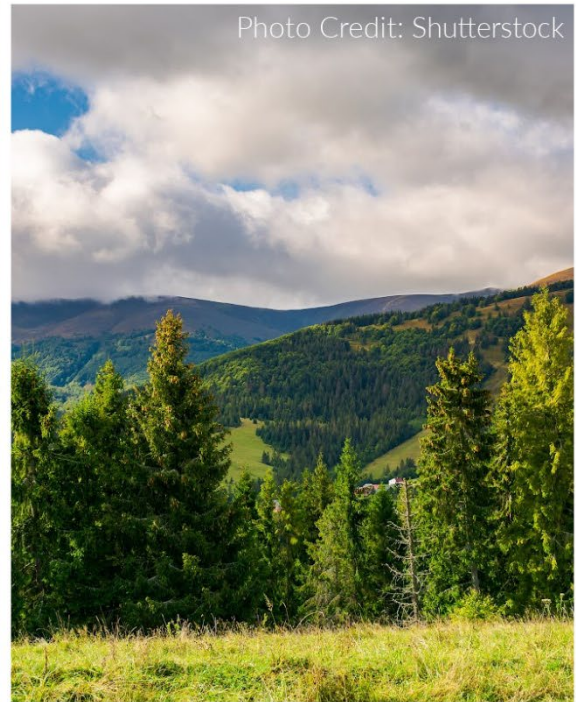


Backgrounder

Supporting Regionally Important Wildlife Protection for the American Goshawk (Ts'ek) in Northwest British Columbia

(BC Nature – Background Information for Letters of Support)



Issue Summary

American Goshawk populations in northwest British Columbia have declined significantly over the past several decades as mature and old-growth forests have become increasingly fragmented by logging and other development. Monitoring of known breeding territories in west-central British Columbia found a 64% decline in occupancy over just nine years, from 72% in 1998 to 26% in 2007, indicating that far fewer traditional breeding territories continued to support nesting goshawks. Because the American Goshawk requires large, intact forests to survive, its decline is also a warning that the health and connectivity of northwest British Columbia's forest ecosystems are being compromised, with implications for many other species that depend on the same habitat.

The decline has occurred despite years of research, monitoring, and voluntary management practices. As British Columbia develops new Forest Landscape Plans, there is an opportunity to strengthen habitat protection before additional mature and old-growth forest is lost or fragmented.



The Gitsegukla Huwilp of the Gitxsan Nation has asked conservation organizations to support a petition calling on the Province of British Columbia to recognize the American Goshawk (*Ts'ek*) as Regionally Important Wildlife in the Skeena Natural Resource Region and Haida Gwaii. The petition argues that this designation would strengthen landscape-level habitat protection through Forest Landscape Planning and help conserve the large, connected forests on which the species, and many other forest-dependent plants and animals depend.

Scope of BC Nature's Support

This backgrounder summarizes the primary conservation concerns raised in the Gitsegukla Huwilp petition and the available information regarding American Goshawk habitat conservation. BC Nature's support is focused on strengthening habitat protection for the American Goshawk through improved landscape-level planning and meaningful collaboration with First Nations.

The petition also calls for the American Goshawk's BC Conservation Data Centre status to be changed from Blue-listed to Red-listed. BC Nature does not have the specialized scientific expertise required to independently assess that request and is therefore not taking a position on the appropriate provincial listing at this time. However, BC Nature encourages the Province to ensure that any current or future status assessment is transparent, follows established scientific criteria, and is based on the best available evidence.

Species at Risk Context

- **Status:** The American Goshawk (formerly referred to provincially as the Northern Goshawk) has experienced significant declines throughout northwestern BC.
- Monitoring over the past 30 years indicates an estimated 80–95% decline in occupancy of known breeding areas in the Skeena Region. On Haida Gwaii, the resident goshawk population is considered to be on the brink of local extinction.
- **Species:** American Goshawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*)
- **Habitat:** Requires large, connected landscapes of mature and old-growth forest for nesting, hunting, dispersal, and successful reproduction.
- **Primary Threats:**
 - Clearcut logging
 - Habitat fragmentation
 - Loss of mature and old-growth forest
 - Inadequate legal protection for nesting and foraging habitat
- **Significance of Area:** The American Goshawk is considered an umbrella species; conserving its habitat also protects many other species dependent on intact old-growth forest ecosystems.

Geographic Context

- **Location:** Skeena Natural Resource Region and Haida Gwaii.
- **Ecosystem:** Temperate rainforest and interior old-growth forest ecosystems.
- **Habitat:** Large tracts of structurally complex mature and old-growth forests.

- **Protection Gap:** While some nest trees may receive limited protection, there are currently no comprehensive legal mechanisms protecting the broader habitat required for breeding, hunting, and movement across the landscape. Existing protections are considered insufficient under current forestry practices.

Cultural Context (First Peoples Impact)

The petition is led by the Gitsegukla Huwilp of the Gitxsan Nation and recognizes the cultural significance of the goshawk to many Indigenous Nations in northwest BC.

