

Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) – Carolinian population in Canada

Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander



2019



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For copies of the recovery strategy, or for additional information on species at risk, including the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) Status Reports, residence descriptions, action plans, and other related recovery documents, please visit the [Species at Risk \(SAR\) Public Registry](http://sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=24F7211B-1)¹.

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¹ <http://sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=24F7211B-1>

RECOVERY STRATEGY FOR THE ALLEGHENY MOUNTAIN DUSKY SALAMANDER (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) – CAROLINIAN POPULATION IN CANADA

2019

Under the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk (1996), the federal, provincial, and territorial governments agreed to work together on legislation, programs, and policies to protect wildlife species at risk throughout Canada.

In the spirit of cooperation of the Accord, the Government of Ontario has given permission to the Government of Canada to adopt the *Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus ochrophaeus) and the Northern Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus fuscus) in Ontario* (Part 2) and the *Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander – Ontario Government Response Statement* (Part 3) under Section 44 of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). Environment and Climate Change Canada has included a federal addition (Part 1) which completes the SARA requirements for this recovery strategy.

The federal recovery strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population in Canada consists of three parts:

Part 1 – Federal Addition to the *Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus ochrophaeus) and the Northern Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus fuscus) in Ontario*, prepared by Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Part 2 – *Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus ochrophaeus) and the Northern Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus fuscus) in Ontario*, prepared by T.M. Markle, A.R. Yagi, and D.M. Green for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources².

Part 3 – *Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander - Ontario Government Response Statement*, prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

² On June 26, 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources became the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

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Preface

The federal, provincial, and territorial government signatories under the [Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk \(1996\)](#)³ agreed to establish complementary legislation and programs that provide for effective protection of species at risk throughout Canada. Under the *Species at Risk Act* (S.C. 2002, c.29) (SARA), the federal competent ministers are responsible for the preparation of recovery strategies for listed Extirpated, Endangered, and Threatened species and are required to report on progress within five years after the publication of the final document on the SAR Public Registry.

The Minister of Environment and Climate Change is the competent minister under SARA for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population and has prepared the federal component of this recovery strategy (Part 1), as per section 37 of SARA. SARA section 44 allows the Minister to adopt all or part of an existing plan for the species if it meets the requirements under SARA for content (sub-sections 41(1) or (2)). The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (now the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry) led the development of the attached recovery strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Part 2) in cooperation with Environment and Climate Change Canada. The Province of Ontario also led the development of the attached Government Response Statement (Part 3), which is the Ontario Government's policy response to its provincial recovery strategy and summarizes the prioritized actions that the Ontario government intends to take and support.

Success in the recovery of this species depends on the commitment and cooperation of many different constituencies that will be involved in implementing the directions set out in this strategy and will not be achieved by Environment and Climate Change Canada, or any other jurisdiction alone. All Canadians are invited to join in supporting and implementing this strategy for the benefit of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander - Carolinian population and Canadian society as a whole.

This recovery strategy will be followed by one or more action plans that will provide information on recovery measures to be taken by Environment and Climate Change Canada and other jurisdictions and/or organizations involved in the conservation of the species. Implementation of this strategy is subject to appropriations, priorities, and budgetary constraints of the participating jurisdictions and organizations.

The recovery strategy sets the strategic direction to arrest or reverse the decline of the species, including identification of critical habitat to the extent possible. It provides all Canadians with information to help take action on species conservation. When critical habitat is identified, either in a recovery strategy or an action plan, SARA requires that critical habitat then be protected.

³ <http://registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=en&n=6b319869-1#2>

In the case of critical habitat identified for terrestrial species including migratory birds SARA requires that critical habitat identified in a federally protected area⁴ be described in the *Canada Gazette* within 90 days after the recovery strategy or action plan that identified the critical habitat is included in the public registry. A prohibition against destruction of critical habitat under ss. 58(1) will apply 90 days after the description of the critical habitat is published in the *Canada Gazette*.

For critical habitat located on other federal lands, the competent minister must either make a statement on existing legal protection or make an order so that the prohibition against destruction of critical habitat applies.

If the critical habitat for a migratory bird is not within a federal protected area and is not on federal land, within the exclusive economic zone or on the continental shelf of Canada, the prohibition against destruction can only apply to those portions of the critical habitat that are habitat to which the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994* applies as per SARA ss. 58(5.1) and ss. 58(5.2).

For any part of critical habitat located on non-federal lands, if the competent minister forms the opinion that any portion of critical habitat is not protected by provisions in or measures under SARA or other Acts of Parliament, or the laws of the province or territory, SARA requires that the Minister recommend that the Governor in Council make an order to prohibit destruction of critical habitat. The discretion to protect critical habitat on non-federal lands that is not otherwise protected rests with the Governor in Council.

⁴ These federally protected areas are: a national park of Canada named and described in Schedule 1 to the *Canada National Parks Act*, The Rouge National Park established by the *Rouge National Urban Park Act*, a marine protected area under the *Oceans Act*, a migratory bird sanctuary under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994* or a national wildlife area under the *Canada Wildlife Act* see ss. 58(2) of SARA.

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Thanks to Tricia M. Markle (Conservation Biology Graduate Program, University of Minnesota), Anne R. Yagi (formerly Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry) and David M. Green (Redpath Museum, McGill University), authors of the *Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus ochrophaeus) and the Northern Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus fuscus) in Ontario*.

Acknowledgement and thanks are also given to all other parties that provided advice and input used to help inform the development of this recovery strategy including Indigenous organizations and individuals, stakeholders and individual citizens who provided input and/or participated in consultation meetings.

Additions and Modifications to the Adopted Document

The following sections have been included to address specific requirements of the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) that are not addressed in the *Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander* (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) and the *Northern Dusky Salamander* (*Desmognathus fuscus*) in Ontario (Part 2 of this document, referred to henceforth as “the provincial recovery strategy”) and/or to provide updated or additional information.

Environment and Climate Change Canada is adopting the Ontario recovery strategy (Part 2) with the exception of section 2.0, Recovery. In place of section 2.0, Environment and Climate Change Canada has established a population and distribution objective and performance indicators, and is adopting the Government of Ontario’s government-led and government-supported actions of the *Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander – Ontario Government Response Statement*⁵ (Part 3) as the broad strategies and general approaches to meet the population and distribution objective.

Under SARA, there are specific requirements and processes set out regarding the protection of critical habitat. Therefore, statements in the provincial recovery strategy referring to protection of the species’ habitat may not directly correspond to federal requirements. Recovery measures dealing with the protection of habitat are adopted; however, whether these measures will result in protection of critical habitat under SARA will be assessed following publication of the final federal recovery strategy.

Only those portions of the Ontario recovery strategy pertaining to the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander are being adopted in this recovery strategy.

⁵ The Government Response Statement is the Ontario Government’s policy response to the recovery strategy and summarizes the prioritized actions that the Ontario Government intends to take and support.

Recovery Feasibility Summary

Based on the following four criteria that Environment and Climate Change Canada uses to establish recovery feasibility, there are unknowns regarding the feasibility of recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population. In keeping with the precautionary principle, this recovery strategy has been prepared as per section 41(1) of SARA, as would be done when recovery is determined to be technically and biologically feasible. This recovery strategy addresses the unknowns surrounding the feasibility of recovery.

1. Individuals of the wildlife species that are capable of reproduction are available now or in the foreseeable future to sustain the population or improve its abundance.

Yes. Based on the information to date, the population in Ontario is believed to be viable and self-sustaining. The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander has been confirmed breeding in two localities in Ontario (Markle et al. 2013), representing two geographically discrete local populations⁶. The total number of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders in Ontario is unknown, but as of 2012, a total of 55 individuals had been observed (Weller, pers. comm. in Markle et al. 2013; Yagi, pers. comm. in Markle et al. 2013). All life stages (eggs, larvae, juveniles, and adults) have been observed in each locality, indicating that the local populations are reproducing (Markle et al. 2013). Because the number of known individuals in the Carolinian population is low, Markle et al. 2013 note the need to determine if inbreeding is a problem in this population, and to monitor its genetic health. Small, isolated populations are also less resilient to stochastic (i.e., random) events and environmental variation, which can impact the population's sustainability. Generally, even if threats can be adequately mitigated, there is a reasonable level of uncertainty on the long-term viability of the Carolinian population in Canada.

2. Sufficient suitable habitat is available to support the species or could be made available through habitat management or restoration.

Yes. Although the habitat used by the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is highly specific and naturally rare in southwestern Ontario, the two known local populations appear to be self-sustaining despite being genetically isolated from the rest of its North American range for a long time. Both local populations occur within the Niagara Gorge, which is managed as a forested reserve by the Niagara Parks Commission. Additional suitable habitat appears to be available in the gorge as well as in areas that would have historically been connected to the gorge (e.g., along the Niagara Escarpment and Fonthill Kame Moraine) and it is feasible that further local populations of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky

⁶ For the purpose of this recovery strategy, a local population is defined as a discrete interbreeding population in a geographically distinct locality.

Salamander may be located with additional search effort (Markle et al. 2013). Suitable habitat may also be created in adjacent sites by increasing moist areas and by adding cover objects, where appropriate and by enhancing the canopy cover at sites and in corridors connecting suitable habitats,

3. The primary threats to the species or its habitat (including threats outside Canada) can be avoided or mitigated.

Unknown. A single natural or anthropogenic initiated event could threaten the survival of the entire Carolinian population because the population is small and restricted to two known localities (COSEWIC 2007). There is no possibility for a rescue effect by immigration from populations in New York because the Niagara River is an effective barrier to dispersal (Markle et al. 2013). The genetic variability across the northern range of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders is already very low (Tilley and Mahoney 1996) and the genetic health of the population should be assessed and monitored. The primary threat to the habitat of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is any activity that changes the quantity and quality of water in the groundwater-fed streams and seeps that it uses. The species inhabit moist and shaded streams supported by groundwater discharge, which are rare within southern Ontario. Current groundwater levels are believed adequate for the survival of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders however, any activities (e.g., development on adjacent lands) or events (e.g., climatic and/or environmental (e.g., landslides, spills)) that result in deterioration, interruption or contamination of the groundwater and surface water that supports the species could be detrimental. The extent of the groundwater recharge area at each location is not fully known and additional research and monitoring is needed to better understand the quantity and quality of water supporting the species' habitat and to develop effective mitigation (Markle et al. 2013).

4. Recovery techniques exist to achieve the population and distribution objectives or can be expected to be developed within a reasonable timeframe.

Yes. Management and stewardship actions exist and are believed to be sufficient to conserve habitat directly used by the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and in doing so, are expected to help achieve the population and distribution objective. These include stewardship activities that improve ground cover (e.g., maintaining available leaf litter, woody debris, rocks and moss) to provide shelter and protection from predators and harsh weather, native tree planting to improve canopy cover and reduce hillside erosion, invasive species management and public outreach and education. While further research is required to map the groundwater recharge zone and to understand the hydrology of the groundwater-fed streams inhabited by the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander, some modeling approaches exist to explore the indirect effects of changed hydrological conditions on the species' habitat which may advise appropriate mitigation strategies (Markle et al. 2013).

1. COSEWIC* Species Assessment Information

Date of Assessment: April 2007

Common Name: Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population

Scientific Name: *Desmognathus ochrophaeus*

COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Reason for Designation:** This is a small and secretive salamander, with aquatic larvae, that inhabits forested brooks, cascades, springs, or seeps where there is abundant cover in the form of crevices between stones, leaf litter, or logs. This species' entire range in the Carolinian faunal province consists of a single, cascading stream in the Niagara Gorge, occupying no more than about 0.005 km². The locality is isolated from any other population of the same species, the nearest being about 22 km away in New York State. Surveys to date have located and identified some 22 individuals and indicate a total adult population that is probably fewer than 100 individuals. Its minute range makes this salamander highly susceptible to stochastic events and the species would easily and rapidly become extirpated if any change to its habitat were to take place. The major threats to this salamander in the Carolinian faunal province are any activities that could affect the water table and dry out the spring that supplies its habitat, degrade groundwater flow and quality or deplete groundwater reserves.

Canadian Occurrence: Ontario

COSEWIC Status History: This newly recognized population not previously assessed by COSEWIC was designated Endangered in April 2007. Last assessment based on an update status report.

* COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada)

** Since the last COSEWIC assessment in 2007, a second locality occupied by the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander was discovered in the Niagara Gorge (Part 2).

2. Species Status Information

Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander's are lungless salamanders that occur in two Canadian provinces (Ontario and Quebec) and throughout the western slope of the Appalachian Mountain system in the eastern United States (Appendix A). Within Canada, the species comprises two designatable units: the Carolinian population (occurring in Ontario), and the Great Lakes / St. Lawrence population (occurring in Quebec). This recovery strategy is specific to the population occurring in Ontario and represents the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Carolinian population) and will hereafter be referred to as Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander unless otherwise referenced.

