



Northern Bobwhite

(*Colinus virginianus*) in Ontario

Ontario Recovery Strategy Series

Draft

2019

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 2007* (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. 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 Environment, Conservation and Parks Species at Risk webpage at: www.ontario.ca/speciesatrisk

1 **Recommended citation**

2 Wyshynski, S.A. 2019. DRAFT Recovery Strategy for the Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus*
3 *virginianus*) in Ontario. Ontario Recovery Strategy Series. Prepared by the Ministry of
4 the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Peterborough, Ontario. v + 11 pp. +
5 Appendix. Adoption of the Recovery Strategy for the Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus*
6 *virginianus*) in Canada (Environment Canada 2018).

7 © Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2019
8 ISBN [MECP will insert prior to final publication]

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10 to the source, except where use of an image or other item is prohibited in the content
11 use statement of the adopted federal recovery strategy.

12 Cette publication hautement spécialisée « Recovery strategies prepared under the
13 *Endangered Species Act, 2007* », n'est disponible qu'en anglais en vertu du Règlement
14 411/97 qui en exempte l'application de la [Loi sur les services en français](#). Pour obtenir
15 de l'aide en français, veuillez communiquer avec recovery.planning@ontario.ca.

16

17 **Authors**

18 Sarah Wyshynski – Ecological Consultant

19 **Acknowledgments**

20 I would like to thank all those who have reviewed and provided advice and input in
21 helping to develop this document. This recovery strategy addendum benefited from
22 valuable comments and insights from Chris Risley, former Species at Risk Biologist,
23 Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and Don Sutherland, Natural
24 Heritage Information Centre, along with several reviewers from the Ontario Ministry of
25 the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

26

27 **Declaration**

28 The recovery strategy for the Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) was developed in
29 accordance with the requirements of the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA). This
30 recovery strategy has been prepared as advice to the Government of Ontario, other
31 responsible jurisdictions and the many different constituencies that may be involved in
32 recovering the species.

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

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

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

44 **Responsible jurisdictions**

45 Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
46 Environment and Climate Change Canada – Canadian Wildlife Service, Ontario
47

48 **Executive summary**

49 The *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) requires the Minister of the Environment,
50 Conservation and Parks to ensure recovery strategies are prepared for all species listed
51 as endangered or threatened on the Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) List. Under the
52 ESA, a recovery strategy may incorporate all or part of an existing plan that relates to
53 the species.

54 The Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) is listed as endangered on the SARO List.
55 The species is listed as endangered under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).
56 Environment and Climate Change Canada prepared the Recovery Strategy for the
57 Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) in Canada in 2018 to meet its requirements
58 under the SARA. This recovery strategy is hereby adopted under the ESA. With the
59 additions indicated below, the enclosed strategy meets all the content requirements
60 outlined in the ESA.

61 A habitat regulation prescribes an area that will be protected as the habitat of a species.
62 Under the ESA, a recovery strategy must include a recommendation to the Minister of
63 the Environment, Conservation and Parks on the area that should be considered in
64 developing a habitat regulation. The Northern Bobwhite is a non-migratory species that
65 typically spends its entire life within a few kilometers from where it hatched.
66 Consequently, all habitat Northern Bobwhite rely on for their survival throughout the
67 year is found in close proximity. Birds use and rely on a variety of interconnected habitat
68 types for foraging, nesting, roosting and safe escape cover. Access to all these different
69 habitat types throughout the day, in both the breeding and non-breeding season, is
70 necessary. It is therefore recommended that Northern Bobwhite habitat be defined as
71 an area which encompasses a mosaic of different preferred cover types. With most
72 reported daily movements of birds being less than 400 m, it is recommended that the
73 area defined as habitat be captured within a 400 m radius of a single verified
74 observation of a bird, brood or covey. This area should encompass sufficient diversity
75 and interspersed cover types that contain all the elements necessary for daily,
76 seasonal and annual needs of a nesting pair, brood or covey, along with safe travel
77 lanes and corridors that facilitate dispersal and movement between breeding and non-
78 breeding season components of habitat. It is recommended that habitat that should be
79 captured in a regulation include, but not be limited to: native prairie and savanna,
80 hayfields, pastures, old or abandoned fields, grassland restoration sites, scrub-shrub,
81 hedgerows, treelines, forest edge, woodlands and row crops. It is further recommended
82 that areas of urban/suburban development, roads, and aquatic areas (e.g., open water
83 and wetlands), which are seldom, if ever, used by Northern Bobwhite, be excluded from
84 the area defined as habitat. As the current distribution of birds in Ontario is unknown yet
85 believed to have declined significantly in recent years, it is recommended that the
86 occupied habitat initially be identified as those areas occupied by a bird or covey within
87 the last 20 years and should continue to be protected for a further 10 years after the last
88 confirmed record of occupancy.

89

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110 **1.0 Adoption of federal recovery strategy**

111 The *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) requires the Minister of the Environment,
112 Conservation and Parks to ensure recovery strategies are prepared for all species listed
113 as endangered or threatened on the Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) List. Under the
114 ESA, a recovery strategy may incorporate all or part of an existing plan that relates to
115 the species.

116 The Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) is listed as endangered on the SARO List.
117 The species is listed as endangered under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA).
118 Environment and Climate Change Canada prepared the Recovery Strategy for the
119 Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) in Canada in 2018 to meet its requirements
120 under the SARA. This recovery strategy is hereby adopted under the ESA. With the
121 additions indicated below, the enclosed strategy meets all of the content requirements
122 outlined in the ESA.

123 **1.1 Species assessment and classification**

124 The following list is assessment and classification information for the Northern Bobwhite
125 (*Colinus virginianus*). Note: The glossary provides definitions for the abbreviations and
126 technical terms in this document.

- 127 • SARO List Classification: Endangered
- 128 • SARO List History: Endangered (2000)
- 129 • COSEWIC Assessment History: Endangered (1994); re-examined and confirmed
130 in 2003 and 2013
- 131 • SARA Schedule 1: Endangered (2005)
- 132 • Conservation Status Rankings (NatureServe 2019): G-rank: G4G5 (2016); N-
133 rank: N1(2018) in Canada; N5 (1997) in the United States; S-rank: S1

134 **1.2 Species description and biology**

135 **Species biology**

136 Northern Bobwhite has a short life span with few adults living longer than five years
137 (Rosene 1969). In the fall and winter, birds gather in highly organized social groups, or
138 coveys. These groups of birds, which are optimally around 12 individuals, are formed to
139 provide improved thermoregulation during the cold winter nights, allow for optimal
140 foraging and improved predator detection (Liberati, et al. 2013).

141 **1.3 Habitat needs**

142 Northern Bobwhite are known to have relatively small home ranges. According to Miller
143 et al. (2017) most Northern Bobwhite have home ranges less than 30 ha, although
144 home range size has been found to vary during both the breeding and non-breeding
145 season depending upon habitat quality, land use and sex (DeVos and Mueller 1993,
146 Lee, et al. 1998, Janke and Gates 2012, Miller, et al. 2017). Larger home ranges have
147 been attributed to poor habitat quality and therefore a need to search further for food
148 (Bell, Dancek and Zwank 1985, J. M. Lee 1994, Madison, Robel and Jones 2000, Lohr,
149 et al. 2011). Studies show that average home range size of coveys during the non-
150 breeding season (3.3 – 7.2 ha (Rosene 1969), 6.8 ha (Yoho and Dimmick 1972), 10.5
151 ha (Miller, et al. 2017), 26.1 ha (Janke and Gates 2012), 40 ha (Madison, Robel and
152 Jones 2000), 18 – 55 ha (Bell, Dancek and Zwank 1985)) is typically smaller than that of
153 individuals during the breeding season (10 ha (DeVos and Mueller 1993), 15 ha (Miller,
154 et al. 2017), 38 ha (Collins, Williams and Castelli 2009), 39 ha (Lohr, et al. 2011), 45 ha
155 (West, Keyser and Morgan 2012), 65 ha and 282 ha (J. M. Lee 1994)). Findings from
156 the previously mentioned studies suggest that most non-breeding season home ranges
157 are less than 30 ha, as reported by Miller et al. (2017). Average home range size in the
158 breeding season can often be greater than 30 ha, although few studies report home
159 ranges larger than 50 ha.

