

Recovery Strategy for the Eastern Mountain Avens (*Geum peckii*) in Canada

Eastern Mountain Avens



2010



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About the *Species at Risk Act* Recovery Strategy Series

What is the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA)?

SARA is the Act developed by the federal government as a key contribution to the common national effort to protect and conserve species at risk in Canada. SARA came into force in 2003, and one of its purposes is “*to provide for the recovery of wildlife species that are extirpated, endangered or threatened as a result of human activity.*”

What is recovery?

In the context of species at risk conservation, **recovery** 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 the species’ persistence in the wild. A species will be considered **recovered** when its long-term persistence in the wild has been secured.

What is a recovery strategy?

A recovery strategy is a planning document that identifies what needs to be done to arrest or reverse the decline of a species. It sets goals and objectives and identifies the main areas of activities to be undertaken. Detailed planning is done at the action plan stage.

Recovery strategy development is a commitment of all provinces and territories and of three federal agencies — Environment Canada, Parks Canada Agency, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada — under the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk. Sections 37–46 of SARA (www.sararegistry.gc.ca/approach/act/default_e.cfm) outline both the required content and the process for developing recovery strategies published in this series.

Depending on the status of the species and when it was assessed, a recovery strategy has to be developed within one to two years after the species is added to the List of Wildlife Species at Risk. A period of three to four years is allowed for those species that were automatically listed when SARA came into force.

What’s next?

In most cases, one or more action plans will be developed to define and guide implementation of the recovery strategy. Nevertheless, directions set in the recovery strategy are sufficient to begin involving communities, land users, and conservationists in recovery implementation. Cost-effective measures to prevent the reduction or loss of the species should not be postponed for lack of full scientific certainty.

The series

This series presents the recovery strategies prepared or adopted by the federal government under SARA. New documents will be added regularly as species get listed and as strategies are updated.

To learn more

To learn more about the *Species at Risk Act* and recovery initiatives, please consult the Species at Risk (SAR) Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

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DECLARATION

This recovery strategy has been prepared in cooperation with the jurisdictions responsible for the Eastern Mountain Avens. Environment Canada has reviewed and accepts this document as its recovery strategy for the Eastern Mountain Avens, as required under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). This recovery strategy also constitutes advice to other jurisdictions and organizations that may be involved in recovering the species.

The goals, objectives, and recovery approaches identified in the strategy are based on the best existing knowledge and are subject to modifications resulting from new findings and revised objectives.

This recovery strategy will be the basis for one or more action plans that will provide details on specific recovery measures to be taken to support conservation and recovery of the species. The Minister of the Environment will report on progress within five years, as required under SARA.

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 Canada or any other jurisdiction alone. In the spirit of the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk, the Minister of the Environment invites all responsible jurisdictions and Canadians to join Environment Canada in supporting and implementing this strategy for the benefit of the Eastern Mountain Avens and Canadian society as a whole.

RESPONSIBLE JURISDICTIONS

Environment Canada

Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources

CONTRIBUTORS

This recovery strategy was prepared by Laurel Bernard, Sherman Boates, Crystal Doggett, Samara Eaton, Mark Elderkin, Julie McKnight, Ruth Newell, Gini Proulx, June Swift, and the Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora Recovery Team. Although Eastern Mountain Avens is not one of the group of species classified as Coastal Plain Flora, the relevant expertise of the Recovery Team members make it appropriate for them to act on behalf of this species.

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

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*. 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.

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.

This recovery strategy will clearly benefit the environment by promoting the recovery of the Eastern Mountain Avens. 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. The reader should refer to the following sections of the document in particular: description of the species, description of the biological needs of the species, examples of activities that are likely to result in the destruction of the critical habitat and effects on other species.

RESIDENCE

SARA defines residence as: *a dwelling-place, such as a den, nest or other similar area or place, that is occupied or habitually occupied by one or more individuals during all or part of their life cycles, including breeding, rearing, staging, wintering, feeding or hibernating* [Subsection 2(1)].

Residence descriptions, or the rationale for why the residence concept does not apply to a given species, are posted on the SAR Public Registry:
www.sararegistry.gc.ca/sar/recovery/residence_e.cfm.

PREFACE

The *Species at Risk Act* (SARA, Section 37) requires the competent minister to prepare recovery strategies for listed extirpated, endangered or threatened species. The Eastern Mountain Avens was listed as Endangered under SARA in June 2003 and under the Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act in 2000. Canadian Wildlife Service - Atlantic Region (Environment Canada) and the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources led the development of this Recovery Strategy. This is a five-year recovery strategy spanning 2010-2015. This recovery strategy meets SARA requirements and it also meets the particular requirements of recovery plans under the Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act (1998).

Although Eastern Mountain Avens is not one of the group of species classified as Coastal Plain Flora, the relevant expertise of the Recovery Team members makes it appropriate for them to act on behalf of this species.

The Recovery Strategy was developed in cooperation or consultation with numerous individuals and agencies: the Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora Recovery Team, Province of Nova Scotia (NS), Environment Canada, aboriginal groups; environmental non-government organizations; industry stakeholders; and private landowners.

An initial Recovery Strategy was developed by the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources in 2001. This 2010 Recovery Strategy builds on the earlier Strategy, retaining much of the content but including additional information as required under SARA.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eastern Mountain Avens (*Geum peckii*) is an endangered perennial herb producing small yellow flowers from June to September. The listing of this species is based on its very restricted and disjunct distribution and the considerable threat of destruction to its habitat. The Canadian population is one of only two global populations. The second population occurs in the United States in New Hampshire where the Eastern Mountain Avens appears in the New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory (New Hampshire Natural Heritage Bureau, 2006) as a state listed threatened plant species. The goal of this recovery strategy is to protect and maintain extant populations at current or greater levels of abundance with no reduction in the current range.

In Canada, the Eastern Mountain Avens is found in only eight sites; all in Nova Scotia. One site is on Digby Neck and the remainder are on Brier Island. Populations are usually found in boggy habitats where moisture levels can vary considerably. Populations within some sites have declined or disappeared entirely due to habitat loss and degradation.

