Snowy Owl: Listing Info Session

Summary of Meetings, March 17/19 and May 26/28, 2026

Thank you for attending Environment and Climate Change Canada's (ECCC) Listing Information Sessions for Snowy Owl, hosted with the support of Centre of Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER). Below is a summary of the questions and discussions had in the information sessions on March 17/19 and May 26/28, 2026. The slide decks presented during the sessions have been included as supplementary material in both English and Inuktitut.



Summary

ECCC provided an overview of the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) listing process in relation to the proposed listing of Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) as Threatened. The presentation explained the role of the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in assessing species status, the purpose of the current consultation period, and what listing could mean in practice, including the development of a recovery strategy and the application of protections on certain federal lands. ECCC also reviewed the Snowy Owl's range, habitat, diet, and key threats identified in the assessment, including climate change, prey fluctuations, avian influenza, collisions, poisoning, and electrocution.

Questions heard during the sessions

Listing Consultations

How long will the consultations for Snowy Owl Listing be going?

The consultation period for the addition of Snowy Owl to Schedule 1 of the Federal Species at Risk Act will be active from January 14, 2026, to October 14, 2026.

When will ECCC seek formal listing decisions from partners?

A decision can be submitted to ECCC from partners anytime during the consultation period. Typically, decisions get made towards the end of the consultation period so that organizations have the remainder of the consultation period to ask questions and hear from other members of their organization to inform their decision. We also will try to align with board meeting schedules.

What level of decline would constitute an Endangered listing rather than a Threatened listing?

COSEWIC uses criteria to guide the recommended at-risk category that can be found here (COSEWIC 2021). The COSEWIC Assessment outlines indicators A2b + 4b as the reason for assessing a status of Threatened. For both indicators, a reduction in the total number of mature individuals in the last 10 years or 3 generations (whichever is longer) of 30% or greater to be Threatened, and a reduction of 50% or greater to be Endangered. Data for Snowy Owl trends in the southern portion of the wintering range shows a decline a 42.6% over the last 3 generations (or 24 years; COSEWIC 2025).

Are other designations being considered, like Special Concern? Going from not at risk to Threatened can be a drastic change.

Other designations are not being considered, only the proposed designation put forward by COSEWIC (Threatened). If additional information arises during the listing consultation or public comment periods that suggest a different status is more appropriate, the Minister may recommend referring the assessment back to COSEWIC.

Who is going to be consulting with the Nunavut islands in the James Bay and Hudson's Bay area? These islands are technically a part of Nunavut but are covered by a different land claim.

Any discussions involving the territory of Nunavut will be coordinated through the Government of Nunavut and ECCC, along with other co-management partners. Our colleagues in the Quebec Region lead consultations in the islands that fall inside of the Nunavik Inuit Land Claims Agreement, the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement, and the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Our Northern team coordinates with our regional colleagues to ensure that there are no overlap or gaps in consultation efforts.

Can you provide a PDF version of the Snowy Owl listing questionnaire that can be printed and distributed?

Yes, a PDF version has since been made and is included alongside this summary.

Is there funding available to facilitate community consultation by WMB staff at community meetings?

Funding availability has been dynamic over the last two months and we want to provide up to date information, therefore will follow up. ECCC can provide material (presentations, questionnaires, summaries, etc.) that is more geographically relevant if it is of interest.

Follow up information: At this time, and likely for the remainder of this consultation period, we do not have a means of providing funding to support this type of involvement. CIER previously assisted in allocating capacity funding for this type of support, but this agreement has since expired. We acknowledge that there is need for financial support and there is ongoing work to

actively address this gap. Partners will be made aware if there is any funding that becomes available.

Seeking clarification on public's role in the process and how to meaningfully participate. It is helpful to hear about the process of listing a species but doesn't feel like an opportunity to contribute information into the process.

These information sessions make up only one part of the consultation process. Sessions are intended to share what the proposed changes are and what can be expected throughout the process, they do not replace more directed consultation. We are happy to work more closely with individuals, communities, organizations, boards, etc. to help gather input in ways that work best for you.

Snowy Owl and COSEWIC Report

There were discussions on community radio about a decrease in the frequency of Snowy Owl observations. Somebody called in saying that Snowy Owl down was used for jackets, is this true?

We have not heard this before and we have not yet found any written record of this use of Snowy Owl, but that's not to say it hasn't happened. ECCC would be open to hearing more about these perspectives.

Snowy Owls are highly dependent on lemmings for their diet. Are declining lemming populations affecting other species such as fox?

ECCC has heard that changes in lemming populations have affects on other species as well. This would be worth discussing in a Recovery Strategy for Snowy Owl, if it is listed.

What is the total number of mortalities from collisions, electrocutions, and poisoning?

Unfortunately, it is not possible to report the number and causes of Snowy Owl mortalities across Canada as this is not tracked explicitly. However, a study from 2022 examined the cause of death in 383 wintering Snowy Owls in eastern North America, including the Arctic. Of those 383 deaths, 18% were from vehicle collisions, 9% from airplane collisions, 8% from other types of collisions, and 3% from electrocution (McCabe et al. 2022). Similar studies in western Canada found that these numbers were higher: 42-66% of deaths from collisions, 6% from electrocution (Kerlinger & Lein 1988; Chang and Wibe 2016).