160 Northern Bobwhite individuals are known to occasionally move long distances (6 km
161 (Miller, et al. 2017), 12 km (Lohr, et al. 2011)), with some travelling greater than 100 km
162 (Lehmann 1984); however, few individuals disperse further than 1.6 km (Fies, Puckett
163 and Larson-Brogdon 2002). Studies suggest that Northern Bobwhite may disperse
164 further in fragmented habitats, with dispersal distances increasing as inter-patch
165 connectivity decreases (Fies, Puckett and Larson-Brogdon 2002). Typical daily
166 movements of Northern Bobwhite are short (390 m (Roseberry 1964), 242 m (Madison,
167 Robel and Jones 2000), 503 m (Taylor, Church and Rusch 2000) and 158 m (Lohr, et
168 al. 2011)), with most reported maximum daily movements less than 400 m (Bell, Dancek
169 and Zwank 1985, Dimmick 1992, Miller, et al. 2017).

170 Coveys, which are made up of young and adult birds from various family and brood
171 groups, are formed in the fall. While made up of different birds each year, they
172 repeatedly use the same roost sites year after year (Liberati, et al. 2013).

173 **1.4 Area for consideration in developing a habitat regulation**

174 Under the ESA, a recovery strategy must include a recommendation to the Minister of
175 the Environment, Conservation and Parks on the area that should be considered in
176 developing a habitat regulation. A habitat regulation is a legal instrument that prescribes
177 an area that will be protected as the habitat of the species. The recommendation
178 provided below will be one of many sources considered by the Minister, including
179 information that may become newly available following completion of the recovery
180 strategy, when developing the habitat regulation for this species.

181 The Northern Bobwhite is a non-migratory species, which typically spends its entire
182 lifetime within a few kilometres of its natal site. Birds inhabit areas that contain a mosaic
183 of small patches of tallgrass prairie-savanna, early to mid-successional forest, and open
184 areas such as agricultural fields and recently burned grasslands. While birds require a
185 diversity of habitats to satisfy food, reproduction and other life requisites, being an edge
186 species (Liberati, et al. 2013, Gates, et al. 2017), they rarely use anything more than the
187 outside edge of a habitat type (e.g., grassland for nesting). Spending the majority of
188 their time walking and running on the ground, all habitat required for survival throughout
189 the species' lifetime is ideally found in close proximity (Roseberry and Klimstra 1984,
190 Liberati, et al. 2013). Gates et al. (2017) found birds to be located within 50 to 250m of
191 other preferred habitat types. It is recommended that habitat on which Northern
192 Bobwhite depends to carry out its life processes, including feeding and reproduction,
193 should be considered for inclusion in a habitat regulation, along with escape cover and
194 roosting habitat which provide protection from predation and the harsh elements of
195 winter (snow, wind, rain).

196 In developing a habitat regulation that provides habitat features required for nesting,
197 feeding, roosting, along with protection from predation, it is important to consider how
198 Northern Bobwhite use the diversity of habitats in their surrounding landscape, and the
199 importance of their interspersion. Ideally, birds nest and forage in open grasslands and
200 idle fields that have been out of production for 1 to 3 years, where forbes (herbaceous
201 flowering plants), tall grasses and shrubs create an umbrella-like understory and create
202 visual obstructions of nests, broods and calling males (Taylor, Church and Rusch 1999,
203 Lusk, et al. 2006, Collins, Williams and Castelli 2009). After hatching, adults move
204 broods from dense nesting cover with little bare ground to habitat (e.g., tall bunch
205 grasses and forbes, recently burned grasses, old or previously tilled fields, legume and
206 small grain crops) with more open ground yet similar overhead cover that is important
207 for concealing the young. Here, chicks can move and forage more easily (Collins,
208 Williams and Castelli 2009, Brennan, Hernandez and Willifors 2014, Brooke, et al.
209 2017). Native grasslands are considered ideal brooding habitat as they are known to
210 have a higher abundance and diversity of invertebrates than agricultural lands, which
211 are essential to a chick's diet (DeVos and Mueller 1993). As predation is the prime
212 source of mortality in Northern Bobwhite, safe roosting habitat and escape cover close
213 to nesting, brooding and feeding habitat is crucial to birds during both the day and night,
214 throughout the year. Areas with shrubby/woody cover (early to mid-successional forest)
215 protect birds from the harsh elements of winter and provide safe resting sites between
216 feedings. Woody vegetation in the form of hedgerows and fencerows provide optimal
217 escape cover in agricultural landscapes (Sargent and Carter 1999). Because birds
218 require access to all these different habitats throughout the day, in both the breeding
219 and non-breeding season, use of a preferred area for nesting, feeding or roosting is
220 greatly influenced by the proximity to other preferred habitats. The spatial relationship of
221 a preferred habitat to other preferred habitat that is a key factor to its usability, rather
222 than simply its presence (Guthery 1997, Brennan, Hernandez and Willifors 2014,
223 Crosby, Elmore and Leslie 2013). While native grassland may be ideal brooding and
224 foraging habitat for Northern Bobwhite, if there is little to no woody vegetation nearby to
225 provide roosting or escape cover, it is of little value to the birds. For this reason, it is

226 recommended that Northern Bobwhite habitat be defined as an area which
227 encompasses a mosaic of different preferred cover types.

228 With an extremely limited distribution and small population in Ontario, which is
229 suspected to have declined significantly since last estimated in 2000 (230 adult
230 breeding birds), a precautionary approach should be applied in defining habitat for
231 Northern Bobwhite. It is recommended that Northern Bobwhite habitat be defined as an
232 area surrounding a location which is occupied by a bird, brood or covey. This area can
233 be defined as any suitable habitat within a 400 m radius of a single observation of a
234 bird, brood or covey. A single observation is being recommended to establish
235 occupancy with the understanding that: Northern Bobwhite are resident species, most
236 birds live within an area of 2.0 km² (less than one km radius) throughout their lifetime
237 (Guthery 1997, Miller, et al. 2017), all habitat required throughout the year is found in
238 proximity to each other, and the current population is unknown with very few verified
239 sightings (with documented locations) within the last 20 years (pers. comm. 2019
240 Sutherland). It should be noted that observations considered here are only for native
241 birds. Currently, the only known native population of Northern Bobwhite in Ontario is on
242 Walpole Island First Nation; birds found on the mainland are presumed to be pen-
243 reared.

244 A 400 m radius (approximately 50 ha) is recommended to delineate Northern Bobwhite
245 habitat based on studies which have found most daily movements of birds being less
246 than 400 m (Bell, Dancek and Zwank 1985, Dimmick 1992, Miller, et al. 2017). While this
247 is an area larger than most covey home ranges, which are less than 30 ha (Miller, et al.
248 2017), it approximates the size of many breeding season home ranges. A precautionary
249 approach is being recommended in order to increase the probability of capturing
250 sufficient diversity and interspersion of cover types (e.g., native grassland, savanna,
251 early to mid-successional forest) that contain all the elements necessary for daily,
252 seasonal and annual needs of a nesting pair, brood or covey. This radius also takes into
253 account that observations are not necessarily made at or near the centre of a home
254 range. Moreover, this area should increase the likelihood of capturing safe travel lanes
255 and corridors (e.g., early successional forest in the form of hedgerows, treelines and
256 clumps of shrubs/ trees in open areas) that facilitate dispersal and movement within and
257 between breeding and non-breeding season components of habitat, in order to maintain
258 gene flow and sustain local populations.