The recovery activities described in this Recovery Strategy will be carried out in part or in whole within the next five years (2010-2015). The objectives for Eastern Mountain Avens are to:

1. Maintain Eastern Mountain Avens populations at occupied sites; 2. Improve conditions and enhance Eastern Mountain Avens populations at occupied sites; and 3. Improve conditions at previously occupied sites.

These objectives will be achieved through research, monitoring, management, education, and stewardship. Specific recovery approaches include:

- Research
 - Assess how to raise water-table level;
 - Continue genetic studies;
 - Explore methods of population and habitat enhancement;
 - Clarify habitat needs and characteristics;
 - Determine extent to which habitat alteration surrounding wetlands may threaten the species
- Monitoring
 - Monitor known occupied sites;
 - Monitor threats;
 - Confirm distribution data;
 - If bog restoration proceeds, monitor habitat characteristics at unoccupied suitable habitat;
- Management
 - Protect habitat at all sites;
 - Reduce off-highway vehicle traffic through habitat;
 - Restore pre-drainage water-table levels;
 - Reduce numbers of nesting gulls in the immediate vicinity of Big Meadow Bog;
 - Restore historic species composition to bog;

- Education
 - Provide quality educational materials and opportunities to raise the awareness of Eastern Mountain Avens;
- Stewardship
 - Foster cooperative relationships for Eastern Mountain Avens recovery with landowners, community, off-highway vehicle operators, volunteers (local naturalists, Nature Conservancy of Canada members) and ecotourists.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
RESPONSIBLE JURISDICTIONS	i
CONTRIBUTORS.....	i
STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT STATEMENT	ii
RESIDENCE	ii
PREFACE	iii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	iv
1. BACKGROUND	1
1.1 Species Assessment Information from COSEWIC.....	1
1.2 Description of the Species	1
1.3 Populations and Distribution	1
1.4 Needs of the Eastern Mountain Avens.....	4
1.4.1 Habitat needs.....	4
1.4.2 Pollination	4
1.4.3 Ecological role	4
1.4.4 Limiting factors.....	5
1.5 Threats.....	5
1.5.1 Drainage ditches.....	5
1.5.2 Gull nesting.....	5
1.5.3 Tree and shrub encroachment.....	6
1.5.4 Development and road maintenance	6
1.5.5 Off-highway vehicle use.....	6
1.5.6 Lakeshore habitat alteration.....	6
1.6. Actions Already Completed or Underway	6
1.7. Knowledge Gaps.....	7
2. RECOVERY	7
2.1. Recovery Feasibility.....	7
2.2. Recovery Goal	8
2.3. Recovery Objectives	8
2.4. Approaches Recommended to Meet Recovery Objectives.....	8
2.4.1 Recovery planning	8
2.4.2 Narrative to support recovery planning table	10
2.5 Evaluation	13
2.6 Critical Habitat.....	14

2.6.1	Identification of the species' critical habitat.....	14
2.6.2	Examples of activities likely to result in destruction of critical habitat.....	15
2.7	Existing Habitat Protection.....	15
2.8	Effects on Other Species	15
2.9	Recommended Approach for Recovery Implementation.....	16
2.10	Statement on Action Plan	16
3.	REFERENCES.....	17
	APPENDIX A.....	18
	APPENDIX B.....	19
	APPENDIX C	20

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	<i>Geum peckii</i> illustration from Holmgren, 1998.....	1
Figure 2.	Global distribution of the Eastern Mountain Avens (<i>Geum peckii</i>)	2
Figure 3.	Distribution of Eastern Mountain Avens (<i>Geum peckii</i>) in Nova Scotia, Canada	2

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1:	Population data at sites and stands (1986-2008).	3
Table 2.	Recovery planning table: recovery approaches for Eastern Mountain Avens in Canada.....	9
Table 3.	A summary of the performance measures for evaluating the success of each strategy / approach.....	13

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Species Assessment Information from COSEWIC

Date of Assessment: May 2000

Common Name: Eastern Mountain Avens

Scientific Name: *Geum peckii*

COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Reason for Designation: A highly disjunct species occurring in a few sites at the northern edge of its range in North America. Some populations have undergone substantial declines due to habitat drainage and successional changes.

Canadian Occurrence: NS

COSEWIC Status History: Designated Endangered in April 1986. Status re-examined and confirmed Endangered in April 1999 and May 2000.

1.2 Description of the Species



The Eastern Mountain Avens (*Geum peckii*) is a rhizomatous perennial herb that produces attractive sunny yellow flowers from June to September. The shiny leaves are compound and consist of one large, rounded, terminal leaflet and several smaller lateral leaflets. The leaves are clustered around the plant's base while a separate flowering stalk (20 – 40 cm tall) carries one to five small (1-3 cm across), five-petaled yellow blooms.

Figure 1. *Geum peckii* illustration from Holmgren, 1998.

1.3 Populations and Distribution

Global and National Status

Global Status: G2 Imperiled (NatureServe, 2006)

Canada: National Status: N1 Critically Imperiled (NatureServe, 2006)

United States: National Status: N2 Imperiled (NatureServe, 2006)

Provincial and State Status

Nova Scotia, Canada: S1 Critically Imperiled (NatureServe, 2006)

New Hampshire, United States: S2 Imperiled (NatureServe, 2006)

Eastern Mountain Avens occurs only in eastern North America. It is known from two disjunct locations: Digby County, in Nova Scotia (NS), Canada and Mount Washington, in the Presidential Range of the White Mountains of New Hampshire, USA (Figure 2). These locations are the only two known in the world. The species was reported in Maine (Gleason and Cronquist, 1991); however, there are no records to substantiate this report.