The global conservation status rank for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander⁷, last reviewed on April 26, 2005 is Secure (G5) (NatureServe 2016). In Canada, the national conservation status rank for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander, last reviewed on December 22, 2011, is Imperilled (N2) (NatureServe 2016). At the subnational scale in Canada, the species is ranked as Critically Imperilled (S1) in both Ontario and Quebec (NatureServe 2016).

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is known from only two locations in the Niagara Gorge, Ontario and is listed as Endangered⁸ on Schedule 1 of SARA. The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is listed as Endangered⁹ under the provincial *Endangered Species Act*, 2007 (ESA).

The Canadian distribution of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander¹⁰ accounts for less than 1% of the global range (COSEWIC 2007).

3. Threats

The provincial *Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander* (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) and the *Northern Dusky Salamander* (*Desmognathus fuscus*) in Ontario (Part 2) describe the threats to survival and recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in Ontario. Environment and Climate Change Canada is adding a recently discovered threat, which is described below.

Disease from alien pathogens

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander could be highly vulnerable in face of pathogen introduction due to small population size, and geographic isolation (Earl and Gray 2014). Pathogens like ranaviruses and chytrid fungi *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* and *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (*Bsal*) are introduced through regional and international trade of animals, and have caused important declines in amphibians and other ectotherms around the world (Duffus et al. 2015; Yap et al. 2015). Mortalities associated with ranaviruses and *B. dendrobatidis* have occurred in various amphibian species of Canada, and *B. dendrobatidis* is known to infect Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander populations of the United States (Hughey et al. 2014; Duffus et al. 2015). *Bsal*, a pathogen specific to salamanders, has not yet been recorded in North America, but introduction is considered likely given considerable

⁷ This assessment of the species is on a global scale and is not limited to the Carolinian population.

⁸ Under SARA, an endangered species means a wildlife species that is facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

⁹ Under the ESA, a species shall be classified as an endangered species if it lives in the wild in Ontario but is facing imminent extinction or extirpation.

¹⁰ This reference to the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is not specific to the Carolinian population.

salamander imports from Asia, where the disease is believed to have originated (Yap et al. 2015). A number of mitigation measures have been proposed for at-risk species, including treatments in infected populations, and application of prevention protocols in animal trade (Scheele et al. 2014; Yap et al. 2015). Considering the limited and evolving understanding of these diseases, as well as the enforcement challenges associated with identifying different salamander species at Canada's numerous ports of entry, the Government of Canada implemented a precautionary, one-year import restriction prohibiting the import of all species of the order Caudata (such as salamanders, newts and mudpuppies) into Canada (unless authorized by a permit issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada). The restriction, implemented through an amendment to the federal Wild Animal and Plant Trade Regulations (WAPTR) was approved by the Governor in Council and was published in the Canada Gazette, Part II, on May 31, 2017.

4. Population and Distribution Objectives

Under subsection 41 (1) (d) of SARA, a population and distribution objective must be established for listed endangered, threatened and extirpated species when recovery is deemed feasible. The population and distribution objective established by Environment and Climate Change Canada for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is to:

- Maintain the two known local populations in Ontario and promote natural population expansion in the general area occupied by the species.

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is primarily found in seepages, small streams and surrounding forested areas with an abundance of refuges (e.g. woody debris, rocks) to carry out its life processes (breeding, egg-laying, overwintering, larval development, foraging, daytime retreats, and dispersal) (Markle et al. 2013). The suitable habitat is supported by groundwater discharge, and is considered highly specific and naturally rare in southern Ontario (Markle et al. 2013; Part 3). Maintaining the two known local populations will in part depend on maintaining the suitable habitat conditions, particularly groundwater quantity and quality. Recovery actions that support a better understanding of the groundwater recharge area and protect and manage the surface water and groundwater system that sustains the seep and stream habitat of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander will be a key priority. Improving knowledge of the species' demographics and physical environment in Ontario, encouraging the implementation of beneficial management practices that minimize impacts on groundwater recharge areas and seeps, and supporting education and awareness that promote collaboration in the protection and recovery of the species will contribute to the success of the population and distribution objectives.

The objective focuses on the continued persistence of the two local populations rather than a quantitative target (e.g., effective population size), based on the best available information at the posting of this recovery strategy. The population was only recently discovered in Ontario (2004; 2010) and the current population abundance is not known.

It is also very difficult to obtain estimates of population size for the two Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander local populations in Ontario because they are nocturnal, difficult to observe, and occupy habitat that is very difficult to access (COSEWIC 2007). All life stages have been observed at each locality, indicating that the local populations are reproducing and appear to be self-sustaining. However, based on the limited information available, it is unclear whether there is gene flow between the two known local populations in Ontario, as loss of genetic diversity is a concern and these local populations are completely isolated from the nearest known population in the United States

The objective is consistent with the province of Ontario's Government Response Statement developed under the provincial *Endangered Species Act*, which outlines the provincial government's goal for the recovery of the species and summarizes the prioritized actions the government intends to take and support (Part 3). The Government Response Statement for the province of Ontario lists the following recovery goal for the recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in Ontario:

The government's goal for the recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is to maintain suitable habitat conditions in the Niagara Gorge in order to retain existing known populations in a self-sustaining state and promote natural increases.

5. Broad Strategies and General Approaches to Meet Objectives

The government-led and government-supported action tables from the *Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander – Ontario Government Response Statement* (Part 3), as they pertain to the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander, are adopted as the broad strategies and general approaches to meet the population and distribution objective.

6. Critical Habitat

6.1 Identification of the species' critical habitat

Section 41 (1)c of SARA requires that recovery strategies include an identification of the species' critical habitat, to the extent possible, as well as examples of activities that are likely to result in its destruction. Under section 2(1) of SARA, critical habitat is "the habitat that is necessary for the survival or recovery of a listed wildlife species and that is identified as the species' critical habitat in the recovery strategy or in an action plan for the species".

Identification of critical habitat is not a component of provincial recovery strategies under the Province of Ontario's ESA. Under the ESA, when a species becomes listed as endangered or threatened on the Species at Risk in Ontario List, it automatically receives general habitat protection. The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander currently receives general habitat protection under the ESA; however, a description of the general habitat has not yet been developed. In some cases, a habitat regulation may be developed that replaces the general habitat protection. A habitat regulation is a legal instrument that prescribes an area that will be protected¹¹ as the habitat of the species by the Province of Ontario. A habitat regulation has not been developed for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander under the ESA.

This federal recovery strategy identifies critical habitat for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in Canada to the extent possible, based on the best available information as of December 2014. Critical habitat is identified for two local populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in Ontario (See Figure 1; see also Table 1). More precise boundaries may be mapped, and additional critical habitat may be added in the future if new or additional information supports the inclusion of areas beyond those currently identified (e.g., new habitat is colonized in adjacent areas).

The identification of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander critical habitat is based on three criteria: habitat occupancy, habitat suitability and habitat connectivity, which are discussed in detail below.

6.1.1 Habitat occupancy

The habitat occupancy criterion refers to areas of suitable habitat where there is a reasonable degree of certainty of current use by the species. Occupancy is based on occurrence reports for both extant locations from the Ontario Natural Heritage Information Centre and Environment and Climate Change Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service. Habitat is considered occupied when one or more Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population individuals have been observed.

In Canada, all observations of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander are from the two known local populations within the Niagara Gorge in southern Ontario.

6.1.2 Habitat suitability

Habitat suitability relates to areas possessing a specific set of biophysical attributes that can support individuals of the species in carrying out essential aspects of their life cycle, such as breeding, egg-laying, overwintering, larval development, foraging, daytime retreats, and dispersal. The biophysical attributes of critical habitat include the characteristics described below:

¹¹ Under the federal SARA, there are specific requirements and processes set out regarding the protection of critical habitat. Protection of critical habitat under SARA will be assessed following publication of the final federal recovery strategy.

Attribute 1: Constant supply of cold water

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander lives within two cascade channels on a steep gradient that emerges from rock layers on the western sides of the Niagara gorge (COSEWIC 2007; Markle et al. 2013). The cascades are formed by ground water seeping from rock layers in the side of the gorge. These water sources provide the moisture required for its cutaneous respiration (COSEWIC 2007) and they represent the most important component of the species' critical habitat. In summer, provided that soil moisture conditions are suitable, the salamanders can disperse to adjacent terrestrial habitats. With the return of cooler weather, the salamanders move back to their water source and burrow into water-saturated soil (Bishop 1941, Organ 1961). The larvae have the ability to survive in temporary streams and seepages.

Attribute 2: Loose soil

The soil layer between the soil surface and the water table is an important component of critical habitat, particularly in the summer. The salamanders require unconsolidated substrates into which they can burrow. The presence of leaf litter and plant cover (e.g., mosses, herbaceous plants) helps to maintain these conditions. Wet cavities along stream edges are also used in similar manner.

Attribute 3: Abundant cover

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is vulnerable to predation and its survival depends greatly on the availability of abundant cover. Rocks, crevices, fallen tree trunks and other woody debris are examples of shelter that protect the salamanders throughout their life cycle (COSEWIC 2007). Cover items are used by females to lay their eggs, and also provide protection to individuals during overwintering.

Attribute 4: Forested areas

Habitats occupied by the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander are most commonly located within or near forested areas, and this species is known to use terrestrial habitat during the summer (COSEWIC 2007). Individuals require moist, shady conditions, which are maintained by the presence of the forest canopy (Markle et al. 2013). Forested areas also provide important cover items (e.g., tree trunks, leaf litter), and is used as dispersal habitat. Recent research suggests that the presence of gaps in the canopy restricted movement along streams, further stressing the importance of natural riparian habitat (Cecala et al. 2014).

Suitable habitat for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is defined as:

- the entire extent (original seep to the Niagara River) of the two occupied groundwater discharge streams, including the streambed and shoreline, AND

- the forested area within a 75 m distance on either side of the two occupied groundwater discharge streams, measured landward from the high water mark-two-year flood recurrence

Each local population is associated to a permanent groundwater discharge stream that runs from a seep and discharges into the Niagara River. Because any decrease in groundwater quantity or quality is likely to be detrimental to the survival and recovery (e.g., natural population expansion) of the species, the entire extent of the two occupied streams is considered suitable habitat (Markle et al. 2013). Little information is available regarding the movement of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in Canada. The 75 m distance is based on the maximal distance individuals have been observed from water for populations studied in the United States (Organ 1961; Bishop 1941). Forested areas directly adjacent to the streams are used by individuals of all life stages.

6.1.3 Habitat connectivity

Habitat connectivity for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is defined as:

- a dispersal corridor that is the entire forested area located between the 75 m distance around both occupied groundwater discharge streams

The dispersal behaviour of adult and juvenile Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders is unknown. However, it is plausible that they may move along moist forested habitats when environmental conditions are appropriate (i.e. no drought). The two local populations are separated by a distance of approximately 500 m. While direct dispersal is not expected to occur frequently, it may be possible for salamanders to cross such distances over time in ideal cool/moist conditions. Gene flow between the sites would help to mitigate potential impacts of inbreeding that could occur in small isolated local populations. Therefore, the area between the two localities is included in the critical habitat as a dispersal corridor, because any habitat disturbance that could occur in between could significantly reduce dispersal probabilities.

6.1.4 Application of the critical habitat criteria

Application of the critical habitat criteria above to the best available data identified critical habitat for the two known local populations of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population in Canada (Figure 1; See also Table 1). This is a partial identification of critical habitat. A schedule of studies (section 6.2; Table 2) has been established to provide the information necessary to complete the identification of critical habitat needed to meet the population and distribution objectives.