259 Northern Bobwhite use and rely on a variety of interconnected habitats. Habitat that is
260 recommended to be captured in a regulation includes, but is not limited to: native prairie
261 and savanna, hayfields, pastures, old or abandoned fields, grassland restoration sites,
262 scrub-shrub, hedgerows, treelines, forest edge and woodlands. Historically, annual row
263 crops (e.g., corn, soy) provided valuable fall/winter foraging and roosting habitat for
264 Northern Bobwhite, as weeds and stubble were left standing after harvesting. In recent
265 years however, the use of intensive and more mechanized farming practices along with
266 pesticide and herbicide use and earlier harvest times, have made row crops less
267 suitable habitat for foraging and roosting (Page and Austen 1994, Perlut 2014, Lohr, et
268 al. 2011). Nevertheless, if certain management practices (e.g., limiting chemicals,
269 leaving a few rows of unharvested crops) are undertaken, row crops can be an

270 important source of food during critical winter months, and are therefore recommended
271 for inclusion as a component of regulated habitat. It is recommended that areas of
272 urban/suburban development, roads, and aquatic areas (e.g., open water and
273 wetlands), which are seldom, if ever, used by Northern Bobwhite, be excluded from the
274 area defined as habitat.

275 The current population size and distribution of Northern Bobwhite on Walpole Island
276 First Nation is unknown, due to insufficient data, with limited sightings reported since
277 2000. These birds however, exhibit high site fidelity, spending their entire life within a
278 few kilometres of their natal site. Coveys, while made up of different individuals each
279 year, are known to form in the same location year after year, using the same roosting
280 sites over time (Liberati, et al. 2013). Until there is a clearer understanding of Northern
281 Bobwhite distribution through regular surveys and monitoring, it is recommended that
282 the area initially defined as occupied habitat should be identified as those areas with a
283 known location of a bird or covey, within the last 20 years, i.e., all verified observations
284 since 1999.

285 With the trend toward larger farms, the amount of tallgrass prairie and savanna habitat
286 has declined significantly in Ontario, as have hedgerows and forest edges. Because
287 habitat availability is a key limiting factor for Northern Bobwhite, and the objective of
288 recovery is to increase the population in Ontario, it is recommended that regulated
289 habitat be protected for 10 years (twice the maximum age of an adult bird) after the last
290 documented record of occupancy. In addition to protecting habitat for a growing
291 population, this timeline takes into consideration that more effort and time are required
292 to confirm absence of a rare species.

293 **Glossary**

294 Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC): The
295 committee established under section 14 of the *Species at Risk Act* that is
296 responsible for assessing and classifying species at risk in Canada.

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

300 Conservation status rank: A rank assigned to a species or ecological community that
301 primarily conveys the degree of rarity of the species or community at the global
302 (G), national (N) or subnational (S) level. These ranks, termed G-rank, N-rank
303 and S-rank, are not legal designations. Ranks are determined by NatureServe
304 and, in the case of Ontario's S-rank, by Ontario's Natural Heritage Information
305 Centre. The conservation status of a species or ecosystem is designated by a
306 number from 1 to 5, preceded by the letter G, N or S reflecting the appropriate
307 geographic scale of the assessment. The numbers mean the following:

308 1 = critically imperilled
309 2 = imperilled
310 3 = vulnerable
311 4 = apparently secure
312 5 = secure
313 NR = not yet ranked

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

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

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

326 **List of abbreviations**

327 COSEWIC: Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada
328 COSSARO: Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario
329 ELC: Ecological Land Classification

- 330 ESA: Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007*
- 331 ISBN: International Standard Book Number
- 332 MECP: Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
- 333 MNRF: Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
- 334 SARA: Canada's *Species at Risk Act*
- 335 SARO List: Species at Risk in Ontario List
- 336

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427

**Appendix 1. Recovery strategy for the Northern
Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) in Canada**

428

Recovery Strategy for the Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) in Canada

Northern Bobwhite



2018



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

Recommended citation:

Environment and Climate Change Canada. 2018. Recovery Strategy for the Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) in Canada. *Species at Risk Act Recovery Strategy Series*. Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ottawa. ix + 38 pp.

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.

Cover illustration: © Dr. George K. Peck

Également disponible en français sous le titre
« Programme de rétablissement du Colin de Virginie (*Colinus virginianus*) au Canada »

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ISBN 978-0-660-28928-1

Catalogue no. En3-4/306-2018E-PDF

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

Preface

The federal, provincial, and territorial government signatories under the [Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk \(1996\)](#)² 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 Northern Bobwhite and has prepared this recovery strategy, as per section 37 of SARA. To the extent possible, it has been prepared in cooperation with the Province of Ontario and Walpole Island First Nation as per section 39(1) of 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 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 Northern Bobwhite 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.

In the case of critical habitat identified for terrestrial species including migratory birds SARA requires that critical habitat identified in a federally protected area³ 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*.

² <http://registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=en&n=6B319869-1#2>

³ 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.

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.

Acknowledgments

The initial draft of the Recovery Strategy for the Northern Bobwhite was prepared by Al Sandilands of Gray Owl Environmental Inc.. Subsequent versions were prepared by Shawn Meyer and Ken Tuininga with assistance from Angela McConnell and John Brett, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service - Ontario and Patrick Hubert, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

The following people provided information for the Northern Bobwhite Recovery Strategy: Madeline Austen and Mike Cadman, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service-Ontario; Amelia Argue, Alan Dextrase, Ron Gould, Don Hector, Pud Hunter, Catherine Jong, Jake Lozon, Ron Ludolph, Kate MacIntyre, Chris Risley, Bree Walpole and Allen Woodliffe, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry; Don Sutherland, Natural Heritage Information Centre – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry; Greg George, Kettle and Stoney Point First Nation; Clint Jacobs, Kennon Johnson, Walpole Island First Nation; Ross James, Royal Ontario Museum; Erica Nol, Trent University; Hal Schraeder, Ontario Ministry of the Environment and Jon McCracken, Bird Studies Canada.

This recovery strategy also benefited from the input, review and suggestions from the following individuals: Marie Archambault, Madeline Austen, Lesley Dunn, Judith Girard, Krista Holmes, Elizabeth Rezek, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service – Ontario, Kim Borg and Véronique Brondex, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service – National Capital Region and Jay Fitzsimmons, Leanne Jennings, Sarah McGuire and Don Sutherland, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

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

Executive Summary

The Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) is a tallgrass prairie-savanna bird which also inhabits early to mid-successional forest habitats and open areas such as agricultural fields. It prefers areas subject to periodic natural disturbances, such as fire, and uses sites with large amounts of shade-intolerant herbaceous species. It requires large and/or well-connected patches of suitable habitat that include open grassy areas for nesting interspersed with early-successional shrubby areas for roosting and plants such as agricultural crops for feeding. The Northern Bobwhite is a non-migratory species that typically spends its entire lifetime close to its natal⁴ area. Consequently, all of its life history requirements must be in close proximity for habitat to be considered suitable for the species.

Currently, native Northern Bobwhites are only known from Walpole Island First Nation in extreme southwestern Ontario in Canada. The species is listed as Endangered under Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* and also under the *Ontario Endangered Species Act, 2007*. Its breeding population was estimated at 230 birds in 2000 (based on a count of 92 singing males), but numbers are believed to have declined since then. Multiple sightings of Northern Bobwhite on Walpole Island First Nation in 2015 and 2016 have, however, confirmed the persistence of the population. The species has experienced significant declines throughout most of its North American range.