Figure 2. Global distribution of the Eastern Mountain Avens (*Geum peckii*)

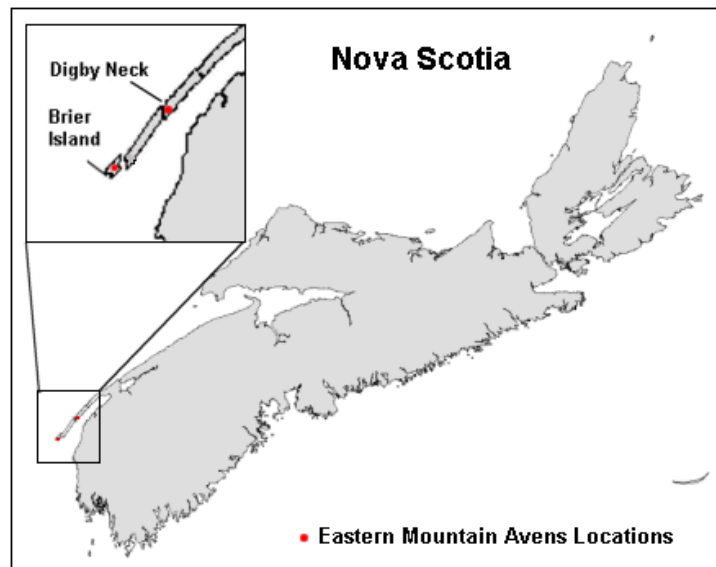


Figure 3. Distribution of Eastern Mountain Avens (*Geum peckii*) in Nova Scotia, Canada

As of 2006, there are 24 known sites with Eastern Mountain Avens in New Hampshire (New Hampshire Natural History Bureau, 2006). Surveys in 2008 identified nine sites with Eastern Mountain Avens in NS. However, the avens species found at Gooseberry Cove was later determined to be Water Avens (*G. rivale*) (S. Blaney, personal communication). These sites were found on Brier Island and in the East Ferry area of Digby Neck in Digby County, south-western NS (Figure 3).

On Brier Island, Eastern Mountain Avens occurs: at Green Head, along Gull Rock Road, in Big Meadow Bog, at Central Brier, at Little Pond, along the Camp Road, and at Western Light. The site at Digby Neck was discovered in 1997 and is situated in a bog south of Harris Lake on the outskirts of East Ferry (Newell and Proulx, 1998).

Population sizes and trends

Within the eight known sites in NS, there are approximately 18 stands of Eastern Mountain Avens. The largest stand contained 1327 plants, but most stands had less than 300 plants and many had less than 65 plants. Based on 2008 survey data, the total population of Eastern Mountain Avens in NS is estimated to be 2424 plants (NS DNR unpublished data). Keddy (1986) estimated the Canadian population to be a minimum of 5450 plants in 1986.

Table 1: Population data at sites and stands (1986-2008).

Site	Stand	Keddy (1986)	Newell & Proulx (1998) ^a	Brown (2003) ^a	Swift (2005)	Proulx (2006), Swift (2006)	Porter & Noel (2007)	NSDNR & ACCDC (2008)
Green Head	GH1	1,000+	-	-	-	-	-	112
	GH2	<1,000	-	-	-	-	-	37
	GH3	<1,000	-	-	-	-	-	0
	GH4	<1,000	-	-	-	-	-	113
	GH5	<1,000	-	-	-	-	-	61
Gull Rock Road	GR1	<1,000 (x4) ^b	-	2,026	134	113	-	274
	GR2	<1,000	-	-	-	-	-	0
Big Meadow	BM1	0	-	1,200	-	-	-	1,327
	BM2	1,000+	-	252	-	-	-	-
	BM3	1,000+	-	186	-	-	-	0
	BM4	1,000+	-	800	-	-	-	21
	BM5	1,000+	-	-	-	-	102 ^c	242 ^c
Central Brier	CB1	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
	CB2	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
Little Pond	LP	<1,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Camp Road	CR	-	-	1,789	“significant decline”	190	-	166
Western Light	WL	<1,000	-	-	-	-	6	6 ^d

Site	Stand	Keddy (1986)	Newell & Proulx (1998) ^a	Brown (2003) ^a	Swift (2005)	Proulx (2006), Swift (2006)	Porter & Noel (2007)	NSDNR & ACCDC (2008)
Harris Lake	HL	-	300	-	-	“same area of occupancy”	-	44
TOTAL		5450 (min)						2,424

^a These surveys counted individual rosettes, rather than clumps and flowering stems as were counted in 2008.

^b Keddy (1986) mapped four separate populations of under 1000 plants within this site

^c Porter and Noel (2007) found their 102 plants within a slightly different area than was covered in 2008. Their numbers are added to the 140 plants observed in 2008 to get the overall total of 242.

^d Not checked in 2008, number based on Porter and Noel (2007) survey.

1.4 Needs of the Eastern Mountain Avens

1.4.1 Habitat needs

Eastern Mountain Avens habitat in NS appears to differ greatly from the New Hampshire populations. In New Hampshire, it occurs in alpine meadows and streamsides (Newell, 2002). In NS, it is found at sea level near the coast in boggy terrain and can occur under a variety of moisture regimes, from sphagnum bogs with small channels of open water to sphagnum depressions and even occasionally in dry depressions on mineral soil (Keddy 1986). Eastern Mountain Avens requires relatively undisturbed soil; any alteration to surface soils can negatively impact the plant's survival.

1.4.2 Pollination

Small flies are considered to be the pollinator of Eastern Mountain Avens, with each flower producing approximately 50 seeds. Zinck (1996) determined the flowers to be protogynous (prior to pollen ripening, the female's stigma becomes receptive) and herkogamous (spatial separation of male and female organs). Self-pollination has been experimentally shown to produce seeds but the number of seed yielded in this manner is fewer than yielded by cross-pollination (Zinck 1996).

1.4.3 Ecological role

Eastern Mountain Avens is part of a community of bog vegetation that is unique in Canada, and is found only in NS. Big Meadow Bog, the largest habitat location for Eastern Mountain Avens is also home to other rare plant species including various orchids, curly grass fern (*Schizaea pumilla*) and northern dwarf birch (*Betula michauxii*) (Brown, 2003). The occurrence of both shrubby cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*) and deergrass (*Scirpus caespitosus*) has been noted wherever Eastern Mountain Avens occurs (Zinc 1996). There is limited research on Eastern Mountain Avens and, therefore, its specific ecological role is not well known.