Critical habitat identified for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is presented using a 10 x 10 km UTM grid (Figure 1; Table 1). This 10 x 10 km UTM grid is part of a standardized grid system that indicates the general geographic areas containing critical habitat, which can be used for land use planning and/or environmental assessment purposes, and is a scale appropriate to reduce risks to the Allegheny Mountain Dusky

Salamander and its habitat. Critical habitat within the grid square occurs where the criteria described in Section 6 are met. More detailed information on critical habitat to support protection of the species and its habitat may be requested on a need-to-know basis by contacting Environment and Climate Change Canada – Canadian Wildlife Service at ec.planificationduretablissement-recoveryplanning.ec@canada.ca

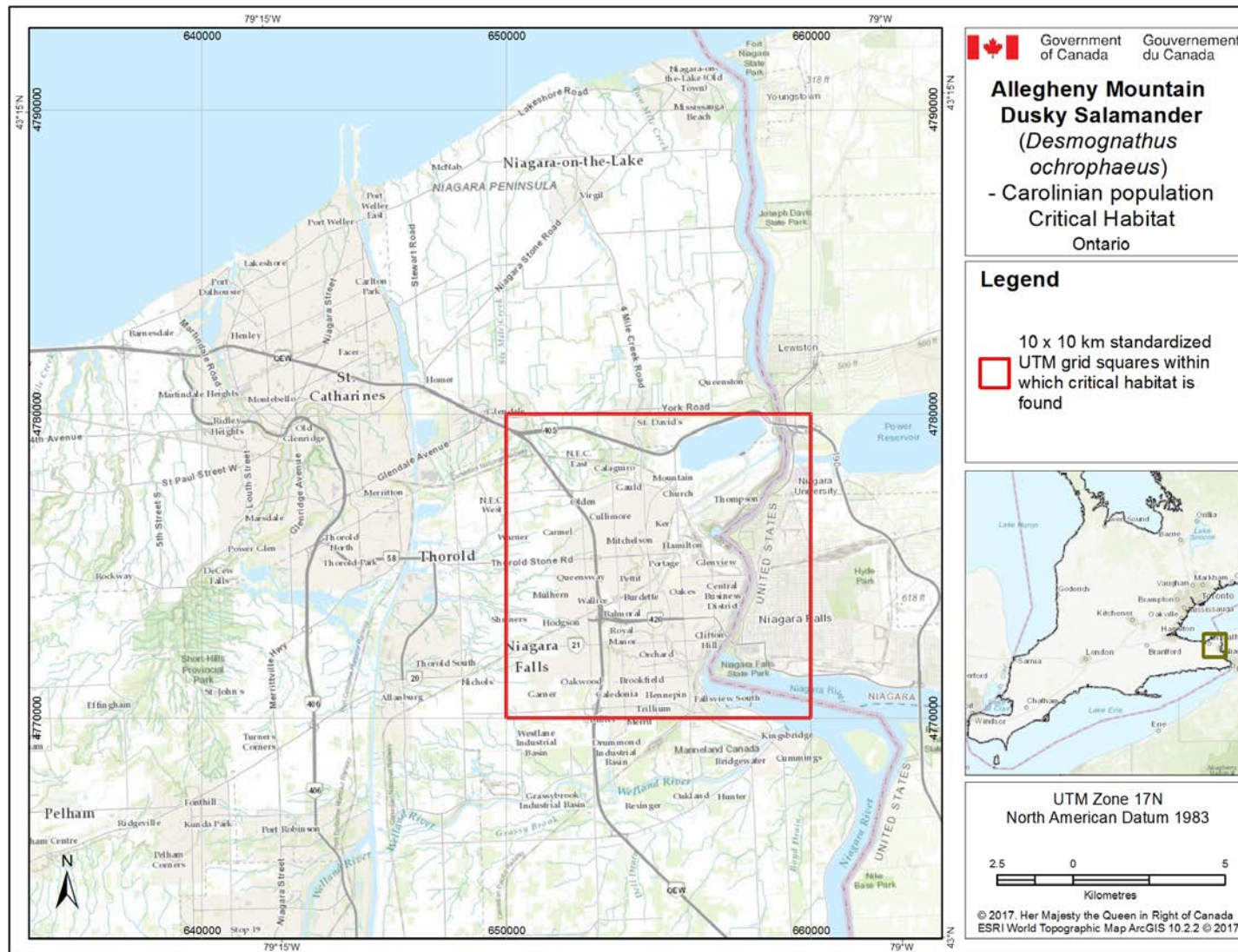


Figure 1. Grid square that contains critical habitat for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in Canada. Critical habitat for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander occurs within this 10 x 10 km standardized UTM grid square (red square), where the criteria described in Section 6 are met.

Table 1. 10 x 10 km standardized UTM Grid square containing critical habitat for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in Canada. Critical habitat occurs where the criteria described in Section 6 are met.

10 x 10 km Standardized UTM grid square ID ¹	UTM Grid Square Coordinates ²		Land tenure ³
	Easting	Northing	
17TPH57	650000	4770000	Non-federal Land

¹Based on the standard UTM Military Grid Reference System (see <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/earth-sciences/geography/topographic-information/maps/9789>), where the first 2 digits and letter represent the UTM Zone, the following 2 letters indicate the 100 x 100 km standardized UTM grid followed by 2 digits to represent the 10 x 10 km standardized UTM grid containing all or a portion of the critical habitat unit. This unique alphanumeric code is based on the methodology produced from the Breeding Bird Atlases of Canada (See <http://www.bsc-eoc.org> for more information on breeding bird atlases).

²The listed coordinates are a cartographic representation of where critical habitat can be found, presented as the southwest corner of the 10 x 10 km standardized UTM grid square containing all or a portion of the critical habitat unit. The coordinates are provided as a general location only.

³Land tenure is provided as an approximation of the types of land ownership that exist at the critical habitat units and should be used for guidance purposes only. Accurate land tenure will require cross referencing critical habitat boundaries with surveyed land parcel information.

6.2 Schedule of Studies to Identify Critical Habitat

Table 2. Schedule of Studies to Identify Critical Habitat

Description of Activity	Rationale	Timeline
Identify the extent of the groundwater recharge area necessary to sustain the seep and stream habitat supporting the species.	As, each local population is associated to a permanent groundwater discharge stream, there is a need to better understand the groundwater hydrology that maintains suitable habitat for the species in order to determine the specific biophysical attributes and how much habitat is required to meet the population and distribution objective.	2024

6.3 Activities Likely to Result in the Destruction of Critical Habitat

Understanding what constitutes destruction of critical habitat is necessary for the protection and management of critical habitat. Destruction is determined on a case by case basis. Destruction would result if part of the critical habitat was degraded, either permanently or temporarily, such that it would not serve its function when needed by the species. Destruction may result from a single activity or multiple activities at one point in time or from the cumulative effects of one or more activities over time. It should be noted that not all activities that occur within or near critical habitat are likely to cause its destruction. Activities described in Table 3 are examples of those likely to cause destruction of critical habitat for the species; however, destructive activities are not necessarily limited to those listed.

The greatest threat to the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander habitat is any activity that changes the hydrology of its habitat. Detrimental changes may include increased or decreased peak flows and discharge volumes, increased turbidity or sedimentation, increased water temperature, and altered water chemistry through contaminated surface water. The groundwater recharge area outside the Niagara Gorge is heavily developed for urban and industrial uses. Development activities that reduce, redirect, or stop the groundwater flow that feeds the inhabited seeps and streams would threaten these local populations. Further research is required to measure, forecast, and detect changes in the quantity and quality of water supporting the species' habitat (Part 3). This information is required to identify the type of activities likely to cause harm, their geographic extent, and the level of each activity likely to cause harm (i.e. thresholds).

Table 3. Activities Likely to Result in the Destruction of Critical Habitat of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population

Description of Activity	Description of effect in relation to function loss	Details of effect
Activities that result in the removal, redirection or other reduction of groundwater and surface water levels (e.g., water extraction for urban development, water management, golf courses).	These hydrologic changes may destroy or degrade suitable habitat by modifying or disrupting water flow, water balance or soil moisture. The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is lungless and relies on its moist skin for respiration, and as a result, any deterioration or interruption of the groundwater and surface water that supports the species could potentially have catastrophic effects.	When conducted within or outside the boundaries of critical habitat, such activities may result in the destruction of this habitat if the water level and flow that contribute to the maintenance of critical habitat are altered.
Activities that increase the quantity of surface water runoff (e.g. storm water runoff from residential development and roads).	Storm water management and increases in impervious surface area may result in landslides or mudslides. This could alter water quality in seeps and streams by increasing turbidity and sedimentation and result in the net removal, disturbance or destruction of cover objects (e.g., rocks, logs or woody debris) and/or canopy cover (displacement of trees).	If this activity occurs within or adjacent to critical habitat, at any time of year, the effects will be direct and cumulative and are likely to destroy or impair critical habitat.
Activities that release pollutants in the groundwater recharge area or directly in the surface water where the species occurs (e.g. pesticides, atmospheric deposition, industrial chemicals).	Pollutants entering the groundwater recharge area and/or directly to the surface water that supports the species could potentially reduce water quality, degrade habitat and expose the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander to environmental toxicity.	If this activity occurs within or outside of the critical habitat (groundwater recharge largely occurs outside of critical habitat bounds), at any time of year, the effects will be direct and cumulative and are likely to destroy or impair critical habitat.
Introduction of exotic and invasive plant species such as European Common Reed (<i>Phragmites australis</i>)	European Common Reed may be eliminating shoreline habitat where it is able to form thick stands. Once introduced, any activities that involves the stripping of native vegetation (e.g., off-trail hiking) favours the spread of exotic and invasive plant species.	If this activity occurs within critical habitat, at any time of year, the effects will be direct and most likely result in the destruction or damage of critical habitat.

Description of Activity	Description of effect in relation to function loss	Details of effect
	Exotic and invasive plant species have strong dispersal capabilities, thus may spread to critical habitat over time and cause destruction.	
Off-trail hiking	Off-trail hiking can displace objects used for cover by the species, increase water turbidity, and erode the stream bed and its banks through direct trampling or trampling of vegetation.	If this activity occurs within critical habitat at any time of year, the effects will be direct and most likely result in the destruction or damage of critical habitat.

7. Measuring Progress

The performance indicators presented below provide a way to define and measure progress toward achieving the population and distribution objective. Every five years, success of recovery strategy implementation will be measured against the following performance indicators:

1. The presence of the two known local populations in Ontario has been maintained.
2. Natural population expansion in the general area occupied by the species has been promoted.

8. Statement on Action Plans

One or more action plans will be completed for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population by 2024.

9. Effects on the Environment and Other Species

A strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is conducted on all SARA recovery planning documents, in accordance with the [*Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals*](#)¹². The purpose of a SEA is to incorporate environmental considerations into the development of public policies, plans, and program proposals to support environmentally sound decision-making and to evaluate whether the outcomes of a recovery planning document could affect any component of the environment or any of the [*Federal Sustainable Development Strategy*](#)'s¹³ (FSDS) goals and targets.

Recovery planning is intended to benefit species at risk and biodiversity in general. However, it is recognized that strategies may also inadvertently lead to environmental effects beyond the intended benefits. The planning process based on national guidelines directly incorporates consideration of all environmental effects, with a particular focus on possible impacts upon non-target species or habitats. The results of the SEA are incorporated directly into the strategy itself, but are also summarized below in this statement.

Government-supported strategies to conserve habitat, to identify potential approaches to mitigate environmental and cultural stressors, and to understand the sensitivity of the groundwater seeps and streams to changes in the quantity and quality of source water

¹² www.ceaa.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=B3186435-1

¹³ www.ec.gc.ca/dd-sd/default.asp?lang=En&n=F93CD795-1

will inevitably benefit other salamander species that also occupy the Niagara Gorge, including the Northern Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus fuscus*)¹⁴, and the Blue-spotted/Jefferson Salamander complex (*Ambystoma jeffersonianum*/*Ambystoma laterale*). Management and enhancement of stream and riparian habitats to maintain high water quality and availability, as well as naturally vegetated shorelines will provide suitable habitat for other species found in association with the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander. Other examples of species that coexist with the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander in the Niagara Gorge region include the American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*), and the Eastern Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), which are both listed as Endangered under SARA.

The potential for the strategy to inadvertently lead to adverse effects on other species was considered. The SEA concluded that this strategy will clearly benefit the environment and will not entail any significant adverse effects.

¹⁴ The Northern Dusky Salamander – Carolinian population is listed as Endangered under SARA.

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Appendix A: Conservation Status Ranks of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) in Canada and the United States

S-Rank	State/ Province
S1 (Critically Imperilled)	Ontario, Quebec
S4 (Apparently Secure)	Kentucky, Virginia
S5 (Secure)	Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, West Virginia
SNR (Unranked)	New Brunswick, Ohio
SH (Possibly extirpated [Historical])	New Jersey

Definitions of Global (G), National (N) and Subnational (S) Conservation Status Ranks (Master et al. 2012)

Rank	Definition
G1 N1 S1	Critically Imperilled—At very high risk of extinction or elimination (G1), or at very high risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction (N1, S1), due to very restricted range, very few populations or occurrences, very steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.
G2 N2 S2	Imperilled—At high risk of extinction or elimination (G2), or at high risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction (N2, S2), due to restricted range, few populations or occurrences, steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.
G3 N3 S3	Vulnerable—At moderate risk of extinction or elimination (G3), or extirpation in the jurisdiction (N3, S3), due to a fairly restricted range, relatively few populations or occurrences, recent and widespread declines, threats, or other factors.
G4 N4 S4	Apparently Secure—At a fairly low risk of extinction or elimination (G4), or extirpation in the jurisdiction (N4, S4), due to an extensive range and/or many populations or occurrences, but with possible cause for some concern as a result of local recent declines, threats, or other factors.
G5 N5 S5	Secure—At very low risk of extinction or elimination (G5), or at very low or no risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction due to a very extensive range, abundant populations or occurrences, with little to no concern from declines or threats.
N#N# S#S#	Range Rank—A numeric range rank (e.g., S2S3 or S1S3) is used to indicate any range of uncertainty about the status of the species or ecosystem. Ranges cannot skip more than two ranks (e.g., SU is used rather than S1S4).
SNR	Unranked—State/province conservation status not yet assessed.