Despite the threats to the Northern Bobwhite and based on the criteria that Environment and Climate Change Canada uses to establish recovery feasibility, the recovery of the Northern Bobwhite has been deemed technically and biologically feasible. Habitat loss and fragmentation are key threats to the viability⁵ of the Northern Bobwhite in Ontario. Predation (wildlife and domestic pets) is also a threat, particularly due to the critically small remnant population. Indiscriminate burning of grassland habitats may eliminate cover particularly in the fall and winter. And the release of non-native Northern Bobwhite is a potential threat because of interbreeding which may compromise native genetic stock and fitness. The use of herbicide and pesticide reduces the amount of forage available, particularly invertebrates which are vital for chick growth and survival. The European Fire Ant (*Myrmica rubra*) is also a potential threat that could impact the Northern Bobwhite in a similar way to how another invasive ant species has impacted it in the United States.

The population and distribution objectives for the Northern Bobwhite in Canada are:

Short term (5 - 10 years):

- Maintain the existing population on Walpole Island First Nation and where biologically and technically feasible increase the abundance of the existing population to at least 230 adult birds.

⁴ Relating to birth.

⁵ The probability of persistence.

Medium term (10 - 20 years):

- If biologically and technically feasible, increase the population on Walpole Island First Nation to at least 500 adult birds and increase its distribution to historically occupied areas on Walpole Island First Nation.

Long term (time frame to be determined):

- If biologically and technically feasible, to achieve a self-sustaining, resilient and redundant population, by establishing at least one viable population on Walpole Island First Nation and re-establish one viable population on the mainland.

Critical habitat has not been identified for the only known remaining population of native Northern Bobwhite in Canada on Walpole Island First Nation nor on the mainland at this time because sufficient location and habitat information are not currently available to Environment and Climate Change Canada. The Schedule of Studies (Section 7.2) outlines the activities required to identify critical habitat necessary to support the population and distribution objectives for this species.

One or more action plans will be completed for Northern Bobwhite by December 2023.

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 Northern Bobwhite. 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.*

Unknown. The most recent targeted surveys for Northern Bobwhite were completed on Walpole Island First Nation in 2000. At this time the population on Walpole Island was estimated to be around 230 adult birds (MacIntyre 2002). While the population has likely declined since 2000, local knowledge from Walpole Island First Nation suggests that a small population persists on the island. Five individuals reported sighting Northern Bobwhites in 2015 and 7 others reported sightings in 2016. Numbers of birds seen ranged from single individuals to coveys⁶ of 30 - 40 birds (Jacobs and Johnson 2016). While these Northern Bobwhites are considered native, the current size of the population is not known. Native Northern Bobwhites are not known to exist on the mainland. Because the only remaining native population exists on Walpole Island and the size of that population is not known, whether sufficient individuals exist to establish a native population on the mainland is not known. The remaining population is also vulnerable to environmental events. Deep snow and prolonged cold periods have caused up to 50% mortality in populations in Iowa and Wisconsin (Errington and Hammerstrom 1936). The feasibility of the recovery of the Walpole Island First Nation population and re-establishing a population on the mainland is not known. The species has declined across much of its range, particularly at the northern extent of its range (Lohr et al. 2011). Connectivity with other populations in the United States appear to be limited. A recent genetic analysis found that historically (prior to 1884) there was little genetic exchange between Ontario and Michigan populations (Chabot 2014). Page and Austen (1994) said that the Ontario population was likely isolated. Habitat that would allow colonization and/or rescue into Ontario from a neighbouring population (e.g., Michigan) is very limited. The major portion of Harsen's Island in Michigan, which is adjacent to some existing habitat on Walpole Island First Nation in Ontario, has not supported Northern Bobwhites, native or pen-reared, since at least 2012 (T. McFadden pers. comm. 2016).

⁶ Small flocks or family groups.

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

Unknown. An analysis of habitat in 2008 on Walpole Island First Nation estimated there were 1348 hectares of natural habitat available for Northern Bobwhite (Jacobs and Johnson 2016). The amount of tallgrass prairie and savanna habitat has declined on Walpole Island First Nation due to conversion to agriculture, housing and invasion by European Common Reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis*) (COSEWIC 2013). On-going efforts by the Walpole Island Heritage Centre and Walpole Island Land Trust have contributed to restoration and protection of tallgrass prairie and savanna sites (Jacobs and Johnson 2016), however, a habitat assessment is needed to determine if a sufficient quantity and mixture of early successional wooded areas and open and semi-open habitats (e.g. brushy cover, cropland and grassland habitats) are currently available for Northern Bobwhite recovery. Substantial habitat restoration will be necessary if a mainland population is to be re-established in southern Ontario, as little habitat for the species remains on the mainland.

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

Yes. The primary threats to Northern Bobwhite are habitat loss and fragmentation due to agricultural and residential development and invasion by European Common Reed, predation, indiscriminate burning, release of non-native Northern Bobwhites, herbicide / insecticide use and potentially European Fire Ant. Indiscriminate burning is largely a threat restricted to Walpole Island First Nation, and with the provincial government restrictions on releases of non-native, pen-reared Northern Bobwhites, pen-reared birds may not currently be a threat to the remaining population on Walpole Island First Nation. The remaining threats are present on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland and mitigation will eventually be required in both of these areas. Threats posed by development can be avoided through the use of planning policies and in some cases, land acquisition or other non-regulatory protection techniques. A variety of methods are available to control European Common Reed including chemical control and prescribed burning. The threat of human-subsidized predators such as raccoons, skunks can be mitigated through best management practices for nuisance animals. Domestic cats etc. can be mitigated through control/removal measures. Predation threats as a whole will be reduced by making more habitat available and increasing connectivity between habitat patches. Outreach and education can be used to better control the extent and timing of fires on Walpole Island First Nation and reduce exposure to herbicide and insecticides. Although the release of non-native, pen-reared Northern Bobwhite and their potential interbreeding with native birds is a concern, releases of non-native Northern Bobwhite in Ontario has been regulated by the province through the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* since 1997 and prior to 1997 through the *Game and Fish Act*. Ontario's current policy for issuing Game Bird Hunting Preserve Licenses is intended to prevent the release of pen-raised Northern Bobwhites on Game Bird Hunting Preserves within 50 km of the native population on Walpole Island First

Nation. European Fire Ants can be managed through integrated pest management including various ant baits.

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

Yes. Tallgrass prairie and savanna conservation and restoration are active in southern Ontario including on Walpole Island First Nation, which is the primary habitat need of Northern Bobwhite. Walpole Island First Nation purchased and leased over 300 hectares of land between 2001 and 2011 for conservation, including prairie and savanna habitats. Also, identifying surrounding sites both on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland that are suitable for tallgrass prairie restoration and assessing habitat connectivity of nesting, foraging and roosting habitats will help achieve the population and distribution objectives over the long-term. Methods to control European Common Reed exist and are being applied at many locations in southern Ontario including on Walpole Island First Nation. A variety of projects have been conducted on Walpole Island First Nation between 2011 and 2016 to control European Common Reed in prairie and savanna habitats. Predation can be addressed through best management practices and habitat creation, and education and outreach can be used in addition to management in the case of feral⁷ cats. Increased public awareness should help encourage the ecologically appropriate use of fire on Walpole Island First Nation. Outreach and education materials on conservation-friendly farming practices, including integrated pest management and organic farming can be promoted within the agricultural community to reduce impacts of herbicides and pesticides in areas supporting Northern Bobwhite. Licenses are not currently issued to pen-rear and release Northern Bobwhites on Game Bird Hunting Preserves in proximity to Walpole Island First Nation in Ontario.

⁷ Having reverted to the wild state, as from domestication.

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1. COSEWIC* Species Assessment Information

Date of Assessment: May 2013

Common Name (population): Northern Bobwhite

Scientific Name: *Colinus virginianus*

COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Reason for Designation: Owing to habitat loss, this grassland bird's population has declined dramatically over historical levels and shows no sign of recovery. There is only one viable population remaining in Canada, located on Walpole Island, Ontario. The status of this species is complicated by the presence of introduced pen-reared birds whose genetic composition is believed to pose a threat to the remaining native population.