1.4.4 Limiting factors

In NS, Eastern Mountain Avens is biologically limited by the following factors:

- small population size and globally limited distribution;
- requirement for specific hydrologic conditions in bogs;
- inability to compete for habitat.

1.5 Threats

Appendix C summarizes the historic and current threats to Eastern Mountain Avens. The threat information presented is based on documented research or expert opinions from members of the Recovery Team.

It is important to note that several of the threats are interrelated and the stresses on the species are likely a result of complex interactions of more than one threat. The additive or cumulative effects of the threats are difficult to assess and address; however, they must be considered wherever possible. The current threats identified may also be compounded by climate change; though there is uncertainty regarding how it may impact the species and its habitat. Specific detail is provided in the following section on six key threats.

1.5.1 Drainage ditches

In 1953, two drainage ditches were dug in Big Meadow Bog in an attempt to convert the land to agriculture use (Brown, 2003; Newell, 2002). The farming initiatives were abandoned, however the drainage ditches remain functional today (Brown, 2003). This has resulted in significant changes to the hydrological conditions of the bog and lowering of the water-table. These changes have impacted the habitat in Big Meadow Bog by direct destruction of habitat where ditches were created and dredged material was dumped, and by drying the bog, which appears to have reduced the amount of suitable habitat and limited the species' extent of occurrence. The lower water table has likely contributed to increased shrub encroachment and perhaps also increased suitability of the bog for gull nesting (S. Blaney, personal communication).

1.5.2 Gull nesting

A large population of Herring (*Larus argentatus*) and Great Black-backed Gulls (*Larus marinus*) has increased the amount of nutrients in the soil. Where gulls enrich the substrate, bog vegetation, including Eastern Mountain Avens, is completely eliminated and replaced with exotic weeds and ruderal native species such as Fireweed (*Chamerion angustifolium*) and Canada Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) (S. Blaney, personal communication). With respect to the gull nesting in Big Meadow Bog, it is speculated that the ditching of the bog led to drier conditions which in turn provided the opportunity for a gull colony to establish, however this link is not well documented (S. Blaney, personal communication).

1.5.3 Tree and shrub encroachment

Many of the Brier Island sites are threatened by increasing cover from trees and shrubs. Several of the sites are only small openings within densely shrubby or semi-treed habitat where ingrowth has been observed in the past decade (S. Blaney, personal communication). Within the Green Head and Gull Rock Road sites tree and shrub encroachment may be a return to more natural conditions in areas which had been kept open in the past by livestock grazing. In Big Meadow Bog the encroachment is likely associated with the construction of the drainage ditches in the 1950's which lowered the water table and likely has promoted tree and shrub growth.

1.5.4 Development and road maintenance

There is the possibility of future housing and cottage development on Brier Island. Some current sites occur as little as 100 m away from existing roads and thus it is possible that future developments could fall within the areas where these stands exist (S. Blaney, personal communication). Road maintenance, ditching, or expansion can result in the alteration of surface soils and impact stands of Eastern Mountain Avens, particularly at Western Light, Green Head, and Gull Rock Road sites. In 1988 a stand was destroyed during the construction of a roadside ditch (Newell 2003).

1.5.5 Off-highway vehicle use

Off-Highway vehicles (OHVs) are widely used on Brier Island and have the potential to significantly damage or even eliminate small stands. However, some OHV activity in habitat surrounding Eastern Mountain Avens may actually afford short-term benefits through limiting competition from shrubs and allowing for establishment of Eastern Mountain Avens. A survey in 2005 recorded that Eastern Mountain Avens were growing heavily in a once used OHV path where a fallen tree prevented access to the stand (Swift 2005).

1.5.6 Lakeshore habitat alteration

This threat applies to the Digby Neck, Harris Lake site only and is the primary threat at this site. Any alteration to the lakeshore habitat associated with this wetland could impact the hydrology, altering the lakeshore water level, and thus habitat conditions of the site.

1.6. Actions Already Completed or Underway

NSDNR and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) have been actively involved in recovery efforts for Eastern Mountain Avens. NSDNR maintains a Geographic Information System (GIS) database of survey data. This data is provided by NSDNR staff and dedicated volunteers.

In 1998, the NCC purchased lands on Brier Island to protect Eastern Mountain Avens. The NCC has been conducting some stewardship activities on their lands and educating the public since 2001. The Brier Island Management Committee (BIMC) was formed in 2001. This group may offer advice on general management issues within the NCC Brier Island property. NCC has developed education plans on local flora and fauna for the local school, and fenced off OHV

trails from use with the assistance of OHV users. Their 2003 report 'Big Meadow Bog and *Geum peckii*: Preliminary Restoration Plan' outlines strategies for the conservation and recovery of Eastern Mountain Avens at the Big Meadow Bog site, some of which are incorporated into this recovery strategy. In this report, the collection of baseline habitat data for Big Meadow Bog was suggested and in 2003, the following parameters were recorded: peat depth, detailed hydrology, and species composition.

1.7. Knowledge Gaps

Monitoring requirements

Regular surveys of known sites as part of a long-term monitoring program to determine accurate population abundance and distribution, population trends, and habitat conditions

Biological / ecological research requirements

A genetic study (Paterson & Snyder 1999) found that Eastern Mountain Avens and *Geum radiatum* (a morphologically similar species) are separate species and recommended a population-level genetic analysis. The relatedness of the two disjunct populations of Eastern Mountain Avens in New Hampshire and NS is unknown at present and may prove useful knowledge to restore the population in NS.

Little is known about reproductive strategies of Eastern Mountain Avens in Nova Scotia and this too, is a conspicuous void in recovery knowledge.