Part 2 – *Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus ochrophaeus) and the Northern Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus fuscus) in Ontario*, prepared by T.M. Markle, A.R. Yagi, and D.M. Green for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources



Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*)

and Northern Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus fuscus*) in Ontario

Ontario Recovery Strategy Series

Recovery strategy prepared under the Endangered Species Act, 2007

Natural. Valued. Protected.

About the Ontario Recovery Strategy Series

This series presents the collection of recovery strategies that are prepared or adopted as advice to the Province of Ontario on the recommended approach to recover species at risk. The Province ensures the preparation of recovery strategies to meet its commitments to recover species at risk under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk in Canada.

What is recovery?

Recovery of species at risk is the process by which the decline of an endangered, threatened, or extirpated species is arrested or reversed, and threats are removed or reduced to improve the likelihood of a species' persistence in the wild.

What is a recovery strategy?

Under the ESA a recovery strategy provides the best available scientific knowledge on what is required to achieve recovery of a species. A recovery strategy outlines the habitat needs and the threats to the survival and recovery of the species. It also makes recommendations on the objectives for protection and recovery, the approaches to achieve those objectives, and the area that should be considered in the development of a habitat regulation. Sections 11 to 15 of the ESA outline the required content and timelines for developing recovery strategies published in this series.

Recovery strategies are required to be prepared for endangered and threatened species within one or two years respectively of the species being added to the Species at Risk in Ontario list. There is a transition period of five years (until June 30, 2013) to develop recovery strategies for those species listed as endangered or threatened in the schedules of the ESA. Recovery strategies are required to be prepared for extirpated species only if reintroduction is considered feasible.

What's next?

Nine months after the completion of a recovery strategy a government response statement will be published which summarizes the actions that the Government of Ontario intends to take in response to the strategy. The implementation of recovery strategies depends on the continued cooperation and actions of government agencies, individuals, communities, land users, and conservationists.

For more information

To learn more about species at risk recovery in Ontario, please visit the Ministry of Natural Resources Species at Risk webpage at: www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Markle, T.M., A.R. Yagi and D.M. Green. 2013. Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) and the Northern Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus fuscus*) in Ontario. Recovery Strategy Series. Prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Peterborough, Ontario. vi + 30 pp.

Cover illustration: Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (top), Northern Dusky Salamander (bottom). Photo credit: Rob Tervo

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DECLARATION

The recovery strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and the Northern Dusky Salamander was developed in accordance with the requirements of the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA). This recovery strategy has been prepared as advice to the Government of Ontario, other responsible jurisdictions and the many different constituencies that may be involved in recovering the species.

The recovery strategy does not necessarily represent the views of all of the individuals who provided advice or contributed to its preparation, or the official positions of the organizations with which the individuals are associated.

The goals, objectives and recovery approaches identified in the strategy are based on the best available knowledge and are subject to revision as new information becomes available. Implementation of this strategy is subject to appropriations, priorities and budgetary constraints of the participating jurisdictions and organizations.

Success in the recovery of this species depends on the commitment and cooperation of many different constituencies that will be involved in implementing the directions set out in this strategy.

RESPONSIBLE JURISDICTIONS

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
Environment Canada – Canadian Wildlife Service, Ontario

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Both the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) and the Northern Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus fuscus*) are listed as endangered in Ontario under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is a federally endangered species listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*. The Northern Dusky Salamander in Ontario is yet to be assessed at the federal level.

Like all plethodontid salamanders, these species are lungless and rely on their moist skin for respiration. They are thus restricted to moist environments and avoid conditions that risk their dehydration. Both species are typically found along the edges of small woodland streams and in damp seepage areas where there is an abundance of logs, stones and leaf litter.

Dusky salamanders have a characteristic light line that runs from the corner of the mouth to the eye. The two species can best be distinguished from each other by the cross-sectional shape of the tail, the colour of the dorsal stripe and the colour of the underside. The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander has a tail that is rounded in cross-section, an evident yellow- to red-coloured dorsal stripe with chevron shaped darker patches running along it, and a typically dark brown or black underside. The Northern Dusky Salamander has a keeled tail that is laterally compressed and triangular in cross-section, a uniformly tan or brown dorsal stripe, and a cream-coloured underside.

The principle limiting factor for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and the Northern Dusky Salamander in Ontario is their extremely restricted range. In Ontario, Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders have now been identified from two localities in the Niagara Gorge, while Northern Dusky Salamanders are known only from a single site. As both species occupy very similar habitats, and share many characteristics, the threats to their survival and recovery are virtually identical. The current habitat is so limited that any degradation is likely to compromise the long-term survival of these salamanders in Ontario.

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander in Ontario utterly depend upon the groundwater discharge that feeds the streams and seeps in which they dwell. Any decrease, curtailment or interruption of the groundwater is considered a serious threat to the continuing existence of these salamanders. Landslides or mudslides in the Niagara Gorge that in any way affect the salamanders' streams and stream-side habitats pose severe threats. Further, degradation of habitat may occur when hikers venture off the maintained trail and inadvertently stir up the stream bed, trample vegetation and increase erosion. Clearing of the habitats used by these salamanders would also constitute a serious threat.

The recovery goal is to safeguard the existing known populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamander species, and if feasible, introduce each species

to unoccupied habitat within the Niagara Gorge that is either created or found to be suitable, with the aim of increasing known population sizes by 50 percent. The four recovery objectives are to:

- protect and enhance existing significant habitat for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario;
- conduct a thorough population study, and if necessary maintain the genetic health of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander populations in Ontario;
- locate additional populations, and expand the current ranges of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders through introductions where appropriate; and
- elicit public support and collaboration in the protection and recovery of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario.

The areas to be considered for habitat regulation include the streams and seeps inhabited by the salamanders, plus the surrounding forested habitat up to 75 m away from the edges of seeps and streams. In addition, the area between the two Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander populations should be protected as a dispersal corridor. Also to be considered are the catchment basins supplying the groundwater that feeds the springs from which the streams and seeps originate.

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1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Species Assessment and Classification

COMMON NAME: Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Desmognathus ochrophaeus*

SARO List Classification: Endangered

SARO List History: Endangered (2008)

COSEWIC Assessment History:

Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (Carolinian population) – Endangered (2007)

Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander – Threatened (2001), Special Concern (1998)

SARA Schedule 1: Endangered (March 5, 2009)

RANKINGS: GRANK: G5 NRANK: N2 SRANK: S1

COMMON NAME: Northern Dusky Salamander

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Desmognathus fuscus*

SARO List Classification: Endangered

SARO List History: Endangered (2004)

COSEWIC Assessment History: Endangered (2012), Not at Risk (1999)

SARA Schedule 1: No Schedule, No Status

RANKINGS: GRANK: G5 NRANK: N3N4 SRANK: S1

The glossary provides definitions for technical terms, including the abbreviations above.

1.2 Species Description and Biology

Species Descriptions

Dusky salamanders have a characteristic light line that runs from the corner of the mouth to the eye. The hind legs are substantially larger than the front legs (Petranka 1998). These features serve to distinguish both species from any other salamanders that may be present in the Niagara Gorge.

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander ranges in size from 70 to 110 mm total length, with males roughly six to twenty percent longer than females (Bruce 1993, Orr 1989, Pauly and Watson 2005). Northern Dusky Salamanders range from 60 to 140 mm total length, with males about seven percent larger than females (Means 2005). Colour and pattern are variable in each species, although the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is typically more brightly coloured, and the Northern Dusky Salamander usually has black specks or spots present along the sides. Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander larvae are 13 to 18 mm long and have dark dorsolateral stripes, often with spots (Petranka 1998). Northern Dusky Salamander larvae are 12 to 20 mm total length with paired blotches or spots along the back. Both species have 14 costal grooves.

The two species can best be told apart by the colour of the dorsal stripe, the cross-sectional shape of the tail and the colour of the underside (Tilley 1969, Petranka 1998). The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander has a tail that is rounded in cross-section, an obvious yellow to red-coloured dorsal stripe with chevron shaped darker patches running along it and a typically dark brown or black underside. In contrast the Northern Dusky Salamander has a keeled tail that is laterally compressed and triangular in cross-section, a uniformly tan or brown dorsal stripe and a cream-coloured underside.

Species Biology

Like all plethodontid salamanders, these species are lungless and rely on their moist skin for respiration. They are thus restricted to moist environments and avoid conditions that risk their dehydration (Spotila 1972, Alvo and Bonin 2003). Dry conditions restrict activity and the animals' low metabolic rates, large energy stores, and resistance to starvation enable them to survive extended periods of time without food (Feder 1983, Feder and Londos 1984).

Both species are typically found along the edge of small woodland streams and in damp seepage areas where there is an abundance of logs, stones and leaf litter (Means 2005, Pauly and Watson 2005). They are nocturnal and remain under cover objects at the edges of streams and seeps during the day. Peak surface activity occurs an hour after sunset on warm, wet nights (Keen 1979, Holomuzki 1980). Adults and juveniles likely move short distances along stream channels where there is continual moisture. However, the Mountain Dusky Salamander is more terrestrial than the Northern Dusky Salamander and is known to venture 75 m away from streams (Organ 1961).

In the northern part of their ranges including New York (and likely Ontario), Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders mate during both autumn and spring (Bishop 1941, Petranka 1998). Courtship is lengthy and intricate, involving a spermatophore laid by the male that the female picks up for internal fertilization of the eggs. Grape-like egg clusters are attached to the undersides of logs or rocks, or deposited amid moss, clumps of leaf litter or organic debris, usually within a meter of a stream or seep (Bishop 1941, Krzysik 1980, Hom 1987). The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander lays clutches of one to two dozen eggs; the Northern Dusky Salamander lays clutches of two to three dozen eggs (Hall 1977, Petranka 1998, Means 2005, Pauly and Watson 2005). Females guard their eggs for the duration of the incubation period (Houck et al. 1985, Forester 1979). Eggs hatch in 6 to 10 weeks (Bishop 1941). Eggs laid in early spring hatch in early fall; eggs laid in the fall hatch the following spring (Bishop 1941, Keen and Orr 1980, Orr 1989).

Larvae inhabit slow moving streams and seeps, and shelter underneath rocks or other debris. Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander larvae may metamorphose into adult form in as little as a few weeks or may take up to eight months (Keen and Orr 1980). Northern Dusky Salamanders will remain larvae for eight months to a year (Means 2005). Sexual maturity in Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders is attained when they are about three years old (Hall 1977) and in Northern Dusky Salamanders at two years (Bishop 1941).

Adults and larvae of both species feed upon aquatic and terrestrial insects such as spiders, beetles, earthworms, snails, mites, aphids and insect larvae (Fitzpatrick 1973, Keen 1979, Petranka 1998). All life stages of dusky salamanders are preyed upon, principally by snakes, crayfish, aquatic insects, small mammals and birds (Bishop 1941, Hom 1988, Orr 1989, Whiteman and Wissinger 1991, Petranka 1998). Northern Dusky Salamanders are also known to prey upon smaller salamanders (Means 2005).

1.3 Distribution, Abundance and Population Trends

Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders extend from eastern Tennessee through the Appalachian Mountains and along the southern shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario to extreme southern Quebec. Northern Dusky Salamanders follow a similar, yet wider, distribution and range from South Carolina through much of the Northeast United States into southern Quebec. In Ontario, Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders are now known to occur at two localities in the Niagara Gorge, while Northern Dusky Salamanders are known only from a single population. All sites are located along the Niagara River, downstream from Niagara Falls, near Queenston (Figure 1). The closest Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander populations are separated by approximately four kilometres of Niagara River shoreline.