Canadian Occurrence: Ontario

COSEWIC Status History: Designated Endangered in April 1994. Status re-examined and confirmed in November 2003 and May 2013.

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

2. Species Status Information

Globally, the Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) is ranked Near Threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List (BirdLife International 2016) and G4G5 (Apparently Secure/Secure⁸), with national ranks of N5 (Secure) in the United States and N1 (Critically Imperilled⁹) in Canada (NatureServe 2015). Provincial and state NatureServe conservation status ranks are listed in Appendix A. It is assessed as nationally Endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC 2003 and 2013) and listed as Endangered on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act* in 2005. In Ontario, the Northern Bobwhite is listed as Endangered on the Species at Risk in Ontario List under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*.

⁸ Apparently Secure/Secure: At a fairly low risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction 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/ At very low risk of extinction or elimination due to a very extensive range, abundant populations or occurrences, and little to no concern from declines or threats.

⁹ Critically Imperilled: At very high risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction due to very restricted range, very few populations or occurrences, very steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.

In Canada, the Northern Bobwhite is at the northern limit of its range and only found in Ontario (Page and Austen 1994). In the United States the species' range encompasses approximately 318,415 km² (Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative 2009). Less than 0.02% of the Northern Bobwhite's global range exists in Canada.

3. Species Information

3.1 Species Description

The Northern Bobwhite is a small grouse-like bird, 21 – 26 cm long, about half the size of a Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) (Peterson 1980). Males have a black necklace, white throat, and a white line above the eye while females have a buffy throat and eye-stripe. Males give a loud, whistled “bob-bob-WHITE!” call in spring to advertise their presence (James and Cannings 2003).

3.2 Species Population and Distribution

The Northern Bobwhite ranges from the eastern side of the Great Plains from southeastern Wyoming to eastern Colorado and eastern New Mexico and Texas east to the Atlantic Ocean (Figure 1). The range also extends southward through eastern Mexico to extreme southwestern Guatemala. The northern extent of its range includes southeastern Massachusetts, southeastern and west-central New York, extreme southwestern Ontario, southeastern Lower Peninsula of Michigan, west-central Wisconsin, southeastern Minnesota, southern Iowa, southeastern South Dakota, and west-central Nebraska (Brennan et al. 2014). Within its range, the Northern Bobwhite is a resident, with no migration occurring outside of the breeding range (Dziepak 1991).



Figure 1: Distribution of the Northern Bobwhite in North America and the western Caribbean (Brennan et al. 2014). Note that distribution has contracted in some areas including in Ontario and several other jurisdictions at the northern edge of range, since this map was created.

The Northern Bobwhite has been widely introduced in many areas. Most of the Caribbean populations are considered introduced as well as those present in the Puget Sound region of Washington, Malheur County in Oregon, and possibly in western Idaho (Brennan et al. 2014). In Canada, introductions have occurred in southern British Columbia (Campbell et al. 1990), Quebec (Lanque and Doyon 1996), and Ontario (Baillie and Harrington 1936). Introductions have been poorly documented, including in Ontario, where there have been many (Page and Austen 1994).

In the majority of the United States the Northern Bobwhite declined 70-90% between 1965 and 1995, with many local populations disappearing entirely (Hernandez et al. 2012 in Brennan et al. 2014). Populations at the northern extent of the range have experienced some of the more significant declines (Lohr et al. 2011).

In Canada, Ontario has the only known population of Northern Bobwhite thought to be native, given that introduction attempts in British Columbia were unsuccessful (Campbell et al. 1990; Page and Austen 1994) and birds in Quebec are considered to be pen-reared¹⁰ birds (Lanque and Doyon 1996).

With European settlement in Ontario and expansion of farming activities, Northern Bobwhite populations increased dramatically and there was a rapid northward and eastward expansion in the 1840s and 1850s. During that time, Northern Bobwhites could be found from the Bruce Peninsula through Muskoka District to the Kingston area (Baillie and Harrington 1936; Lumsden 1994). Prior to European settlement southern Ontario had many indigenous farms (Riley 2013). It's possible that the Northern Bobwhite expanded from the extensive tallgrass prairies of southwestern Ontario and at times occupied some of these features throughout southern Ontario similar to how its range expanded with the spread of European farms.

Severe winter weather in the second half of the 19th century affected populations and by 1904, the range of the Northern Bobwhite had contracted to extreme southwestern Ontario (DeVos 1964; Lumsden 1994). At that time, it was common only in Essex, Kent, and Lambton Counties and the western portions of Middlesex and Elgin Counties (Figure 2). Coveys were reported during this period east to Oxford and Brant Counties. To augment populations in the latter part of 19th century numerous releases of pen-reared birds occurred (Baillie and Harrington 1936).

¹⁰ In Ontario pen-reared birds are non-native birds raised in captivity primarily for hunting and generally have low survival rates in the wild.

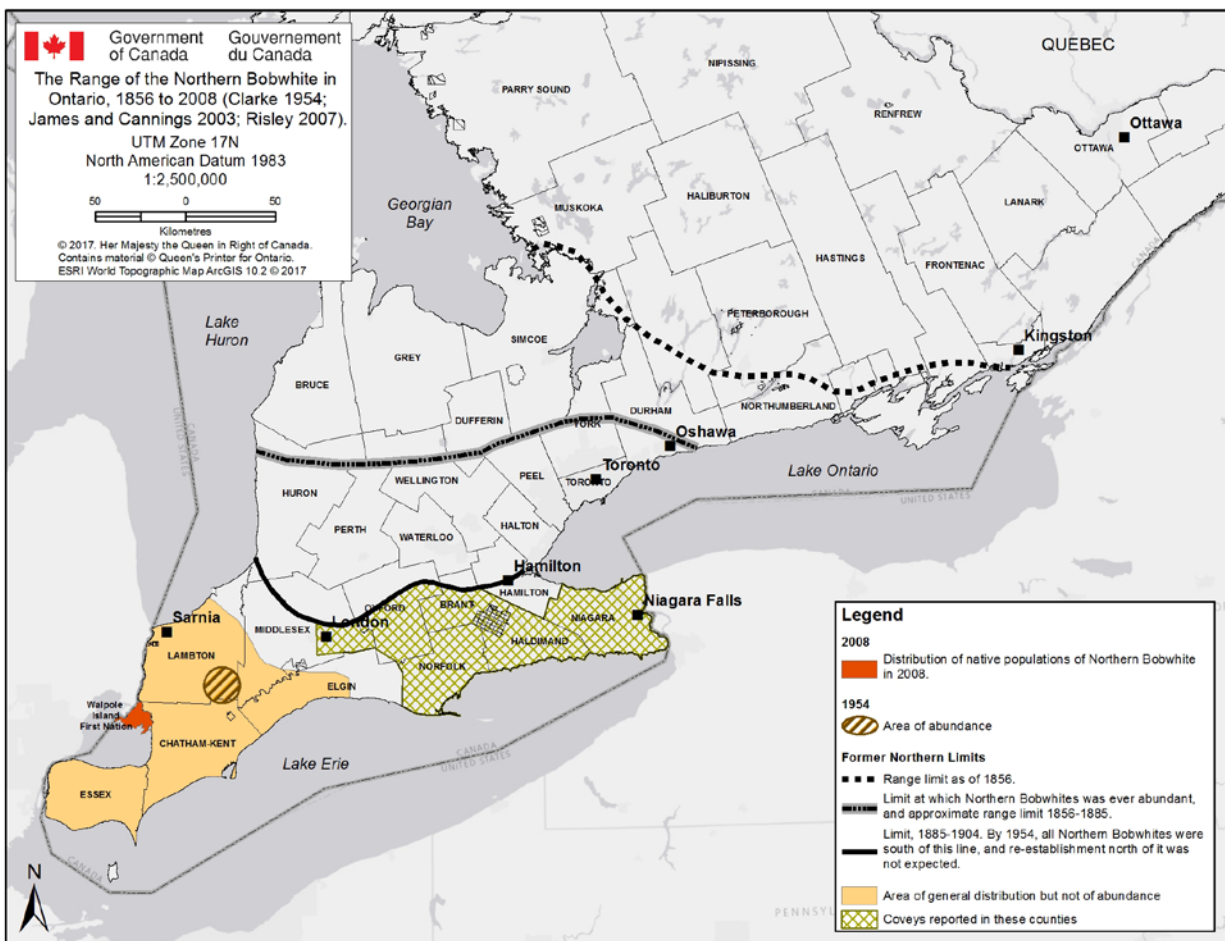


Figure 2. The range of the Northern Bobwhite in Ontario, 1856 to 2008 (Clarke 1954; James and Cannings 2003; Risley 2007).