Habitat restoration and enhancement feasibility

Research and experimental trials are required to ensure the appropriate decisions are made to restore the habitat for Eastern Mountain Avens in Big Meadow Bog.

2. RECOVERY

2.1. Recovery Feasibility

Ecological and technical feasibility of species recovery

Recovery of Eastern Mountain Avens is technically and biologically feasible as determined by the criteria for assessing 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

Experimental crosses revealed healthy reproduction through both cross-pollination and self-pollination.

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

Habitat is available in Nova Scotia and approximately 20% of the known Canadian stands are on land owned by the NCC, which means that a significant portion of habitat is potentially accessible for conservation and habitat management.

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

Most of the threats have the potential to be eliminated or minimized.

4. Recovery techniques exist or can reasonably be expected to be developed to achieve the recovery goal. YES

Recovery techniques exist, such as habitat restoration and transplantation, which have been successfully carried out in other situations (although not with Eastern Mountain Avens in particular).

2.2. Recovery Goal

The goal of this recovery strategy is to protect and maintain extant populations at current or greater levels of abundance with no reduction in the current range.

2.3. Recovery Objectives

- 1) Maintain populations at occupied sites

Rationale: Current sites must be protected as a strong population base for recovery efforts.

- 2) Improve conditions and enhance populations at occupied sites

Rationale: Improve habitat where Eastern Mountain Avens is known to occur to help stands flourish. Techniques such as active vegetation management, seed banking, and transplantation may be considered if deemed feasible.

- 3) Improve conditions at previously occupied sites

Rationale: At least three stands of Eastern Mountain Avens have been lost due to ditching, trampling, habitat disturbance, and encroaching vegetation. Once recovery efforts are undertaken to restore habitat or remove disturbance, nearby populations may repopulate the area.

2.4. Approaches Recommended to Meet Recovery Objectives

2.4.1 Recovery planning

The recovery strategies outlined in this section will facilitate the achievement of the recovery objectives. Recovery approaches are identified as research, monitoring, management, education,

and stewardship. The Action Plan associated with this Recovery Strategy will include a detailed and prioritized schedule for these activities.

Table 2. Recovery planning table: recovery approaches for Eastern Mountain Avens in Canada. Priorities are defined as: Urgent = top priority action, without which population will decline; Necessary = needed to evaluate and guide recovery actions; Beneficial = beneficial if urgent actions are already underway.

Priority	Broad Approach/ Strategy	Objective Addressed	General Steps	Effect
RESEARCH				
Urgent	• Assess how to raise water-table level	All	~ Gather information and design experimental trials to assess how to restore the pre-drainage water-table level	May provide protection from some threats
Beneficial	• Continue genetic studies	All	~ Sample plants in NS and in New Hampshire	Clarifies the possibility of human-assisted rescue from New Hampshire
Beneficial	• Explore methods of population and habitat enhancement	All	~ Determine feasibility for seed banking and transplanting within the Atlantic population ~ Identify other possibilities for enhancement	Guides management and recovery efforts Determines potential for population augmentation/expansion
Beneficial	• Clarify habitat needs and characteristics	2	~ Map and atlas habitat characteristics and floristic associations for all sites with Eastern Mountain Avens	Habitat needs of the species are better understood
Beneficial	• Determine extent to which habitat alteration surrounding wetlands may threaten the species	All	~ Assess distance needed to protect the hydrology and the native vegetation community of the site	Guides management of recovery efforts
MONITORING				
Necessary	• Monitor known occupied sites	All	~ Develop reliable, repeatable, long-term monitoring tools and techniques to locate, monitor and assess	Enables determination of population trends, evaluation of recovery efforts and guides recovery efforts
Necessary	• Monitor threats	All	~ Document presence, severity, and effects of threats	Assesses success of efforts to eliminate and reduce threats
Beneficial	• If bog restoration proceeds, monitor habitat characteristics at unoccupied suitable habitat	3	~ Track changes in hydrology and species composition	Increases capacity to foster population enhancement
MANAGEMENT				
Necessary	• Protect Habitat at all sites	All	~ Secure relevant habitat through a variety of approaches	Allows for easier implementation of recovery actions

Priority	Broad Approach/ Strategy	Objective Addressed	General Steps	Effect
Necessary	• Reduce off-highway vehicle traffic through habitat	All	~ Map main trails with OHV riders, highlight any areas that may cause significant threat ~ Work with riders to re-route trails to less vulnerable area and discourage off-trail riding.	Gives drivers ownership in recovery solutions Reduces threat to Eastern Mountain Avens habitat
Urgent	• Restore pre-drainage water-table levels	All	~ Take action based on the results of research.	Enhances habitat and helps maintain current distribution, higher water-table may discourage gulls
Necessary	• Reduce numbers of nesting gulls in the immediate vicinity of Big Meadow Bog	All	~ Observe effects of raising water level by above action. ~ If necessary, undertake further discouragement measures	Helps maintain existing sites and potential future sites and may make habitat less suitable for encroaching vegetation
Necessary	• Restore historic species composition to bog	All	~ Observe effects of raising water level, if that occurs ~ If necessary, use active vegetation management to re-instate sphagnum-dominated cover.	Restores habitat conditions and interactions
EDUCATION				
Necessary	• Provide quality educational materials and opportunities to raise the awareness of Eastern Mountain Avens	All	~ Create educational materials to support recovery efforts and solicit support for Eastern Mountain Avens and/or restoration of its habitat	Raises the public profile of Eastern Mountain Avens
STEWARDSHIP				
Necessary	• Foster cooperative relationships for Eastern Mountain Avens recovery with landowners, community, OHV riders, volunteers and ecotourists	All	~ Engage groups and individuals in the recovery process ~ Search for local and historical information and resources to assist in bog restoration ~ Encourage voluntary stewardship agreements	Increases capacity of recovery efforts beyond researchers

2.4.2 Narrative to support recovery planning table

Research

Assess how to raise water table level

Raising the water-table in Big Meadow Bog to the height before construction of the drainage ditches may reverse the negative impacts on Eastern Mountain Avens habitat. However, more information and experimental trials will be necessary before a decision to do so is reached.