Dusky salamanders were first reported from Ontario in 1908 (Nash 1908), although a general area was not mentioned until Bishop (1941, 1943) reported dusky salamanders occurring in "Ontario opposite Buffalo, New York". In 1989, dusky salamanders were

discovered in two localities in the Niagara Gorge: the first locality was a stream in the Whirlpool area and the second was a stream just south of Queenston (Kamstra 1991). These sites were the first specific localities identified for dusky salamanders in Ontario and one specimen from each locality was collected for museum records (Kamstra 1991). Originally specimens from both localities were identified as Northern Dusky Salamanders. However, in 2004, local MNR staff suspected that the Queenston dusky salamanders were actually Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders based on physical appearance. Genetic analysis confirmed the salamander population to be Allegheny Mountain Dusky (Markle and Green 2005, 2006, Markle et al. 2006).

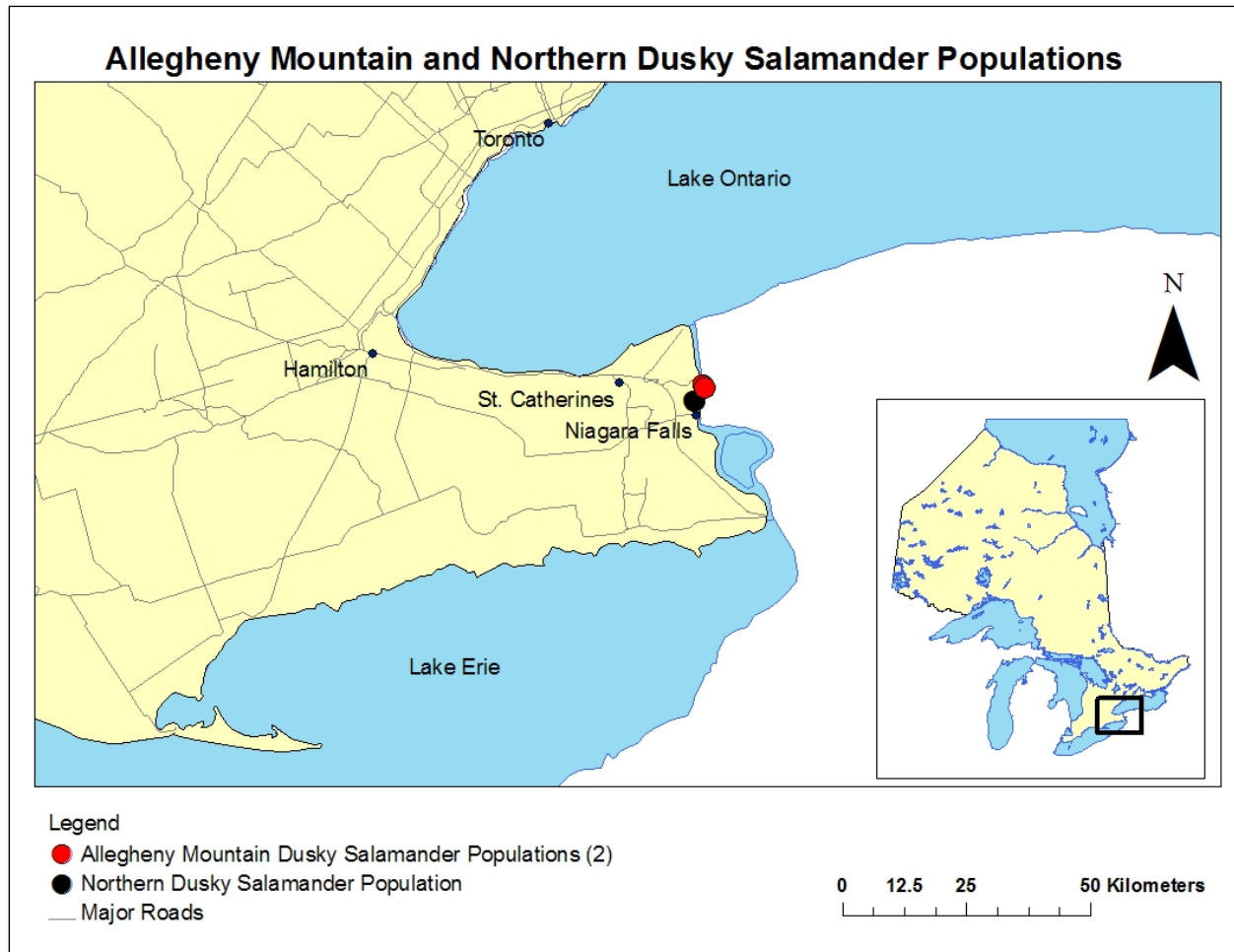


Figure 1. Distributions of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario. (Note that the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander populations are represented by two closely overlapping circles on the map.)

In the fall of 2010, partnership between staff of Ontario Power Generation (OPG), along with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' Niagara Area office, led to the discovery of a second site for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders in the Niagara Gorge (Weller 2010, 2011) bringing the total to two known populations of Allegheny Mountain

Dusky Salamanders in Ontario. The two populations are found half a kilometre apart southeast of the town of Queenston.

The single population of Northern Dusky Salamanders inhabits a steep bank in the vicinity of the Whirlpool, and is watered by eight or nine seeps that flow into the Niagara River. Surveys along the escarpment have failed to uncover any additional populations of Northern Dusky Salamanders, and the nearest known population is over 30 km away in New York State (Bonin 1999, Markle and Green 2005).

While there are no precise data on abundance or trends for either species in Ontario, as of 2012, 38 Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders have been observed in the Queenston population (COSEWIC 2007, A. R. Yagi, pers. comm. 2012, W. F. Weller, pers. comm. 2012) and a total of 17 individuals have been observed from the Smeaton Creek population (Weller 2010, 2011, W. F. Weller, pers. comm. 2012). For Northern Dusky Salamanders, a total of 79 individuals have been observed in the Whirlpool site since 2005 (A. R. Yagi, pers. comm. 2012). For both species, and in each population, three age-classes (including larvae, juveniles, and adults) have been found, along with eggs. Based on the information to date, it appears that all three populations are viable and self-sustaining.

1.4 Habitat Needs

Terrestrial Habitat

Throughout their ranges, Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders occur in a variety of aquatic or semiaquatic forested habitat, and are often found to be abundant in or about seeps, as well as along the margins of small streams (Petranka 1998, Means 2005, Pauly and Watson 2005). The forest canopy is critical in maintaining shady conditions, which protects against high temperatures and maintains humidity. Leaf litter, woody debris, rocks and naturally vegetated habitat between and adjacent to individual seeps and small streams are important for dispersal for both species. Cover objects such as logs, leaf litter, moss and rocks in these areas provide shelter and protection from predators and inclement weather. Adults of both species will actively defend space under cover objects from other salamanders (Petranka 1998). Dusky salamanders are nocturnal and remain under cover objects during the day, coming out at night to forage along seepage areas and streams, and across the forest floor. Adult salamanders of both species feed predominantly on terrestrial or semi-terrestrial invertebrates (Petranka 1998).

Moist retreats also offer the ideal habitat to lay eggs, and nests are often found under rocks in seepage banks, or in mud crevices beneath logs or moss (Jones 1986, Petranka 1998). Females of both species are known to remain with their eggs to defend them and will greatly reduce foraging during this time (Fitzpatrick 1973, Montague and Poiniski 1978).

The average home range for an Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is likely less than one square metre (Petranka 1998). Some individuals in the United States, however, are known to venture up to 75 m from water (Organ 1961), and during optimal conditions may venture much further. Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders in general are found to be more terrestrial than Northern Dusky Salamanders and are often found some distance from permanent seeps or streams (Organ 1961). For Northern Dusky Salamanders, home ranges are estimated to remain within 15 m of a stream, with a maximum home range recorded at 114 m² (Hom 1987, Petranka 1998). However, during cool and wet periods dusky salamanders can likely travel large distances between seepage areas.

Aquatic Habitat

Once larvae emerge from eggs they live in seepages, sluggish portions of streams, or in wet cavities along the stream edge until they transform into adults (Petranka 1998). During this time they feed on small invertebrates. Seasonal factors such as moisture, levels of seeps and time of year that the eggs are laid may influence the length of the larval period and whether or not they overwinter as larvae.

Winter Retreats

These salamanders are active on the ground surface at all times of year except during the coldest winter months. During the colder months, salamanders overwinter in subsurface cavities, burrows, fissures and seepages, to depths of 90 cm or more, where they can avoid freezing temperatures and remain moist (Bishop 1941, Organ 1961). Often adults and juveniles are found to congregate together in these retreats (Petranka 1998). Northern Dusky salamanders are found to move 12 to 25 cm below ground when temperatures drop below 7°C (Ashton 1975).

Indirect Habitat

As both species require access to cool, highly oxygenated, first-order forested streams or seeps, they are thus highly dependent upon specific hydrological conditions that ensure a constant supply of groundwater to the source springs. As a result, indirect habitat includes the source water of streams and seeps that is so critical to their survival.

1.5 Limiting Factors

The principle limiting factor for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario is their extremely limited range. Each species is known only from one or two localities of very limited extent. They are constrained to these sites by highly specific requirements for a stream habitat that is rare within southern Ontario. The limited distribution of suitable sites in the Niagara region restricts the salamanders to the Niagara Gorge and curtails their capability for dispersal (Oldham 2006). There is no possibility for a rescue effect via immigration from populations in New York because none are nearby and the Niagara River is an effective barrier to dispersal.

Nevertheless, because the Ontario populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders are isolated from each other by inhospitable terrain, it is unlikely that hybridization or competition between the species will occur, such as has been documented where they co-occur on Covey Hill in Quebec (Sharbel et al. 1995, Boutin 2006). However, hybridization and competition between the species is likely to occur if the species are transplanted to, or invade, each other's habitats. The larger, more aggressive Northern Dusky Salamander is an important competitor of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders where the species are found to occur together. Northern Dusky Salamanders are found to be capable of driving Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders away from preferred habitat closer to the streamside (Krzysik 1979, Grover and Wilbur 2002, Boutin 2006). Thus, in the presence of Northern Dusky Salamanders, Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders preferentially occupy drier microhabitats on finer substrates farther from the water's edge (Tilley 1997, Petranka and Smith 2005, Boutin 2006). At the same time, because Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders have higher tolerances for a wider range of ecological conditions than do Northern Dusky Salamanders (Tilley 1970, Grover 2000), they are able to survive well in such habitats.

1.6 Threats to Survival and Recovery

As both the Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders have very similar biology, and because they occupy similar habitats and are separated by roughly four kilometres of river bank, the threats to their survival and recovery are virtually identical. Due to their extremely small range sizes in Ontario, both species are highly susceptible to habitat change. The current habitat is so limited that any degradation is likely to compromise the long-term survival of these salamanders in Ontario.

Disruption or Contamination of Groundwater

Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario utterly depend upon the groundwater discharge that feeds the streams and seeps in which they dwell. Any diminution, curtailment or interruption of the groundwater is a serious threat to the continuing existence of these salamanders. Lowering of groundwater and decreased dissolved oxygen concentrations have been linked to declines in other species of stream salamanders (Bowles and Arsuffi 1993, Turner 2004). Contamination of the surface water that maintains this hydrological system would likewise have potentially catastrophic effect upon the animals. Northern Dusky Salamander larvae have been shown to be sensitive to stream pollution and siltation, and densities are found to be inversely proportional to the degree of stream disturbance associated with urbanization (Petranka 1998). Population declines are generally attributed to siltation or loss of ground cover, although potential contaminants could include storm runoff from industrial and urban areas or herbicides and pesticides applied in the catchment areas of these streams. In addition, there is potential for groundwater feeding the seeps and streams to be redirected, decreased, or cut off as a result of large developments in the area and water flow should be monitored accordingly.

Erosion

Landslides or mudslides in the Niagara Gorge that in any way affect the salamanders' seep and stream-side habitats would be considered severe threats. At the top of the slope, uncontrolled stormwater flows from roadways, parking lots or other cleared areas have been discharged over the bank and have been known to trigger mudslides within the Gorge and erode trails (MNR staff D. Mills and A. R. Yagi, pers. comm. 2012).

Deforestation

Clearing of the forested canopy above the streams or seeps used by the salamanders would be a serious threat to these species by causing changes to the thermal regime and quality of subterranean refugia. Fortunately, the entire extent of significant habitat for these species is owned and managed by the Niagara Parks Commission (NPC), an important stakeholder in the overall recovery of these species. For that reason tree removal is unlikely, but remains a potential threat if it were to occur accidentally or through a natural event such as a mudslide. The newly discovered population of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders at Smeaton Creek occur on NPC land that is currently being leased to OPG. Communication between stakeholders regarding land use and potential impacts on salamanders and their habitat is therefore critical.