In the early 1970s, there were an estimated 1,055 coveys of Northern Bobwhite in Ontario primarily in Lambton, Middlesex, and Elgin Counties excluding Walpole Island First Nation (MacIntyre 2002) and included native, mixed and non-native birds. Populations declined further in the late 1970s following three successive years of severe winter weather. During the first Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (1981-1985) and the subsequent Ontario Rare Breeding Bird Program (1989-1991), the Northern Bobwhite was documented in 79 squares within its scattered distribution in southwestern Ontario (Cadman et al. 1987). The first atlas also notes that native birds were still present in several areas on the mainland including along the Thames River in Middlesex and Chatham-Kent Counties (Risley 2007). The abundance during the first atlas period was estimated at 232 to 1,545 pairs (Page and Austen 1994) but many of these birds were likely pen-reared and released as opposed to being native birds (Lumsden 1987).

In 1989-90, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources estimated a population of 180 Northern Bobwhite in 15 coveys, but this study did not include Walpole Island First Nation (MacIntyre 2002). Two disjunct areas in Aylmer and Chatham Ontario Ministry of

Natural Resources Districts were identified as possible areas where native stock was probably persistent (Page and Austen 1994).

During the second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas (2001-2005) most mainland Northern Bobwhites were believed to be pen-reared stock (Risley 2007). Christmas Bird Count results for Wallaceburg showed no Northern Bobwhites detected between 2011 and 2015 (National Audubon Society 2015). Though data are limited, Breeding Bird Survey results for Ontario suggest significant long (1970-2012) and short (2002-2012) term declines of 23.1% and 23% per year, respectively (Environment Canada 2014).

Currently, the only known remaining native Northern Bobwhite population in Canada is on Walpole Island First Nation. Birds on the mainland are presumed to be pen-reared (Risley 2007; COSEWIC 2013). In 2000, 92 males were detected on Walpole Island First Nation during whistling ground surveys with a conservative extrapolation to a population of 230 adult breeding Northern Bobwhite (MacIntyre 2002). Recent local community knowledge indicates that the Northern Bobwhite persists on Walpole Island First Nation. Five individuals reported seeing Northern Bobwhites in 2015 and 7 others reported sightings in 2016. While most reports were of 1 or 2 birds, 3 coveys were reported in 2015 of 5, 9 and 30 birds and another 3 in 2016 having approximately 12, 20 and 30 birds (Jacobs and Johnson 2016; C. Jacobs pers. comm. 2016). Insufficient data is currently available to estimate the current population size on Walpole Island First Nation.

3.3 Needs of the Northern Bobwhite

Habitat and Biological Needs

Northern Bobwhites typically have clutches of 12–14 eggs, (range 7–28) (Stoddard 1931). Peck and James (1983) mentioned 6 nests in Ontario with 11 to 15 eggs. Average clutch size generally decreases as the breeding season progresses and attempts to re-nest occur (Stoddard 1931; Dimmick 1972; Klimstra and Roseberry 1975). Hatching success is greatly influenced by predators, human disturbance, and weather. Hatching success in Illinois was 33% (n = 793 nests) (Roseberry and Klimstra 1984). One clutch is typical but the Northern Bobwhite can produce 2 clutches in Ontario (Risley 2007). Re-nesting (following failure), however, is common (Lumsden 1987). About 80% of Northern Bobwhites live less than one year. (Brennan et al. 2014) and annual mortality is often as high as 80%, the majority of these being juveniles (Johnsgard 1973 as cited in Page and Austen 1994). Average annual mortality of adults is around 30% (Brennan et al. 2014). Exposure can cause significant mortality during winter in northern parts of the range (Kabat and Thompson 1963; Roseberry and Klimstra 1984). Deep snow and long periods of cold can cause losses as high as 50% during severe winters (Errington and Hamerstrom 1936; Robbins et al. 1986). Winter survival of adults may be most important for recovering Northern Bobwhite populations (Sandercock et al. 2008; Williams et al. 2012) and Williams et al. also suggest increasing the survival of young to at least 30 days is necessary for population growth. Folk et al. (2007) suggest that survival of sub-adults (defined as <1 yr. old females)

most strongly influences the population growth rate in Northern Bobwhites. Each of these factors likely plays an important role in population growth, but which is the most important is not clear.

Guthery et al. (2000) found that Northern Bobwhite populations subject to winter catastrophes (but not to hunting) required a population of around 500 birds to be viable. Populations subject to both winter and summer catastrophes, which could include weather causing reproductive failure, require populations to be approximately 800 birds to be viable. While Northern Bobwhites in Ontario could suffer from winter catastrophes, such as heavy and prolonged snows, summer catastrophes, such as extreme rain events are more common further south in the United States (P. Hubert pers. comm. 2016). Guthery et al. (2000) also determined that for each bird approximately 1-2 hectares of usable space are needed. A viable population of 500 birds in Ontario would require around 1000 hectares of suitable habitat (P. Hubert pers. comm. 2016).

General Habitat

The Northern Bobwhite is a tallgrass prairie-savanna species which also inhabits early to mid-successional forest habitats and open areas such as agricultural fields. It prefers areas subject to periodic natural disturbances, such as fire, and uses sites with large amounts of shade-intolerant herbaceous species (Ellis et al. 1969; Taylor et al. 1999a; Collins et al. 2009; Brennan et al. 2014). It requires large and/or well-connected patches of suitable habitat that include grassy areas for nesting, feeding and roosting, interspersed with shrubby areas for roosting and hiding and plants such as agricultural crops for feeding, dusting, loafing and roosting (James and Cannings 2003).

The Northern Bobwhite is a non-migratory species and an individual may spend its entire lifetime in the same geographic proximity. Most live within 2.6 km² of where they were hatched. Most also spend their lifetime within an area of 2.0 km² with each bird requiring approximately 0.02 km² (2 hectares) of usable habitat to survive (Murphy and Baskett 1952; Guthery 1997; Guthery et al. 2000). Home range size, however, varies depending on habitat quality, surrounding land use and sex, with males having a smaller home range in highly fragmented landscapes (Dimmick 1992; Taylor et al. 1999b). Northern Bobwhite home ranges include enough habitat to allow them to complete their essential life cycle activities, including finding enough food. Typically, the maximum distance they move from where they are hatched is 3.5 km (Murphy and Baskett 1952; Rosene 1969). Northern Bobwhites form coveys in the fall and winter and covey home ranges vary in size and shape (1.6 - 31.2 hectares, n=1145; Rosene 1969). There is very little overall movement between seasons, and some Northern Bobwhite families' summer and winter ranges overlap (Johnsgard 1973 as cited in Page and Austen 1994). Smith (2015) found that Ohio Northern Bobwhites moved an average of 0.5 km between the centres of summer and winter home ranges and had an average overlap of 5.0 ha (+/- 1.0) or 34%.