Research should be designed and carried out at Big Meadow Bog to assess how to restore the pre-drainage water-table level and to understand whether doing so will restore habitat for Eastern Mountain Avens. Based on the results of this research, management actions will be recommended.

Continue genetic studies

When Paterson and Snyder (1999) studied whether *Geum peckii* and *Geum radiatum* were separate species, genetic sampling proved the species to be distinct. They recommended population level genetic analysis to identify genetic variation and conservation importance. Understanding the relatedness of the NS and New Hampshire populations would clarify the rescue potential from the New Hampshire population and may therefore guide management actions.

Explore methods of population and habitat enhancement

More information is required before decisions can be made regarding transplanting Eastern Mountain Avens. Possible habitat enhancement methods may also be explored with the intent that such strategies could play a greater role in recovery efforts when the Recovery Strategy is reviewed in 2015.

Clarify habitat needs and characteristics

In order to further the understanding of habitat needs and characteristics it is important to map habitat characteristics and floristic associations for all sites. Producing an atlas of Eastern Mountain Avens sites and habitats will facilitate habitat protection as well as education and stewardship initiatives.

Determine extent to which habitat alteration surrounding wetlands may threaten the species

It is possible that alteration of areas surrounding wetlands may impact the hydrology or vegetation community within the sites. In order to ensure that management efforts are appropriately targeted it is important to refine our understanding of the extent to which distance from the wetland impacts the species.

Monitoring

Monitor known occupied sites

A set of reliable, repeatable, long-term monitoring tools and techniques should be developed to assess the status of Eastern Mountain Avens and the success of recovery efforts.

Monitor threats

As part of site monitoring, observations of threats should also be recorded including presence and count of gulls, encroachment of competing plants, etc.

If bog restoration proceeds, monitor habitat characteristics at historical and unoccupied suitable habitat

The NCC Big Meadow Bog and *Geum peckii*: Preliminary Restoration Plan (2003) recorded baseline information on water level conditions in Big Meadow Bog. These conditions should continue to be measured at prescribed times. These data will be necessary to evaluate

enhancement of habitat if action is taken to raise the water-table. In addition to tracking changes in hydrology, species composition should also be tracked.

Management

Protect habitat at all sites

Wherever possible, Eastern Mountain Avens habitat (extant and historical) should be secured. This could be achieved through a variety of approaches, such as; purchasing, acquiring through a donation, or establishing a conservation easement. Protection of habitat would also be enhanced by ensuring that all laws and regulations are enforced. Education and stewardship are also important steps towards achieving protection of habitat and is thus linked directly to the education and stewardship approaches/strategies.

Reduce off-highway vehicle traffic through habitat

The Recovery Team and other conservation partners should work with OHV operators to establish mutually acceptable re-routing of trails away from Eastern Mountain Avens stands. Educational materials should also be provided so the local riders may inform visiting riders why off-trail riding is a threat to Eastern Mountain Avens.

Restore pre-drainage water-table levels

If research indicates that raising the water-table in Big Meadow Bog will be beneficial to Eastern Mountain Avens, the management actions implicated as most likely to succeed in restoring pre-drainage water-table levels should be implemented.

Reduce numbers of nesting gulls in the immediate vicinity of Big Meadow Bog

Gulls have appeared in Big Meadow Bog as a result of the drainage ditches lowering the water-table, making the habitat suitable for nesting. Gulls have nutrified the soil, making it suitable for species that compete with Eastern Mountain Avens. It is possible that if a suitable action to raise the water-table is undertaken, the gulls may leave or be reduced. Counts should be taken to monitor the impact of the suitable action on the gulls. If an action is not chosen or that action does not result in a reduction of the gulls, further discouragement measures may be explored.

Restore historic species composition to bog

Research will dictate if action should be taken to raise the water-table and by what means. If the water-table does rise, the effects of raising the water level on species that were not historically present in the bog should be monitored. It may be necessary to explore using active vegetation management to re-instate sphagnum-dominated cover.

Education

Provide quality educational materials and opportunities to raise the awareness of Eastern Mountain Avens

The target audience for education should be easy to identify for Eastern Mountain Avens because the known distribution area in NS is relatively small. Educational materials should be created to support recovery efforts and solicit stewards for Eastern Mountain Avens and/or restoration of its habitat.

Stewardship

Foster cooperative relationships for Eastern Mountain Avens recovery with landowners, community, OHV riders, volunteers and ecotourists

To date, an active role has been taken by naturalists, local residents, OHV operators, and organizations such as NCC. The resulting activities have led to the discovery of Eastern Mountain Avens stands, re-routing of OHV trails to protect the plant, as well as purchase of land to conserve habitat. The information and input that local residents can provide may prove invaluable to decisions that must be made regarding habitat restoration and conservation. In addition, voluntary stewardship agreements should be developed with private landowners to protect Eastern Mountain Avens stands occurring on their land.

2.5 Evaluation

Section 46 of SARA requires that the competent minister report on the progress towards meeting the objectives of the recovery strategy every five years. Table 3 highlights those performance measures that will be evaluated within five years of the final recovery strategy being posted on the SAR Public Registry.

Table 3. A summary of the performance measures for evaluating the success of each strategy / approach.

