

CARIBOU ON THIN ICE AND PELICANS ON THE EDGE

The Northwest Territories (NWT) [Species at Risk Committee \(SARC\)](#) met in Inuvik from April 18-21, 2023, to assess the biological status of two NWT species. Both assessments were based on the best available information from Indigenous and community knowledge, and scientific knowledge.

Dolphin and Union caribou are the only caribou that migrate seasonally across the frozen ocean between Arctic islands and the mainland. Their lifecycle depends on it.

SARC reassessed [Dolphin and Union caribou](#) as an Endangered species, owing to the species' low numbers, its sensitivity to multiple impacts of climate change and a high level of community concern. This assessment indicates the species faces a higher risk of extinction than when it was previously assessed in 2013.

"Changes to the sea ice are putting Dolphin and Union caribou at extreme risk of drowning or starvation. For example, climate change and passing ice breakers can make the ice weak or delay migration.

"Communities are already taking action to reduce harvest. It's now up to all of us to make sure these critical ice crossings are protected so caribou can travel safely to their feeding and calving grounds."

- Leon Andrew, Chairperson, NWT Species at Risk Committee

Based on this recent assessment, SARC has made several recommendations, including: enforcement of seasonal restrictions on ship travel through the Northwest Passage; increased monitoring, sampling and harvest reporting; and ongoing harvest education based on cultural teachings of Elders.

American White Pelican is one of the largest of birds in North America. The birds that live in the NWT are at the very northern edge of their global range. SARC assessed American White Pelicans as a species of Special Concern in the NWT because the birds that occur in the territory only nest in one area and could be wiped out by a single event such as flooding or disease. However, the population has been increasing, the species is highly mobile and the nesting area could be repopulated or new nesting areas established.

SARC has recommended more education and research on American White Pelicans in the NWT, from both traditional and community knowledge and scientific sources.

SARC will present its assessments and recommendations to the [Conference of Management Authorities \(CMA\)](#) in May 2023. The CMA will engage with NWT communities and decide if Dolphin and Union caribou should be listed as an Endangered species in the NWT and if American White Pelican should be added to the NWT List of Species at Risk as Special Concern.

The full 2023 assessments with recommendations can be found here:

- [Dolphin and Union caribou](#)
- [American White Pelican](#)

For more information, visit www.nwt-speciesatrisk.ca or contact:

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SPECIES AT RISK COMMITTEE

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Quick facts:

Assessment process

- The [Species at Risk \(NWT\) Act](#) provides a process and tools to identify, protect and recover species at risk in the Northwest Territories.
- The NWT [Species at Risk Committee \(SARC\)](#) is established by the *Species at Risk (NWT) Act* as an independent committee of experts responsible for assessing the biological status of species at risk in the NWT.
- SARC uses two sets of criteria to assess and categorize species as Extinct, Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern, Data Deficient or Not at Risk. One set of criteria is based in Indigenous and community knowledge and the other in science. For more on SARC's dual assessment process, see: [How species are assessed in the NWT](#).
- SARC provides recommendations to the Conference of Management Authorities, which decides whether to add a species to the NWT List of Species at Risk and what management actions should be taken.
- Endangered means the species is facing imminent extirpation from the NWT or extinction. Species listed as Endangered require a recovery strategy within one year of listing.
- A species of Special Concern is a species that may become Threatened or Endangered in the NWT due to a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats. A management plan is required within two years.

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Dolphin and Union caribou

- There are currently about 3,800 Dolphin and Union caribou in NWT and Nunavut, which migrate between Victoria Island and the mainland twice a year. The population was about 30,000 in 1997 and has since declined by 89 per cent.
- In the NWT, Dolphin and Union caribou was first assessed by SARC as a species of Special Concern in December 2013. It was listed as a species of Special Concern on the [NWT List of Species at Risk](#) in March 2015.
- A [management plan](#) for Dolphin and Union caribou in the NWT and Nunavut was completed in 2018.
- Under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, Dolphin and Union caribou are currently listed as a species of Special Concern (2011). In 2017, they were reassessed by the [Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada](#) as being Endangered in Canada and a listing decision is pending.

American White Pelican

- American White Pelican is found throughout North America. The Slave River colony is the northernmost colony of American White Pelicans. The colony is located just south of the NWT border near Fort Smith and uses habitat in the NWT during breeding season.
- This is SARC's first time assessing American White Pelican.
- American White Pelican is not currently listed under the federal *Species at Risk Act* although it is considered a species at risk in some provinces.

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