Poisoning, likely from rodenticides, was found to be the cause of death in over 50% of necropsied Snowy Owls on wintering grounds (COSEWIC 2025).

How many Snowy Owls are harvested in Land Claims Areas?

There are currently no reporting structures for Snowy Owl harvest in the Northern Land Claims Areas. So, this number is not known.

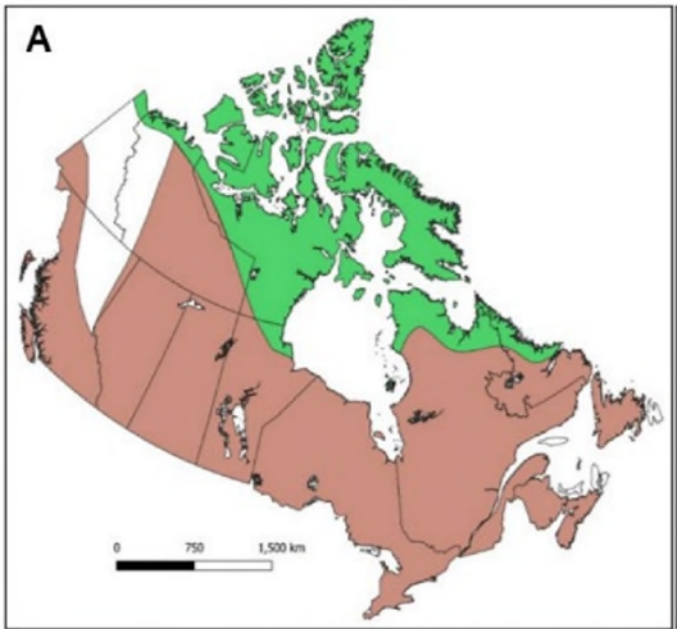
Will there be more Indigenous Knowledge included in this report? It is very science focused.

At this stage, new information is not being gathered to add to the report but instead we are wanting to see if there is more information available and if it aligns with what has been included in the status assessment. If Snowy Owl is listed, then during the recovery planning stage there will be opportunities to include more regionally specific knowledge, including Indigenous Knowledge, to help inform how to address threats and conserve the species.

Can you provide more clarification about the range of Snowy Owl in the North, including seasonal use and fly aways?

The maps shared in the COSEWIC assessment (right) outline the breeding range to be throughout most of Nunavut, the Inuvialuit Settlement Area, and northern Quebec and Labrador. If food remains available, some individuals may reside here all year, but commonly Snowy Owl will move southwards throughout the other territories and provinces, excluding the western mountains, for the winter months.

Specific fly away routes or patterns aren't used by Snowy Owls as they are with songbirds or waterfowl species. Instead, Snowy Owl disperse based on the abundance of food availability (mostly lemmings). This makes their dispersal more sporadic instead of following defined migration paths.



Year-round range of Snowy Owl in Canada is shown in green. Non-breeding range is in brown

Listing Implications

Given that there are no automatic protections on prohibitions in Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, would that area fall to the territories to protect?

SARA prohibitions (section 32 and 33) are automatic only on ECCC or Parks Canada controlled lands, such as some National Wildlife Areas, and National Parks. Migratory Bird Sanctuaries are largely CIRNAC (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada) lands or private lands (e.g., Inuit Owned Lands) and would require a ministerial order for prohibitions to apply (section 35).

In the slides, “nests” were listed as an example of Snowy Owl residences. In a recent court decision regarding Marbled Murrelet, the definition of residences was expanded beyond just the “nests”. This definition affects what habitat is, or is not, protected. Protected habitat, such as Critical Habitat, could be much broader than just the nest and could impact much of the North.

ECCC is developing an updated Critical Habitat approach based on this court decision. The approach that is taken for Snowy Owl may be similar to a non-bird species, but we are awaiting further guidance on how Critical Habitat will be defined. Further conversations regarding protections and Critical Habitat will be had if Snowy Owl is listed.

Other comments

A participant noted that they have seen more Snowy Owls in the southern portion of the Inuvialuit Settlement Area recently. They used to get the odd Snowy Owl in their traps on Banks Island while trying to get White Fox. They call them oopkis and have been seeing them among the trees.

Snowy Owl is discussed in all six of the Inuvialuit Community Conservation Plans and this could be a good resource for further information. It was also encouraged that ECCC present to the Inuvialuit hunter’s and trappers boards at their individual community meetings.



For further questions, comments, or input regarding the potential listing of Snowy Owl, please contact the Northern Species at Risk team at SARA.North@ec.gc.ca. Comments are being accepted until October 14, 2026.

References:

Chang, A.M. and Wiebe, K.L. 2016. Body condition in Snowy Owls wintering on the prairies is greater in females and older individuals and may contribute to sex-biased mortality.

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COSEWIC. 2025. COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* in Canada. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xv + 44 pp.

Kerlinger, P. and Lein, M.R. 1988. Causes of mortality, fat condition, and weights of wintering Snowy Owls. Journal of Field Ornithology 59, 7–12.

McCabe, R.A., Therrien, J.F., Wiebe, K., Gauthier, G., Brinker, D., Weidensaul, S. et al. 2022. Density-dependent winter survival of immatures in an irruptive raptor with pulsed breeding. Oecologia 198, 295–306