For the Haida, the goshawk is their national bird. Within Gitsegukla, the goshawk appears on the crest of one of the wilps (houses), reflecting its cultural importance. The petition emphasizes that implementation of Regionally Important Wildlife protection should occur in partnership with First Nations and align with Indigenous stewardship, title, rights, and responsibilities.

Ecological Context

The American Goshawk depends on large, healthy, connected forests to survive. When goshawk populations decline, it is often because those forests are becoming too fragmented to function as healthy ecosystems.

Healthy old-growth forests provide benefits that extend far beyond wildlife. They help store carbon, regulate water supplies, reduce erosion and flood risk, support salmon-bearing watersheds, and provide habitat for hundreds of plants and animals that contribute to resilient ecosystems. They are also central to the cultural, ecological, and economic well-being of many Indigenous communities.

Protecting habitat for the American Goshawk therefore helps protect the broader forest systems that people depend on. Conserving large, connected forests today supports biodiversity, strengthens resilience to climate change, and helps ensure that future generations continue to benefit from healthy watersheds and functioning ecosystems.

The American Goshawk is not the end goal of conservation, it is a signal that the forests supporting clean water, carbon storage, biodiversity, recreation, and Indigenous stewardship remain healthy and intact.

Historical Context

Historically, forest management decisions in British Columbia were driven primarily through provincial timber management objectives. While First Nations were consulted under evolving legal requirements and some entered forestry or revenue-sharing agreements, the protection of large, connected wildlife habitat was often addressed through voluntary measures or site-specific reserves rather than landscape-scale planning. The cumulative effect of decades of harvesting has fragmented mature and old-growth forests across parts of the Skeena region, contributing to declines in species such as the American Goshawk.

Conservation Significance

The petition requests that British Columbia:

- Recognize the American Goshawk as Regionally Important Wildlife.
- Incorporate RIW protections into Forest Landscape Plans.
- Protect and restore connected mature forest habitat.
- Develop enforceable landscape-level habitat measures.
- Work collaboratively with First Nations in planning, implementation, and monitoring.
- Establish long-term effectiveness monitoring.

Scientific Context

The petition cites more than thirty years of regional monitoring, provincial recovery planning, and peer-reviewed research demonstrating that:

- breeding habitat alone is insufficient without protecting surrounding hunting habitat,
- landscape connectivity is essential,
- continued habitat fragmentation remains the primary driver of population decline, and
- Forest Landscape Planning provides an opportunity to improve long-term habitat conservation.

References

- Petition Request to Recognize Regionally Important Wildlife for American Goshawk final copy, June 24'26 copy for Haida, allied First Nations, ENGOs and Citizen groups



Petition Request to
Recognize Regional

- **McClaren et al. (2015), *Science-Based Guidelines for Managing Northern Goshawk Breeding Areas in Coastal British Columbia***
<https://jem-online.org/index.php/jem/article/view/576>
This is the strongest scientific source for habitat requirements, breeding areas, post-fledging areas, and broader territory management.
- **Government of Canada, *Recovery Strategy for the Northern Goshawk, laingi subspecies, in Canada***
<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry/recovery-strategies/northern-goshawk-final-2018.html>
Useful for federal status, threats, recovery objectives, and critical habitat.
- **Province of British Columbia, *Implementation Plan for the Recovery of Northern Goshawk***
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/plants-animals-and-ecosystems/species-ecosystems-at-risk/recovery-planning/implementation_plan_for_the_recovery_of_northern_goshawk.pdf
Provides the provincial recovery framework and identifies priority management and monitoring actions.

- **Forest Practices Board, *Management of Habitat for Species at Risk under FRPA***
<https://www.bcfpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/SIR55-SAR-Habitat.pdf>
Especially important because it examines Northern Goshawk habitat protection under BC forestry law and compares legal protection for coastal goshawks with voluntary measures for interior populations.
- **COSEWIC, *Assessment and Status Report on the Northern Goshawk, laingi subspecies***
https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/virtual_sara/files/cosewic/sr_autour_palombes_northern_goshawk_1213_e.pdf
Useful for population status, threats, habitat dependence, and the Haida Gwaii population.
- **Forest Practices Board, *Goshawk Foraging Habitat on Haida Gwaii***
<https://www.bcfpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/IRC143-Goshawk-Foraging-Habitat-Haida-Gwaii.pdf>
Supports the point that protecting nest sites alone is insufficient and that broader foraging habitat remains at risk.
- **BC Northern Goshawk Management Research Library**
<https://forestumbrella.ca/goshawk-management>
This page gathers several relevant BC documents, including the 2012 interior goshawk best-management practices and the 2023 foraging-habitat guidance.
- **Environment and Climate Change Canada, Northern Goshawk species status page**
<https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/bird-status/oiseau-bird-eng.aspx?sB=NOGO&sL=e&sM=a&sY=2019>