

Species at risk stewardship on agro-ecosystems in the Kespukwitk Priority Place

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Within the Kespukwitk (Southwest Nova Scotia) Priority Place, agro-ecosystems have been identified as one of eleven conservation targets being used to guide collaborative species at risk conservation and recovery efforts. Working with the conservation community, The Clean Annapolis River Project (CARP) worked to identify priority threats to species at risk on agricultural landscapes in Kespukwitk. A list of strategies to address these threats was then compiled and to help assess feasibility of each strategy, CARP collaborated with representatives from the agricultural community. Based on these discussions, strategies were ranked based on 1.) benefit to the target species/habitat, 2.) barriers to the farmer in time, initial expense, and long-term perceived economics, and 3.) technical feasibility based on perceived barriers. Some of the top strategies to come out of this process were:

- 1.) installation of shelterbelts,
- 2.) riparian vegetation planting,
- 3.) supporting alternative pollinator habitat, and
- 4.) installation of livestock exclusion fencing from waterways and wetlands and supplying alternative watering sources.

A number of these strategies have since been implemented on farms in Kespukwitk, with over 10 local producers participating to-date. A current focus of this project is engagement of new farms to partner with - species at risk conservation can be sensitive topic for private landowners and managers on working lands such as farms. Based on the experience of CARP and many other conservation organizations, relationship-building is a key element to successful program delivery, with strategies requiring incremental steps to allow for trust to be built over time.

Key words: Agro-ecosystems, species at risk, stewardship

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