Habitat Degradation

Although salamanders are located in steep and normally inaccessible areas within the Niagara Gorge, the streams and seeps where these salamanders live are often explored by hikers who venture off the maintained trail (A. R. Yagi, pers. comm. 2012). This can stir up the stream bed, trample vegetation and increase erosion. Litter originating from the maintained trail may also contaminate the area.

Further, the invasive strain of the European Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) has moved into the more gently sloping sections of the stream beds and is eliminating some potential habitat used by the salamanders wherever it is able to grow into thick stands. Research needs to be done to examine the potential impact of this plant on dusky salamanders and habitat, and what the most effective methods of removal may be.

Inbreeding

The genetic health of all three known populations of dusky salamanders in Ontario should be determined and monitored. As the Niagara River is considered a major barrier to dispersal for these salamanders, the Ontario populations are considered to be small population isolates that have no way of receiving gene flow from the nearest populations in New York State. Ontario Dusky Salamander populations are anticipated to be relatively small based on numbers detected to date and on the areas known to be occupied. Further, genetic studies across the northern range of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders have found that genetic variability is already very low, likely as a result of rapid population expansion since the last glacial cycle (Tilley and Mahoney 1996). As very small populations may be vulnerable to detrimental effects of inbreeding such as genetic defects and lower reproductive success (Hedrick and Kalinowski 2000), it would be prudent to determine whether inbreeding appears to be a problem, and if so

to consider introductions of individuals from New York to maintain the long-term health of the populations.

Population Loss

As the entire range of each species in Ontario is extremely limited, there is much concern that a single stochastic event (such as a landslide) could wipe out a whole population of either species at any given time. Further, groundwater levels and seepage outputs are susceptible to change as the result of human activity, especially near urban and industrial areas where these salamanders are found. A major spill of contaminants, which gets into the seepage surface water, would also likely be detrimental to these populations. For Northern Dusky Salamanders in particular, there may be little opportunity for dispersal to other suitable habitats. To safeguard against major losses to either of these species, measures should be taken to expand the known ranges of each species by locating new populations (if they exist) and creating or finding additional suitable habitat for introductions where appropriate.

Collection by People for the Pet Trade

While unlikely, there is some concern that salamanders could be taken from the Niagara Gorge and used in the pet trade. As populations are believed to be very low in numbers, removal of any numbers and of any age classes could have large impacts. Public education materials may help to convince park visitors of the special circumstances, and regulations, surrounding these populations, and the importance of leaving the habitat and populations intact.

1.7 Knowledge Gaps

The hydrology of the groundwater springs that feed the streams in which these salamanders live needs to be better understood. The extent of the groundwater recharge area is not fully known, and the results of a study investigating groundwater flows to the seeps and their relationship with surface water would be helpful. The salamanders are utterly dependent upon these sources of water, and the hydrology of the area needs to be thoroughly examined to ensure continued water quantity and quality. Aspects of water quality such as mineral content, pH, dissolved oxygen and contaminant load need to be ascertained so that changes that could affect the salamanders may be detected. While the extent of the groundwater recharge area, which contributes to the dusky streams, is not fully known, it likely includes the tableland area immediately west of the Niagara River Gorge and extending from the Niagara Escarpment south to the Whirlpool.

There is almost no demographic information on the populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario. Population sizes are not known, nor how much they fluctuate in size over time. Demographic characteristics such as mortality rates, growth rates and reproductive success are likewise unknown, as is information on dispersal potential and genetic diversity. This lack of information is in part because they have only recently been discovered and identified, and is also due

to the difficulty in safely accessing much of the habitat. However, considering the extremely limited extent of habitats they occupy, these salamanders are undoubtedly few in numbers and genetically impoverished. Since the significant threats to the welfare and recovery of these species are all related to habitat, gaps in the understanding of these species' population ecologies should not limit the ability to adequately define recovery goals, objectives, or approaches for these species, nor to recommend the habitats that should be considered for regulation.

1.8 Recovery Actions Completed or Underway

Following the discovery of populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario, a provincial recovery team was established and identified the recovery goals detailed in this recovery strategy. The recovery team has produced educational and promotional materials on the salamanders, including stickers, magnets, shopping bags and a stewardship guide (Yagi et al. 2010). The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources has completed some on-the-ground habitat enhancement work, particularly for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander population, including cedar planting, removal of European Common Reed and corridor planting.

Areas of significant habitat have been mapped and described in detail for the Queenston site (Yagi and Tervo 2008a) and for the Whirlpool site (Yagi and Tervo 2008b). However, the Smeaton Creek site has not yet been mapped to reflect areas of significant habitat. Work is underway in conjunction with OPG to trace the origins of the groundwater springs (W. F. Weller, pers. comm. 2012). Some protection is afforded to the salamander populations because the Niagara Parks Commission manages all of the territory occupied at these sites. Further, both the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and the Northern Dusky Salamander are provincially listed in Ontario as endangered under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (Ontario Regulation 230/08). In addition, the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is a federally endangered species listed on Schedule 1 of the Species at Risk Act (SARA). The Northern Dusky Salamander is not listed under SARA, although a COSEWIC status report update is in preparation.

2.0 RECOVERY

2.1 Recovery Goal

The recovery goal is to safeguard the existing known populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamander species, and if feasible, introduce each species to unoccupied habitat within the Niagara Gorge that is either created or found to be suitable with the aim of increasing known population sizes by 50 percent.

2.2 Protection and Recovery Objectives

Table 1. Protection and recovery objectives

No.	Protection or Recovery Objective
1	Protect and enhance existing significant habitat for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario.
2	Conduct a thorough population study, and if necessary maintain the genetic health of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander populations in Ontario.
3	Locate additional populations, and expand the current ranges of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders through introductions where appropriate.
4	Elicit public support and collaboration in the protection and recovery of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario.

2.3 Approaches to Recovery

Table 2. Approaches to recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario

Relative Priority	Relative Timeframe	Recovery Theme	Approach to Recovery	Threats or Knowledge Gaps Addressed
1. Protect and enhance existing significant habitat for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario.				
Critical	Short-Term	Research – Potential Threats	1.1 Identify extent of groundwater recharge area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption of groundwater • Poor understanding of hydrology and groundwater recharge area
Critical	Short-Term	Research – Potential Threats	1.2 Measure flows of seeps and streams occupied by dusky salamanders to determine seasonal and yearly averages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption of groundwater • Poor understanding of hydrology and groundwater recharge area
Critical	Long-Term	Protection	1.3 Have source water protection (both surface and ground water) for land in the upgradient tableland areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption of groundwater • Poor understanding of hydrology and groundwater recharge area
Necessary	Long-term	Management	1.4 Ensure that all development activities on adjacent land that may involve contaminating or lowering of the groundwater table are monitored for groundwater impacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption or contamination of groundwater

Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and the Northern Dusky Salamander in Ontario

Relative Priority	Relative Timeframe	Recovery Theme	Approach to Recovery	Threats or Knowledge Gaps Addressed
Necessary	Long-Term	Management and Monitoring	1.5 Control quantity and quality of stormwater discharge from adjacent land including industrial, recreational and urban areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eliminate the application of herbicides and pesticides in the vicinity of seeps; monitor stormwater quality for pollutants; develop an emergency spills action plan for the area; create wetland areas to capture and slow down stormwater run-off; plant native trees to stabilize the slope. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disruption or contamination of groundwater Erosion
Beneficial	Ongoing	Management and Monitoring	1.6 Monitor erosion rates on the hillsides where salamanders are found for indications of slope instability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erosion
Beneficial	Ongoing	Management and Monitoring	1.7 Ensure that forest canopy remains intact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deforestation
Beneficial	Ongoing	Research and Stewardship	1.8 Discourage park visitors from off-trail hiking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat degradation
Beneficial	Ongoing	Research and Stewardship	1.9 Investigate and implement best management practices for removal of European Common Reed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat degradation
2. Conduct a thorough population study, and if necessary maintain the genetic health of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander populations in Ontario.				
Critical	Short-term	Research – Populations	2.1 Conduct a thorough population study to determine more accurate population size and trends for each species in Ontario: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> may involve mark-recapture fieldwork and/or genetic analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inbreeding Lack of demographic information
Necessary	Long-term	Monitoring and Assessment	2.2 Monitor genetic health of populations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> check for inbreeding with genetic analysis every 25 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inbreeding

Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and the Northern Dusky Salamander in Ontario

Relative Priority	Relative Timeframe	Recovery Theme	Approach to Recovery	Threats or Knowledge Gaps Addressed
Necessary	Short-term	Research and Management	2.3 If inbreeding appears to be a concern, look into the feasibility of salamander introductions from New York State, which is the nearest population source.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inbreeding
3. Locate additional populations, and expand the current ranges of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders through introductions where appropriate.				
Critical	Short-term	Research and Management	3.1 Search suitable/accessible habitat in Niagara Gorge for any additional populations of dusky salamanders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population Loss • Lack of demographic information
Necessary	Short-term	Research and Management	3.2 Research the probability of success if individuals are translocated from sites outside of Ontario to suitable unoccupied habitats: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • determine likelihood of survival; • establish what numbers would be needed for a successful introduction and if they can be moved; • research other potential barriers to introductions; • identify areas with no obvious impediments to re-establishment; • investigate potential habitat along the Niagara Escarpment and Fonthill Kame Moraine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population Loss
Beneficial	Long-term	Management	3.3 If potential habitat is found (and successful introduction seems likely), pilot an introduction project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population Loss

Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and the Northern Dusky Salamander in Ontario

Relative Priority	Relative Timeframe	Recovery Theme	Approach to Recovery	Threats or Knowledge Gaps Addressed
4. Elicit public support and collaboration in the protection and recovery of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario.				
Beneficial	Ongoing	Education and Outreach	4.1 Prepare educational materials such as pamphlets to inform park visitors about the endangered status of these salamanders and the need to not disturb them or their habitat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat degradation and salamander loss • Collection by people for pet trade

Narrative to Support Recovery Objectives and Approaches

The first objective for recovery is to protect, conserve and enhance the current habitats where Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders are found. Although habitat protection is already afforded through the Niagara Parks Commission, this does not guarantee that water feeding the streams and seeps inhabited by the salamanders will remain of high quality and quantity. For that reason the most critical approach to the recovery includes management of the supporting groundwater recharge and discharge areas to ensure that water quality and quantity are maintained. Monitoring and regulation of surface water is also needed to control potentially toxic discharges from industrial, recreational and urban areas in adjacent lands, as well as to mitigate high stormwater discharge that can lead to mudslides.

A second major objective for recovery is research to determine the actual size of each population in the Niagara Gorge and to better understand population trends for improved management. Maintaining the genetic health of the existing populations is also critical, as inbreeding depression can lead to reduced reproductive success.

The third objective is to locate new, potentially suitable habitat for the salamanders and determine the feasibility of expanding existing Ontario populations. Habitat along the Niagara Escarpment and the Fonthill Kame Moraine would have been connected to the Niagara Gorge in the past, and may offer potential habitat suitable for introductions. There is also some potential that additional populations of dusky salamanders may naturally occur at these locations. Suitable habitat may also be created in adjacent sites by adding cover objects, removing invasive plants and increasing moist areas where feasible. Because the known populations are so highly localized, a single catastrophic erosion event could wipe out an entire seepage area inhabited by these salamanders and thus extirpate the species in Ontario.

The fourth objective is public education and the engendering of good stewardship, which will be imperative for the long-term survival of these populations. The public needs to be aware that the Niagara Gorge is important habitat for these two species, and that activities such as off-trail hiking or collection of salamanders as pets may be detrimental to their continued survival. Consideration should be given to joining public education efforts toward dusky salamander conservation and protection with that of other wildlife species in the Niagara Gorge that share similar habitats and needs.

Supporting Narrative for Recovery Approaches 1.1 to 1.9:

One of the major priorities for the long-term recovery of these species is to ensure that groundwater quantity and quality is maintained. Current groundwater levels are adequate for the survival of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in the Niagara Gorge. However, any development on adjacent land that could change the hydrology, either increasing or decreasing peak flows and discharge volumes, increasing turbidity or sedimentation, or increasing water temperature, could spell disaster for dusky salamander populations and should be subject to assessment and monitoring. The extent of the groundwater recharge area is not fully known and needs to be thoroughly examined to ensure water quantity and

quality. Contaminated surface water could potentially infiltrate into the groundwater table within the Lockport formation. Alteration of water chemistry by the application of fertilizers or herbicides, increasing turbidity or dissolved solids and changing the temperature or pH could disrupt levels of dissolved oxygen and nutrients critical to the maintenance of salamander habitat. While the full extent of source waters remain unknown, it likely includes the tableland area immediately west of the Niagara River Gorge and from the Niagara Escarpment south to the Whirlpool.