Strategy / Approach	Performance Measures for Evaluation
RESEARCH	
• Assess how to raise water-table level	• Appropriate approach identified
• Genetic studies	• Increased understanding of genetics
• Explore methods of population and habitat enhancement	• Enhancement methods are identified
• Clarify habitat needs and characteristics	• Habitat characteristics and requirements documented
	• Map and atlas of all sites produced
• Determine extent to which habitat alteration surrounding wetlands may threaten the species	• Assessment of distance from wetland needed to protect hydrology conducted
MONITORING	
• Monitor known occupied sites	• Effective long-term monitoring process developed
• Monitor threats	• Changes in threats are monitored
• If bog restoration proceeds, monitor habitat characteristics at historical and unoccupied suitable habitat	• Monitoring program in place for physical characteristics
MANAGEMENT	
• Protect habitat at all sites	• Number of conservation easements established
	• Number of sites purchased or donated
	• Proportion of populations and habitat protected

- Reduce off-highway vehicle traffic through habitat
- Restore pre-drainage water-table levels
- Re-routing of OHV trails away from Eastern Mountain Avens habitat
- Suitable habitat conditions restored
- Reduce numbers of nesting gulls in the immediate vicinity of Big Meadow Bog
- Restore historic species composition to bog
- Reduce number of nesting gulls at targeted sites
- Data records of native and non-native vegetation

EDUCATION

- Provide quality educational materials and opportunities to raise the awareness of Eastern Mountain Avens
- Eastern Mountain Avens material is presented
- Stewardship communication pieces (website, identification card or brochure) are available

STEWARDSHIP

- Foster cooperative relationships with landowners, community, OHV riders, volunteers, and ecotourists
- Number of volunteers
- Voluntary involvement in recovery activities and planning

2.6 Critical Habitat

2.6.1 Identification of the species' critical habitat

Eastern Mountain Avens is a unique species known to occur in two disjunct locations with distinctly different habitats; an alpine location in the United States and boggy terrain in NS. Eastern Mountain Avens populations in NS have been the subject of survey effort since 1985 and it is unlikely that more populations will be discovered.

Sufficient information is available on the species' habitat requirements and distribution, thus critical habitat is fully identified in this recovery strategy. It is important to note that if new information becomes available or additional sites or stands are found, then critical habitat would be updated accordingly in a Recovery Strategy or Action Plan.

Critical habitat is identified as the eight known sites with Eastern Mountain Avens. In general terms, Eastern Mountain Avens in NS occurs near the coast in bogs, sphagnum depressions, and occasionally in dry depressions on mineral soil and regularly co-occurs with shrubby cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*) and deergrass (*Scirpus caespitosus*) (Newell 2002). Alterations of hydrology and/or the native vegetation community by mechanical, chemical or other means are documented as causing decline to Eastern Mountain Avens. Thus, as a precautionary measure, Critical Habitat is identified as: the wetlands where the species currently occurs and a 100 m zone landward of the edge of these wetlands. The purpose for including the 100 m zone is to maintain and protect the hydrology of the site for Eastern Mountain Avens and to protect the native vegetation community.

Appendix A indicates the general location of known occupied sites of Eastern Mountain Avens. Appendix B, giving the coordinates and directions to the Eastern Mountain Avens sites and stands, has been removed from the public document to protect the species and its habitat.

2.6.2 Examples of activities likely to result in destruction of critical habitat

An activity is detrimental to Critical Habitat when it alters conditions such that the capacity of that Critical Habitat to contribute to the survival or recovery of the species would be compromised.

Some examples of activities that may result in the destruction of Critical Habitat include, but are not limited to:

- alteration of surficial soil through activities such as ditching, bulldozing, excavation, raking, shovelling, trampling, indiscriminate use of herbicides;
- deliberate setting of fires;
- alteration of surficial or ground hydrology through activities including channelization, alteration to natural drainages.

2.7 Existing Habitat Protection

Under the Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act (NSESA), the province of NS may designate “core habitat”, which is defined in the act as “*specific areas of habitat essential for the long-term survival and recovery of endangered or threatened species*”. The process for designating core habitat is not yet developed as the emphasis has been on other existing and tested tools for habitat protection. The relationship between the identification of “Critical Habitat” under SARA and the designation of “core habitat” under the NSESA, and the implications for protection are yet to be determined.

Eastern Mountain Avens core habitat, if designated under the Nova Scotia Endangered Species Act, can be protected by some specific regulations. In 1988 the NCC purchased a Brier Island property encompassing roughly 20% of known Eastern Mountain Avens stands (NSDNR unpublished data).

In 2003, the NCC prepared a report entitled, ‘Big Meadow Bog and *Geum peckii*: Preliminary Restoration Plan’, and has been actively monitoring the site and communicating with the landowners of other sites. All of the sites not within the NCC owned parcel of land occur on privately owned land. In 2003, owners of the private Brier Island properties were supportive of bog restoration and allowed NCC access to their properties to conduct research (Brown 2003). The NCC may pursue acquisition of more land on Brier Island or at the Digby Neck – East Ferry site if the appropriate conditions or opportunities arise (Bernard, per. comm. 2006).

2.8 Effects on Other Species

Species that have become established in Big Meadow Bog due to the habitat conditions provided by the drainage ditch (such as gulls) may be displaced due to the efforts to restore habitat by raising the water-table. The displacement of gulls at sites is beneficial to Eastern Mountain

Avens and will not be harmful to gull populations overall. Species with similar habitat needs to Eastern Mountain Avens that have been pushed to the marginal edges of the bog should benefit from habitat restoration efforts. Research and monitoring efforts will be minimally invasive and should have no significant negative effects on other species. Educational, stewardship and threat mitigation efforts are expected to benefit the majority of native species in the area.

2.9 Recommended Approach for Recovery Implementation

A single species approach is recommended because Eastern Mountain Avens is distinct with respect to habitat requirements and threats in this area of NS.

