on a regular basis. Riding Mountain National Park specialists recommend checking transects 12-96 hours after snowfall.

Track transects are a good, economical method of measuring a species population in any given habitat. Data derived from transects does not give an absolute measure of population size but, rather, gives an accurate picture of presence and relative abundance. Data collected from transects is most useful when compared over the long term, as a trend analysis.

To conduct your own track transect, follow these steps:

- Learn about your study target's preferred habitat.
- Preferably using GPS, designate a specific transect area within your study target's preferred habitat. This area should not change for the duration of your study.
- Learn to identify your study target's paw print.
- 12-96 hours after snowfall, go to your transect and record track location, habitat, activity of the animal and fill all data fields in the Observation Data Sheet, found here \*.
- Multiple tracks within 100 m should be counted as one animal unless backtracking proves otherwise
- Habitat breaks less than 15 metres wide should be included as the surrounding habitat.

- **FIELD TRIP.**

Get out of the classroom and come see authentic pine marten habitat at Riding Mountain National Park's Whirlpool Lake! Overnight group camping is available. Call (204) 848-7275 to book your reservation today.

- **BISON REINTRODUCTION**

In the 2009 management plan for Banff National Park, one of the "Priority Actions" stated was to "Re-introduce a breeding population of plains bison and investigate the feasibility of re-introducing caribou".

In 2005, 71 plains bison were re-introduced in Grasslands National Park in December 2005, after 120 years of absence.

Here is the link to the story:

<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/sk/grasslands/ne/ne2.aspx>

A display herd of around 40 bison exists already in Riding Mountain National Park. Bison were introduced in 1931 from Wainwright, Alberta. These bison were found to be diseased. They were destroyed, and a new, healthy herd was introduced from Elk Island National Park. The present-day herd are ancestors of the original Elk Island bison, with other bulls introduced from other parks to keep the gene pool healthy. They are currently fenced to ensure they do not escape from within the park boundary, which could create problems. Bison play a significant role in the natural processes within the rough fescue prairie ecosystem in RMNP. Ensuring their protection and the protection of the rough fescue prairie goes hand in hand.

Here is a link to the history of bison in Riding Mountain National Park:

[http://www.pc.gc.ca/apprendre-learn/prof/sub/bison/index\\_e.asp#Plains Bison in Riding Mountain National Park](http://www.pc.gc.ca/apprendre-learn/prof/sub/bison/index_e.asp#Plains_Bison_in_Riding_Mountain_National_Park)

Considering the release of the bison in Grasslands and the proposed release in Banff, we will simulate planning the removal of the fence at the bison enclosure in Riding Mountain National Park. Here are some activities to try:

- **DEBATE**

Divide yourselves into Groups, representing local stakeholders:

1. Group 1: Parks Canada
2. Group 2: First Nations
3. Group 3: Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
4. Group 4: Farmers and Cattle Ranchers
5. Group 5: The Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve

In your groups, discuss the implications of bison roaming free in Riding Mountain National Park (and beyond!). Decide on whether you are for or against the proposal, or some conditions your group might like to see. Afterwards, the “Parks Canada Group” will host a discussion involving all groups. Each group will present their thoughts and concerns regarding the project. A vote can then be held as to whether the fence should be removed. If it decided that the fence will be removed, the groups can discuss how the reintroduction will be conducted.

Parks Canada Teachers' Corner - ***Home on the Plains: The Re-introduction of Plains Bison in Canada's Western National Parks***. This is a great background lesson, with excellent resources and different park settings.

[http://www.pc.gc.ca/apprendre-learn/prof/sub/bison/index\\_e.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/apprendre-learn/prof/sub/bison/index_e.asp)