Stormwater discharges from adjacent lands can also have catastrophic impacts on the salamander populations, both in the quality and quantity of water. Increases in erosion rates along the slope due to stormwater discharges may increase the instability of the slope. Resulting mudslides have the potential to decimate entire populations. While habitat stewardship activities have focused on replanting the mudslide areas in the short-term, wetland creation to capture and slow down the storm run-off discharges in the tablelands would be a long-term solution. Furthermore, contaminants such as herbicides, pesticides, oil, dangerous goods, and other pollutants can kill salamanders directly or make them more susceptible to disease by weakening their immune systems. As these salamanders are restricted to moist environments, and their larvae live within the seepages, groundwater pollution can have a catastrophic impact. Finally, an emergency spills action plan for this area would be valuable.

Deforestation is a threat to all forest-dwelling salamanders. However, it is not likely a serious threat for the Ontario populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders which reside in lands that are owned and managed by the Niagara Parks Commission (Yagi and Tervo 2008a,b).

The invasive strain of the European Common Reed now grows in thick stands at the base of the slope in the Niagara Gorge. It acts to further stabilize the slope but also eliminates habitat use by dusky salamanders (Yagi and Tervo 2008a). Mechanical removal is necessary to control its spread; however, the long-term benefit of this approach has not yet been assessed. The removal of trees and shrubs in an area can lead to soil erosion, increased sedimentation in streams, changes in light intensity and temperature, changes in prey availability and modification or loss of habitat. This being the case, it is important to investigate and implement the best management practices for removal of European Common Reed.

Supporting Narrative for Recovery Approaches 2.1 to 2.3:

To better understand the management needs of these salamander populations, it is critical to determine current population sizes and trends for both species. Appropriate recovery actions may differ depending upon whether populations are increasing, decreasing or remaining constant.

Small populations are prone to inbreeding. This may become a concern with these populations over time, as natural migration across the Niagara River is virtually impossible, and dusky salamanders are not known to inhabit the opposite shore at this time. As inbreeding may result in decreased breeding success and other genetic

defects, it is recommended to check on the genetic health of Ontario dusky salamander populations at regular intervals. If found to be necessary, and introductions are deemed feasible, genetic rescue could be arranged. As genetically similar salamanders are known to inhabit adjacent New York State (Markle and Green 2005), there is potential that introduction of small numbers from New York into the Niagara Gorge populations could alleviate inbreeding effects.

Supporting Narrative for Recovery Approaches 3.1 to 3.3:

Stochastic events, such as major mudslides, could wipe out entire salamander populations within the Niagara Gorge. Therefore, it is critical to determine whether there is suitable habitat available for dusky salamander on adjacent land that will support introductions. Dispersal by salamanders out of the Niagara Gorge is presently unlikely as they are hemmed in by the Niagara Parkway at the top and the Niagara River on the bottom, yet it is possible that there were migration corridors between the Niagara Gorge and the Niagara Escarpment in the past. Suitable habitat may still exist along the Niagara Escarpment or the Fonthill Kame Moraine. If potential habitat is found, the feasibility of introductions should be considered.

If feasible and realistic within the habitat available, the recovery goal is to increase known populations of each species by 50%. As a new population was recently discovered, and potentially suitable (yet very difficult to access) salamander habitat remains to be surveyed, there is a good possibility that additional populations of both species may occur in the Niagara Gorge. Within the gorge there is plenty of suitable forest habitat; however, the limiting factor appears to be an abundance of quality seeps. Some habitat might be modified slightly to be more appealing to dusky salamanders, thereby encouraging additional populations where suitable. For instance, niche quality can be improved through adding cover objects (a potential limiting factor for abundance), along with the removal of invasive plant species where they are affecting natural groundcover or forest canopy. In addition, there may be some potential to increase available seep habitat and moist areas in the talus slope by re-routing the portion of groundwater not currently being used by salamanders to suitable but unoccupied areas. This goal is ambitious, and while work would need to be done to examine the feasibility of creating/modifying habitat and introducing species, it could be an important step in safeguarding the populations of these species in Ontario. Finally, improving the habitat between the two Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander populations could aid in dispersal and gene flow between the two sites.

Supporting Narrative for Recovery Approaches 4.1 and 4.2:

Although located in a steep and normally inaccessible area, streams and seeps in the Niagara Gorge are often explored by hikers who venture off the maintained trail. Litter from trail users is spread throughout the area. In addition, there may be potential for some salamanders to be collected by people for the pet trade. The human impact on these populations and how to mitigate this impact needs to be better understood, however, controlling human access to the habitats supporting dusky salamanders and educating trail users and visitors to the Niagara Gorge would likely help limit potential

damage. Discouraging human access off trail would not only be directly beneficial to the salamanders but could help to reduce erosion on the slopes as well.

2.4 Performance Measures

As dusky salamanders are nocturnal, elusive and liable to occupy habitat that is very difficult to access, obtaining reasonable estimates of population size for Ontario is difficult. It is likely that population estimates will require long-term and consistent monitoring including consecutive years of monthly surveys. Salamanders are expected to recover fairly quickly where optimal habitat is made available. Successful recovery will require both an increase in suitable habitat and an increase in abundance for both Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders. As information is added through research and monitoring, it is recommended that recovery approaches be adjusted to ensure effectiveness.

Performance measures for each objective include:

Protect and enhance existing significant habitat for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario.

- Extent of the groundwater recharge area identified.
- Flows of seeps and streams occupied by salamanders measured to determine seasonal and yearly averages.
- Major projects or developments on the tablelands that could impact groundwater quantity or quality at salamander sites monitored.
- Emergency spills action plan developed.
- Program in place to annually monitor water quality and detect pollutants at salamander sites.
- Program in place to monitor erosion rates at base of Niagara River Shoreline.
- Invasive plants within/near salamander habitat removed as appropriate.

Conduct a thorough population study, and if necessary maintain the genetic health of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander populations in Ontario.

- Population sizes, trends and demographics assessed for both species.
- Genetic health of each population quantified.
- Nearest source populations of each species identified in New York for potential introduction if inbreeding appears to be of concern.

Locate additional populations and expand the current ranges of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders through introductions where appropriate.

- All other accessible suitable habitat within the Niagara Gorge and Niagara Escarpment surveyed for additional populations of dusky salamanders.
- Potential habitat for introductions within Niagara Gorge or Niagara Escarpment identified.

- Increased quality of adjacent suitable habitat so that populations of each species in Ontario have the potential to increase by a minimum of 50%.

Elicit public support and collaboration in the protection and recovery of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders and Northern Dusky Salamanders in Ontario.

- Education tools (pamphlets, magnets, etc.) developed and distributed to Niagara Gorge visitors to provide awareness of the impact of off-trail actions on salamander habitat.
- Outreach projects to encourage stewardship and involve stakeholders on adjacent lands above the Gorge initiated.

2.5 Area for Consideration in Developing a Habitat Regulation

Under the ESA, a recovery strategy must include a recommendation to the Minister of Natural Resources on the area that should be considered in developing a habitat regulation. A habitat regulation is a legal instrument that prescribes an area that will be protected as the habitat of the species. The recommendation provided below by the author will be one of many sources considered by the Minister when developing the habitat regulation for this species.

All populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky and Northern Dusky Salamanders in the Niagara Gorge occupy forested areas with groundwater discharges. While their habitat requirements are virtually the same, Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders are slightly more terrestrial and may inhabit semi-permanent streams or seeps, whereas Northern Dusky Salamanders are nearly always located in permanent streams or seeps. Preservation of these moist areas within a forested habitat is essential.

All three known populations of dusky salamanders in Ontario are completely dependent on the continuing existence of the seeps and streams emanating from rock layers on the sides of the Niagara Gorge. Any regulation concerning the areas presently occupied by the salamanders would become irrelevant if the springs and the ground water flow that feeds them were to become contaminated or disrupted. Thus the adjacent land above the Gorge that serves as the catchment basin for these springs should also be considered if the long-term survival of these salamander populations is to be ensured.

Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander

Direct Habitat

The two localities inhabited by Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders are found on the west bank of the Niagara Gorge near Queenston. Each consists of a single, permanent groundwater discharge stream running down a very steep gradient through mixed deciduous forest (Yagi and Tervo 2008a, Weller 2010, 2011). The origin of both cascades is groundwater, which seeps out from rock layers at an elevation below the tableland. As all life stages of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander depend to

some extent on permanent streams or seeps and on rocky habitat, it is recommended that these stream areas be included in a habitat regulation.

Forested areas include the subterranean frost-free environment, soil, wet cavities along stream edges, vegetation, canopy cover, rocks, leaf litter and logs surrounding seep areas. This habitat provides shelter and food resources, and is critical to the survival and recovery of the species. Although the movements of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders in these populations are not well known, in other parts of its range individuals have been found up to 75 m from water (Organ 1961). For this reason, dispersal habitat for Ontario populations should include the forest floor extending to 75 m from the edges of a stream or associated seep occupied by these salamanders. Consequently, it is recommended that the entire extent of the two groundwater discharge streams and a 75 metre zone of forested land on both sides of each stream be included in the habitat regulation. Therefore, total direct habitat recommended for regulation of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders at the Queenston site is 1.98 ha, and for the Smeaton Creek population, 2.54 ha.

Finally, as two populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders (roughly half a kilometre apart) are now known in the Niagara Gorge, it is recommended that the area between the two localities be included in the habitat regulation as a dispersal corridor. While direct dispersal is not expected to occur frequently, it may be possible for salamanders to cross such distances over time in ideal cool/moist conditions. Gene flow between the sites would help to mitigate potential impacts of inbreeding that could occur in small isolated populations. The corridor habitat makes up an additional 4.2 ha of direct habitat, providing a total of 8.72 ha (the two sites plus the corridor) recommended for direct habitat regulation for the species.

Indirect Habitat

Populations of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamanders in the Niagara Gorge rely on the groundwater seepage streams during all life stages. Any decrease, curtailment or interruption of the ground water is likely to be detrimental to salamander recovery. Further, studies have demonstrated that siltation and urban impacts can decrease water quality and reduce dusky salamander populations. As a result, protection of groundwater quantity and quality needs to be considered in a habitat regulation for the long-term survival of this species in Ontario.

A study is in progress to determine the relationship between the water level in the Sir Adam Beck complex reservoir and stream flow at the Smeaton Creek site, Queenston site and Whirlpool site. The results of this study should be incorporated into follow-up documentation related to this recovery strategy. Although the full extent of the groundwater recharge area has yet to be determined with the appropriate hydrological studies, the Sir Adam Beck reservoir operates within the elevation of groundwater discharge areas and may play a role in maintaining a hydraulic gradient toward the seepage area of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander populations. In late 2011, OPG lowered water in the reservoir to zero as part of an initiative to investigate future re-lining the reservoir to prevent leakage. During this time, it was observed that flow to

Smeaton Creek was dramatically reduced (A. R. Yagi, pers. comm. 2012). While a detailed analysis is needed to explicitly make the connection between the reservoir and stream or seepage flow, there is potential for the reservoir to be contributing a large amount of the flow to Smeaton Creek, and perhaps some to the Queenston Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander population as well.

It is therefore recommended that indirect habitat regulation include the groundwater recharge area and surface water catchment that feeds the source springs of both Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander populations. While detailed hydrological studies will provide a better sense of the extent of this area, a rough estimate includes some 700 ha of tableland and adjacent lands (Yagi and Tervo 2008a).

Northern Dusky Salamander

Direct Habitat

Although movements of Northern Dusky Salamanders in this population are not well understood, the average home range of individuals in USA populations is estimated to extend not further than 15 m from a stream or seep (Petranka 1998). Streams and seeps are critical habitat for larvae to develop and provide year-round essential moisture for adults. For this reason, it is recommended that all of the permanent or semi-permanent groundwater seeps within the currently occupied range of Northern Dusky Salamanders at the Whirlpool site be included in a habitat regulation.

Terrestrial forested habitat is important as a foraging area for adult salamanders. While under most conditions Northern Dusky Salamanders will remain near a permanent source of water, under ideal conditions (wet/cool nights) it is likely that they will disperse much further into the forest habitat to search for food or mates. Seepage areas occupied by Northern Dusky Salamanders at the Whirlpool site are quite dynamic in terms of flow, and can vary greatly from year to year depending on amounts of rainfall. Seasonality is also likely to influence seepage flow, although seasonal aspects of the Whirlpool seepage flows have not been determined. During periods of heavy rainfall seepage flow increases, saturating forest floor and increasing seepage areas. Such events can dramatically increase the available terrestrial habitat accessible to these salamanders. Because of the dynamic nature of the seeps at this site, a 75 m area extending from all permanent and semi-permanent seeps is proposed as a precautionary minimum for direct habitat protection. This will help to ensure that we capture all of the hydrologic function of this site and enable dispersal between the many seepage areas. Further, it provides enough habitat protection to allow for some changes to seepage flow over time. The total direct habitat recommended for regulation for the Northern Dusky Salamander is 3.36 ha.