Nesting Habitat

The Northern Bobwhite builds its nests on the ground, usually within 15-20 m of openings such as fields and roads (Rosene 1969). Nests are usually partially covered with standing vegetation less than 51 cm tall (Stoddard 1931; Rosene 1969). Its primary nesting habitat includes large grassy areas with some litter and little bare ground (Taylor et al. 1999a, b; Lusk et al. 2006). It prefers forbs¹¹ and other tall “bunch grass” plants that create an umbrella-like understory for nest concealment and safe movement of broods (Taylor et al. 1999a, b; Lusk et al. 2006; Collins et al. 2009) as well as shrubs, tall grasses and forbs 1.25 – 1.5 metres in height for visual obstruction (Brooke et al. 2015). Interspersion of shrubs within these large grassy areas may also be preferred by calling males and may be important in some areas (Taylor et al. 1999a; Lusk et al. 2006). Optimum breeding areas also have nearby habitats with approximately 50% exposed ground for brood-rearing with remaining areas covered in herbaceous and some woody vegetation. The ideal conditions are large open grasslands with some woodland, transitional habitats and agriculture in close proximity to one another. Northern Bobwhites have been shown to avoid areas overgrown with invasive non-native plants (Brooke et al. 2017). Invasive plant species can also limit the mobility of Northern Bobwhite chicks (Martin et al. 2015). Although the Northern Bobwhite is often associated with grasslands nesting in areas having some litter (Brooke 2017), too much litter build-up has been shown to reduce its survival and restricts its use to more edge habitats (Peters et al. 2015). Northern Bobwhites are sometimes found near human habitation and may nest in agricultural areas (e.g., orchards, pasture, croplands and tree nurseries), gardens, fence lines and roadsides (Bent 1932; Fitch 1958; Graber and Graber 1963; Rosene 1969; Mayfield 1988; Taylor et al. 1999b; James and Cannings 2003; Collins et al. 2009). In Ontario they have nested in hay fields, fence rows, roadsides, city parks and edges of golf courses (Peck and James 1983).

Foraging Habitat

The Northern Bobwhite is an opportunistic feeder that primarily relies on seeds from agriculture, forest and weeds as well as leaves from succulent plants (Brennan et al. 2014). Invertebrates, however, are also consumed and are vital to the growth and survival of chicks. As a result, brood habitat must have an abundance of insects (DeVos and Mueller 1993) which has been linked to plants, such as forbs, that have a high relative moisture content (Taylor and Guthery 1994). Adult Northern Bobwhites also require an invertebrate rich diet (Lochmiller et al. 1993; Guiliano et al. 1996). Invertebrate numbers and diversity tend to be significantly higher in native plants that they are adapted to than non-native plants (Ballard et al. 2013; Litt et al. 2014). Adequate food supplies near winter cover are essential for Northern Bobwhite survival (Roseberry and Klimstra 1984; James and Cannings 2003), particularly as cold weather, snow cover, rain and wind restrict their movement (Roseberry and Klimstra 1984).

¹¹ An herbaceous flowering plant other than a grass.

Common forage species include: ragweed (*Ambrosia spp.*), tick-trefoil (*Desmodium spp.*), bush-clovers (*Lespedeza spp.*), crabgrass (*Digitaria spp.*), Staghorn Sumac (*Rhus typhina*), Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*), pine tree seeds (*Pinus spp.*), wild grape (*Vitis spp.*), panic grasses (*Panicum spp.*), foxtails (*Setaria spp.*), cultivated crops i.e. corn (*Zea mays*), soybeans (*Glycine max*), and wheat (*Triticum aestivum*). Mast producing trees: oaks (*Quercus spp.*), hickories (*Carya spp.*) and sassafras (*Sassafrass albidum*) (Sandilands 2005). Sometimes fruit: raspberry (*Rubus spp.*), Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), cherry and wild plum (*Prunus spp.*) (Murphy and Baskett 1952; Ellis 1969; Rosene 1969; Schroeder 1985; Brennan et al. 2014).

Roosting Habitat

Safe roosting habitat within the home range is essential, with birds roosting during the day and at night. Typical daytime roosting habitat is dense, tall, woody vegetation with bare ground (Taylor et al. 1999a). The minimum area for a suitable daytime roost is 41 m² and each home range requires 1- 3 roosts (Rosene 1969; Schroeder 1985; Johnson and Guthery 1988). Habitat at nocturnal roosts varies from sparse vegetation and little overhead cover (e.g., wheat stubble) to more litter, less bare ground and tall plants (Klimstra and Ziccardi 1963; Ellis et al. 1969; Rosene 1969; Schroeder 1985; Taylor et al. 1999a).

Wintering Habitat

Winter habitat requirements are similar to those during the breeding season, but denser cover for roosting is necessary. Suitable winter cover includes tallgrass prairie habitat, dense brush or pine tree stands. The Northern Bobwhite may inhabit wooded ravines or dense growths of tall weeds, but move to woody cover once there is snow on the ground (Schroeder 1985). In Illinois, most winter night roosts were in areas of low to medium topography in well drained areas. Roosts were generally on bare soil or leaf litter, mostly among vegetation 40 - 90 cm tall (Klimstra and Ziccardi 1963). Brushy cover must be sufficiently dense to keep snow off the ground to give access for foraging (Errington and Hamerstrom 1936; Roseberry and Klimstra 1984). Winter habitat is likely key to the survival of Northern Bobwhite populations in Ontario (James and Cannings 2003) where it is at the northern extent of its range.

4. Threats

4.1 Threat Assessment

The threat assessment applies to both Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland, however, indiscriminant burning may not be a concern on the mainland, while release of pen-reared birds is not currently a threat to the population on Walpole Island First Nation. In addition, threats may exist on the mainland even though native Northern Bobwhites have yet to be re-introduced.

Table 1. Threat Assessment Table

Threat	Level of Concern ^a	Extent	Occurrence	Frequency	Severity ^b	Causal Certainty ^c
Habitat Loss and Fragmentation						
Agricultural development, residential development	High	Widespread (Walpole Island First Nation and mainland)	Historic; current	Recurrent	High	High
Invasive plants: European Common Reed	Medium	Widespread (Walpole Island First Nation and mainland)	Current	Recurrent	Moderate	High
Changes in Ecological Dynamics or Natural Processes						
Predation	Medium	Widespread (Walpole Island First Nation and mainland)	Current	Recurrent	Moderate	Medium
Indiscriminate Burning	Medium	Localized (Walpole Island First Nation)	Current	Recurrent	Moderate	Low
Exotic, Invasive, or Introduced Species						
Release of non-native, pen-reared Northern Bobwhite	Medium	Widespread (mainland)	Historic; anticipated	Recurrent	Moderate	Medium
European Fire Ant	Unknown	Widespread	Anticipated	Recurrent	Unknown	Low
Herbicide and Insecticide						
Herbicide and insecticide application resulting in reduced food supply	Unknown	Widespread (Walpole Island First Nation and mainland)	Historic; anticipated	Recurrent	Unknown	High

^a *Level of Concern: signifies that managing the threat is of (high, medium or low) concern for the recovery of the species, consistent with the population and distribution objectives. This criterion considers the assessment of all the information in the table.*

^b *Severity: reflects the population-level effect (High: very large population-level effect, Moderate, Low, Unknown).*

^c *Causal certainty: reflects the degree of evidence that is known for the threat (High: available evidence strongly links the threat to stresses on population viability; Medium: there is a correlation between the threat and population viability e.g. expert opinion; Low: the threat is assumed or plausible).*

4.2 Description of Threats

The main threats to the Northern Bobwhite in Canada in decreasing order of significance are: habitat loss and fragmentation mainly through agricultural expansion and intensification, residential development and invasion by European Common Reed; predation; indiscriminate burning; release of non-native, pen-reared Northern Bobwhites; herbicide/pesticide use and potentially the European Fire Ant.