2.10 Statement on Action Plan

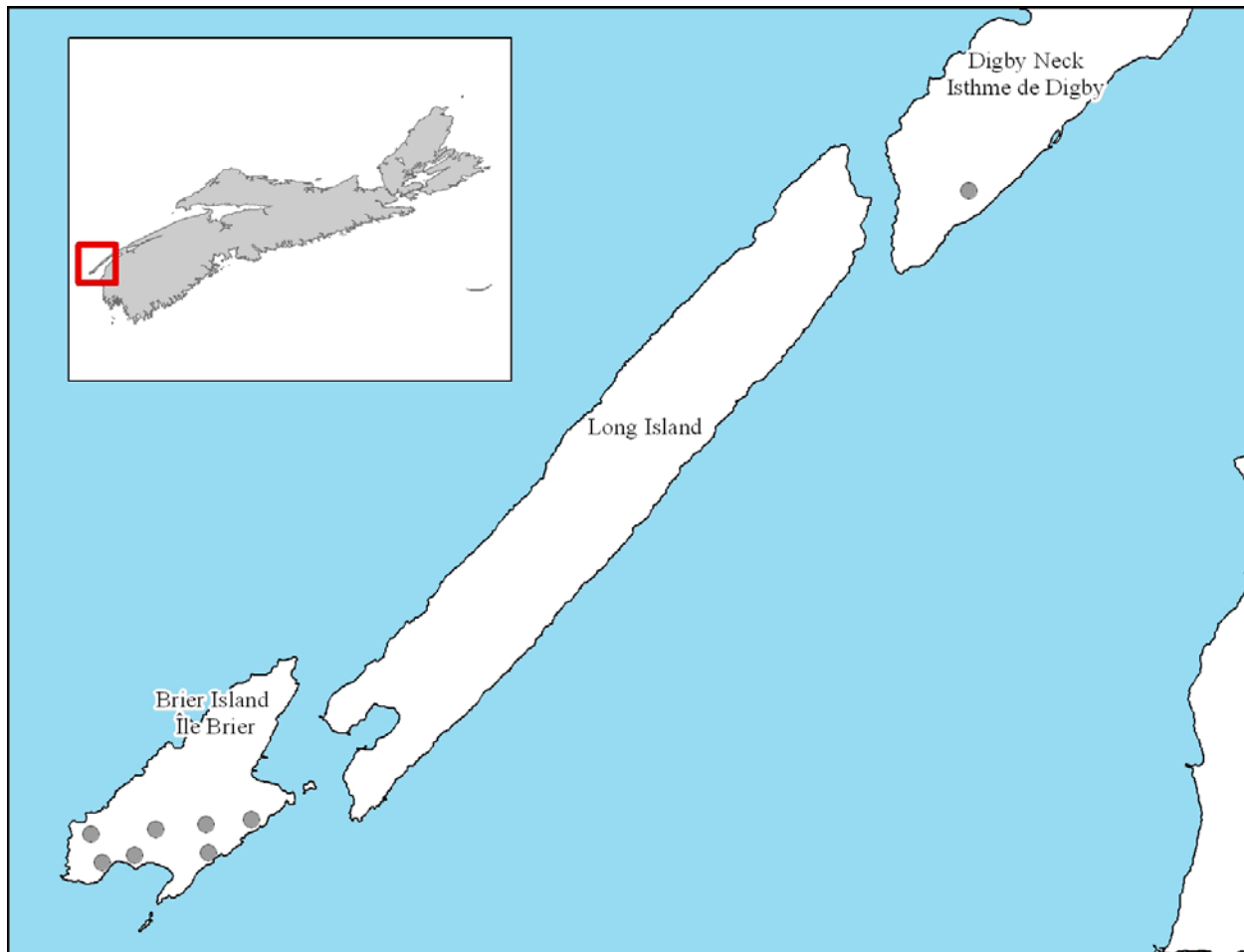
An action plan detailing the steps necessary to achieve the objectives and knowledge gaps presented in this recovery strategy for Eastern Mountain Avens will be developed within two years of the final posting of the Recovery Strategy.

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APPENDIX A

Known sites with Eastern Mountain Avens (*Geum peckii*) as of August 2008. Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, 2008



APPENDIX B

This appendix has been removed from the public document to protect the species and its habitat.

APPENDIX C

Threat classification table for threats impacting Eastern Mountain Avens

General Threat (Alpha-numeric Threat Code)	Specific Threat	Stress	Extent	Occurrence	Frequency	Causal Certainty	Severity	Level of Concern	Brier Island	Digby Neck
			Threat Information ⁺						Priority*	
A. THREAT CATEGORIES: Habitat Loss or Degradation										
1. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use	Alteration of habitat characteristics (scarification, substrate compaction)	Scarification of soil; Mortality	W	C	S	L	L	M	M	L
2. Development and road maintenance	Alteration of habitat characteristics	Mortality; Alteration of surface soils; Loss of habitat	L	U	U	H	H	M	M	L
B. THREAT CATEGORY: Changes in Ecological Dynamics or Natural Processes										
1. Drainage ditch	Alteration of surface and/or ground hydrology	Long term habitat loss; Alteration of species composition	L	H/C	C	H	H	H	H	-
2. Gull nesting	Alteration of habitat - soil nitrification	Loss of suitable habitat; Increased competition	L	C	C	H	H	H	H	-
3. Tree and shrub encroachment	Alteration of habitat - reduced sunlight	Loss of suitable habitat; Increased competition	W	C	C	H	H	H	H	-
4. Lakeshore habitat alteration	Alteration of hydrology - increased stochasticity	Alteration of habitat	L	C	OT	H	M	M	-	H
C. THREAT CATEGORY: Pollution										
1. Dumping		Mortality; Loss of habitat	L	C	U	U	M	L	L	-
D. THREAT CATEGORY: Disturbance or Persecution										
1. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use		Mortality	W	C	S	L	L	M	M	L
2. Collecting (scientific purposes or gardeners)		Mortality	L	C	U	H	M	L	L	-
E. THREAT CATEGORY: Climate and Natural Disasters										
1. Climate change	Alteration of plant community and ecosystem	Uncertain	W	U	C	U	U	H	U	U

⁺**Extent:** W (widespread) or L (local). **Occurrence:** H (historic), C (current), I (imminent), A (anticipated), or U (unknown). **Frequency:** OT (one-time), S (seasonal), C (continuous), R (recurrent), or U (unknown). **Causal Certainty:** H (high), M (medium), or L (low). **Severity:** H (high), M (moderate), L (low), or U (unknown). **Level of Concern** (H: high, M: medium, L: low, or U: Uncertain).

* **Priority** (H: high, M: medium, L: low, U: Uncertain, or - [dash]: not applicable).