Indirect Habitat

While we still do not fully understand the extent of the groundwater recharge area, it is evident that shallow groundwater seeping into the gorge is the predominant source of essential moisture for these salamander populations. Therefore it is highly recommended that some level of source water protection (both surface and groundwater) be provided for land in the up-gradient tableland areas. The groundwater

source is believed to originate in the Lockport rock formation. While the full extent of this area has not yet been determined (Yagi and Tervo 2008b), approximately 550 ha of tableland and adjacent lands are likely involved. This includes lands immediately west of the Niagara River Gorge and extending from the Niagara Escarpment to the Whirlpool. The maintenance of the groundwater discharge is essential to the long-term survival of all dusky salamander populations in Ontario. As a result, major projects on the tableland that have the potential to affect groundwater quality and quantity need to be thoroughly assessed and monitored once initiated.

Other considerations

The populations of both dusky salamander species in the Niagara Gorge are recent discoveries made as the result of intensive off-trail surveys in steep and treacherous terrain. It is quite possible that additional populations of both dusky salamanders may exist in the province. Areas of potential salamander habitat need to be searched extensively wherever possible and any new areas where dusky salamanders are found need to be quickly added to an area of habitat regulation. Further, where suitable habitats are available (or where available habitats can be made suitable), introductions should be considered and habitat regulation extended to include habitat at introduction sites.

GLOSSARY

Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): The committee responsible for assessing and classifying species at risk in Canada.

Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO): The committee established under section 3 of the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* that is responsible for assessing and classifying species at risk in Ontario.

Conservation status rank: A rank assigned to a species or ecological community that primarily conveys the degree of rarity of the species or community at the global (G), national (N) or subnational (S) level. These ranks, termed G-rank, N-rank and S-rank, are not legal designations. The conservation status of a species or ecosystem is designated by a number from 1 to 5, preceded by the letter G, N or S reflecting the appropriate geographic scale of the assessment. The numbers mean the following:

- 1 = critically imperilled
- 2 = imperilled
- 3 = vulnerable
- 4 = apparently secure
- 5 = secure

Costal grooves: A set of parallel, vertical grooves between the ribs on the sides of some salamanders, newts and their larvae.

Cross-section: A surface or shape that is or would be exposed by making a straight cut through something, especially at right angles to an axis.

Dorsal: Relating to the upper side or back of an animal.

Endangered Species Act, 2007 (ESA): The provincial legislation that provides protection to species at risk in Ontario.

First-order stream: A stream that has no permanent or semi-permanent tributaries feeding into it.

Hybridization: the act of mixing different species or varieties of animals or plants, thus producing hybrids.

Keeled: A flattened, ridge-like part.

Plethodontid: Lungless salamanders from the family Plethodontidae.

Refugia: An area in which organisms can survive through a period of unfavourable conditions.

Seep: Flow or leak slowly through porous material or small holes.

Species at Risk Act (SARA): The federal legislation that provides protection to species at risk in Canada. This act establishes Schedule 1 as the legal list of wildlife species at risk to which the SARA provisions apply. Schedules 2 and 3 contain lists of species that at the time the Act came into force needed to be reassessed. After species on Schedule 2 and 3 are reassessed and found to be at risk, they undergo the SARA listing process to be included in Schedule 1.

Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) List: The regulation made under section 7 of the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* that provides the official status classification of species at risk in Ontario. This list was first published in 2004 as a policy and became a regulation in 2008.

Spermatophore: A cone-shaped jellylike mass topped with a sperm cap, deposited by male salamanders during courtship.

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**Part 3 – *Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and
Northern Dusky Salamander* – Ontario Government
Response Statement, prepared by the Ontario Ministry of
Natural Resources**

Ministry of Natural Resources

Natural. Valued. Protected.

Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander

Ontario Government Response Statement



PROTECTING AND RECOVERING SPECIES AT RISK IN ONTARIO

Species at risk recovery is a key part of protecting Ontario's biodiversity. Biodiversity – the variety of living organisms on Earth – provides us with clean air and water, food, fibre, medicine and other resources that we need to survive.

The *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) is the Government of Ontario's legislative commitment to protecting and recovering species at risk and their habitats. As soon as a species is listed as extirpated, endangered or threatened under the ESA, it is automatically protected from harm or harassment. Also, immediately upon listing, the habitats of endangered and threatened species are protected from damage or destruction.

Under the ESA, the Ministry of Natural Resources (the Ministry) must ensure that a recovery strategy is prepared for each species that is listed as endangered or threatened. A recovery strategy provides science-based advice to government on what is required to achieve recovery of a species.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STATEMENTS

Within nine months after a recovery strategy is prepared, the ESA requires the Ministry to publish a statement summarizing the government's intended actions and priorities in response to the recovery strategy. The recovery strategy for Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) and Northern Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus fuscus*) was completed on January 11, 2013 (http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/stdprodconsume/groups/lr/@mnr/@species/documents/document/stdprod_099152.pdf).

The response statement is the government's policy response to the scientific advice provided in the recovery strategy. All recommendations provided in the recovery strategy were considered and this response statement identifies those that are considered to be appropriate and necessary for the protection and recovery of the species. In addition to the

Dusky salamanders are greyish-brown in colour and slender in shape with long tails and hind legs that are larger than their front legs. The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander ranges from 70 to 110 mm in length with a bright yellow to red-coloured dorsal stripe running along it, and a dark brown or black underside. The Northern Dusky Salamander ranges from 60 to 140 mm in length with a uniformly tan or brown dorsal stripe, and a cream-coloured underside.

strategy, the response statement is based on input from stakeholders, other jurisdictions, Aboriginal communities and members of the public. It reflects the best available traditional, local and scientific knowledge at this time and may be adapted if new information becomes available. In implementing the actions in the response statement, the ESA allows the Ministry to determine what is feasible, taking into account social and economic factors.

MOVING FORWARD TO PROTECT AND RECOVER ALLEGHENY MOUNTAIN DUSKY SALAMANDER AND NORTHERN DUSKY SALAMANDER

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander are listed as endangered species under the ESA, which protects both the animals and their habitat. The ESA prohibits harm or harassment of both species and damage or destruction of their habitat without authorization. Authorization would require that conditions established by the Ministry be met.

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander is known to occur at two locations in Ontario's Niagara Gorge, southeast of the town of Queenston. Its range extends from eastern Tennessee through the Appalachian Mountains and along the shores of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario to southern Quebec. Located approximately four kilometres away, the Northern Dusky Salamander's single known population in Ontario is found among seeps that flow into the Niagara River. The Northern Dusky Salamander's range is similar to that of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander, extending from South Carolina through the Northeast United States into southern Quebec. Both species are considered globally secure.

The Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander are lungless and rely on their moist skin for respiration. These species inhabit moist and shaded streams supported by groundwater discharge, which are rare within southern Ontario. As a result, any deterioration, interruption or contamination of the groundwater and surface water that supports the species could potentially have catastrophic effects. As well, loss of ground cover – such as leaf litter, woody debris, rocks and moss that provide shelter and protection from predators and harsh weather – may lead to population declines. Other threats include landslides causing erosion and siltation, the clearing of the forested canopy above the species' habitat, disruption by hikers venturing off trail, the invasive European Common Reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*), and inbreeding. Based on the information to date, all populations in Ontario are believed to be viable and self-sustaining.

The government's goal for the recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander is to maintain suitable habitat conditions in the Niagara Gorge in order to retain existing known populations in a self-sustaining state and promote natural increases.

Protecting and recovering species at risk is a shared responsibility. No single agency or organization has the knowledge, authority or financial resources to protect and recover all of Ontario's species at risk. Successful recovery requires inter-governmental co-operation and the involvement of many individuals, organizations and communities.

In developing the government response statement, the Ministry considered what actions are feasible for the government to lead directly and what actions are feasible for the government to support its conservation partners to undertake.

GOVERNMENT-LED ACTIONS

To help protect and recover the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander the government will directly undertake the following actions:

- Protect and manage the surface water and groundwater system that sustains the seep and stream habitat of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander through continued water budget assessments that determine the quantity and quality of the water moving within the local area of the Niagara Gorge and any natural or human activities that influence the system.
- Educate other agencies and authorities involved in planning and environmental assessment processes on the protection requirements under the ESA.
- Encourage the submission of Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander data to the Ministry's central repository at the Natural Heritage Information Centre or the Ontario Reptile and Amphibian Atlas.
- Undertake communications and outreach to increase public awareness of species at risk in Ontario.
- Protect the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander and their habitat through the ESA.
- Support conservation, agency, municipal and industry partners, and Aboriginal communities and organizations to undertake activities to protect and recover the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander. Support will be provided through funding, agreements, permits (including conditions) and/or advisory services.
- Establish and communicate annual priority actions for government support in order to encourage collaboration and reduce duplication of efforts.

GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED ACTIONS

The government endorses the following actions as being necessary for the protection and recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander. Actions identified as "high" will be given priority consideration for funding or for authorizations under the ESA. The government will focus its support on these high-priority actions over the next five years.

Focus Area:	Research and Monitoring
Objective:	Assess and improve knowledge of the species' demographics and physical environment in Ontario.
	Actions:
	1. (HIGH) Develop and implement a standardized survey and monitoring program for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander and their habitat to:

- conduct searches of suitable unoccupied habitat along the Niagara Escarpment and Fonthill Kame Moraine for undiscovered populations;
 - monitor changes in slope stability and erosion rates on hillsides in the species' habitat;
 - monitor population levels and trends; and
 - monitor genetic health of the populations to detect potential inbreeding.
2. (HIGH) Develop an integrated program to measure, forecast, and detect changes in the quantity and quality of water supporting the species' habitat. This includes:
- developing a water budget model;
 - characterizing and simulating the surface water and groundwater system and contaminant transport;
 - assessing water use and land use scenarios;
 - measuring seasonal and yearly averages of the flows of seeps and streams; and
 - integrating the monitoring of climate, surface and groundwater within the local area of the Niagara Gorge.

Focus Area: Protection and Management
Objective: Maintain suitable habitat, particularly groundwater quantity and quality, and minimize threats from adjacent land uses.

Actions:

3. (HIGH) Work with stakeholders, engineers, and contractors to implement beneficial management practices that minimize impacts on groundwater recharge areas and seeps. Water budget modelling can help to forecast and identify potential impacts caused by changing land and water uses.
4. Plant native trees to reduce hillside erosion and deforestation and create stormwater management ponds to capture and slow down run-off of herbicides, pesticides and other pollutants.
5. Investigate whether the removal of European Common Reed will improve or negatively impact the quality of the habitat. The European Common Reed eliminates habitat use by the salamanders, but also helps to stabilize the slope and prevent soil erosion. If appropriate, implement the Ministry's protocol for the control of European Common Reed.

Focus Area: Awareness
Objective: Raise awareness and promote collaboration in the protection and recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander in Ontario.

Actions:

6. Prepare educational materials such as pamphlets to inform park visitors about the endangered status of these salamanders and the need to not disturb them or their habitat, and to discourage off-trail hiking.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Financial support for the implementation of actions may be available through the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund, Species at Risk Research Fund for Ontario, or the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program. Conservation partners are encouraged to discuss project proposals related to the actions in this response statement with the Ministry. The Ministry can also advise if any authorizations under the ESA or other legislation may be required to undertake the project.

Implementation of the actions may be subject to changing priorities across the multitude of species at risk, available resources and the capacity of partners to undertake recovery activities. Where appropriate, the implementation of actions for multiple species will be co-ordinated across government response statements.

REVIEWING PROGRESS

The ESA requires the Ministry to conduct a review of progress towards protecting and recovering a species not later than five years from the publication of this response statement. The review will help identify if adjustments are needed to achieve the protection and recovery of the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander and Northern Dusky Salamander.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to thank all those who participated in the development of the "Recovery Strategy for the Allegheny Mountain Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus ochrophaeus*) and Northern Dusky Salamander (*Desmognathus fuscus*) in Ontario" for their dedication to protecting and recovering species at risk.

For additional information:

Visit the species at risk website at ontario.ca/speciesatrisk

Contact your MNR district office

Contact the Natural Resources Information Centre

1-800-667-1940

TTY 1-866-686-6072

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