Habitat Loss and Fragmentation

Agricultural Development

Although most habitat loss has been historical, with the growth of modern farming practices, some loss is still occurring. On Walpole Island First Nation, farm fields continue to be expanded cutting into grassland habitats, hedgerows and woodlands (Jacobs and Johnson 2016). In Ontario, the farming trend has been to move away from pasture and summer fallow to croplands resulting in less suitable habitat for Northern Bobwhite (Page and Austen 1994 and Statistics Canada 1997 in James and Cannings 2003). Similarly in the United States the trend has been toward less pasture and larger farms (MacDonald 2013; Perlut 2014; Sumner 2014). The trend in Ontario is also toward larger farms which have lower biodiversity, including less insect prey diversity (Fahrig et al. 2015). Larger farms also tend to have fewer woody edges (Smith 2015). Further, with more intensive farming practices and cleaner more mechanized farming methods leaving few weeds, croplands no longer provide suitable habitat for Northern Bobwhites for foraging or roosting (Levine 1988 in Page and Austen 1994; Perlut 2014). MacIntyre (2002) showed that there is very little habitat remaining for Northern Bobwhite in Essex County and much of the cropland in Norfolk County is unsuitable to the species.

Residential Development

Habitat fragmentation from residential development and land use change is a particularly serious threat because the Northern Bobwhite is a sedentary species; most birds live within a 2.6 km² of where they hatched (Stoddard 1931; Murphy and Baskett 1952). Because of this, populations can become isolated as habitats become fragmented. In particular, the loss of hedgerows which historically improved connectivity of habitat patches has significantly affected the Northern Bobwhite. In Wisconsin, Northern Bobwhite populations were eliminated as hedgerows declined from 1 km every 113 ha to 1 km every 164 ha (Graber and Graber 1963; Klimstra and Ziccardi 1963; DeVos 1964; Baillie 1967; Schroeder 1985; Mayfield 1988). As remaining habitat patches and corridors between populations are lost, the movement of individuals to sustain local populations and gene flow is eliminated. This leaves remaining isolated small populations at a high risk of extirpation particularly from chance events such as severe winter weather.

Invasive Plants

Invasion of non-native European Common Reed has impacted moist tallgrass prairie and meadow marsh habitats on Walpole Island First Nation, outcompeting native vegetation and resulting in a further reduction of Northern Bobwhite habitat (COSEWIC 2013; Jacobs and Johnson 2016; Catling and Mitrow 2011). While Northern Bobwhites may occasionally use European Common Reed for cover, its structure and density are not suitable for most other habitat needs including foraging and nesting (Jacobs and Johnson 2016; P. Hubert pers. comm. 2016). Another non-native grass (Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*)) in the United States has been shown to reduce habitat quality for Northern Bobwhite chicks by making movement more difficult and by increasing thermal stress (Martin et al. 2015). Invasive, non-native plant species can also out compete native plant species on which Northern Bobwhites and other wildlife depend for food items such as seeds and arthropods (Sands et al. 2009; Catling and Mitrow 2011; Brooke et al. 2017). Northern Bobwhites may nest in stands of non-native plants, but only if they have a bunch-grass structure and contain openings with bare ground (Sands et al. 2012; Brooke et al. 2017). European Common Reed's tall rigid stems do not provide these features given the tall rigid stem of each plant, the high stem density and litter accumulation within stands.

Changes in Ecological Dynamics or Natural Processes

Predation

Augmented food supplies and the provision of shelter in urban and agricultural areas have significantly increased the population of many predators such as raccoons (*Procyon lotor*), foxes (*Vulpes* spp.), coyotes (*Canis latrans*), Virginia Opossums (*Didelphis virginiana*), and Striped Skunks (*Mephitis mephitis*); all of which prey on Northern Bobwhite (Burger et al. 1995; Brennan et al. 2014). The semiaquatic American Mink (*Neovison vison*) is also believed to be a threat, particularly on Walpole Island First Nation with its extensive shorelines (C. Jacobs pers. comm. 2017). Northern Bobwhites are much more susceptible to predation in a fragmented landscape. Increased predation by raccoons due to reduced cover was noted as a factor in declines to Northern Bobwhites in Elgin County (Page and Austen 1994).

In the United States urban areas where Northern Bobwhites are in close proximity to humans, Domestic Cats (*Felis catus*) can significantly affect Northern Bobwhite populations (Stoddard 1931; Bent 1932). Blancher (2013) suggests that cats are likely the largest source of human-caused mortality of birds in Canada, and notes that Northern Bobwhite is vulnerable to cat predation because it nests and forages on the ground. Feral cats are common on Walpole Island First Nation and in the surrounding area (A. Woodliffe pers. comm. in James and Cannings 2003; Jacobs and Johnson 2016) and unwanted pets from the mainland are frequently abandoned on Walpole Island First Nation (C. Jacobs pers. comm. 2016).

Other birds are also significant predators of Northern Bobwhites, particularly Cooper's Hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*), buteos¹² and medium to large owls (Burger et al. 1995). Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks (*Accipiter striatus*) as well as Merlin's (*Falco columbarius*) all improved in status between the 1st and 2nd Ontario Breeding Bird Atlases (1981-1985 and 2001- 2005) (Cadman et al. 2007) and may pose a threat to the already critically small Northern Bobwhite population on Walpole Island First Nation.

Indiscriminate Burning

Regular disturbance through prescribed burning is a well-established management practice to maintain tallgrass prairie and savanna habitats. However, indiscriminate burning, consuming entire habitat parcels and burning in the fall and winter, can eliminate cover for Northern Bobwhites and jeopardize survival (James 2000 in MacIntyre 2002; A. Woodliffe pers. comm. in James and Cannings 2003). Burning to rejuvenate prairie habitats has been done successfully on Walpole Island First Nation for generations, but in recent years indiscriminate burning has increased and may be impacting Northern Bobwhite survival (Jacobs and Johnson 2016; C. Jacobs pers. comm. 2016). Ecologically sound prescribed burning in Oklahoma demonstrated little impact on Northern Bobwhite movement and space use (Carroll et al. 2017). Burning followed by specific herbicide treatments was used to successfully maintain suitable habitat structure for Northern Bobwhite in native prairie grasses in Kentucky (Yeiser et al. 2015). Optimal timing of prescribed burning for habitat management for Northern Bobwhite and other local species of conservation concern still needs to be determined.

Exotic, Invasive, or Introduced Species

Release of Non-native Northern Bobwhite

Since the late 1800s, imported or non-native pen-reared Northern Bobwhites have been released for hunting in Ontario (Cadman et al. 1987). With bird's being raised in captivity for so long and there being so many different sources, the genetic origin of pen-reared and released birds in Ontario is not known. Releases of non-native Northern Bobwhites for hunting and dog training and trials have continued, including releases adjacent to the only remaining remnant population of native Northern Bobwhites on Walpole Island First Nation. Between 2007 and 2008, there were three game bird preserves that released pen-reared Northern Bobwhites adjacent to Walpole Island First Nation, with one game bird preserve located in Wallaceburg. Since then, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has stopped issuing licences that allow for the release of pen-reared birds within 50 kilometres of Walpole Island First Nation (P. Hubert pers. comm. 2016). While releases of pen-reared birds may have been occurring on Harsen's Island, United States, adjacent to Walpole Island First Nation in the past, there have not been releases there since 2008 and no Northern Bobwhites have been heard or seen on Harsen's Island since 2012 (T. McFadden pers.

¹² Broad-winged hawks such as the Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*).

comm. 2016). Recent genetic analysis of Northern Bobwhite in Ontario supports the belief that Walpole Island First Nation birds are native (Chabot 2014).

Pen-reared birds can be very similar in appearance to native birds. Genetic markers have been developed to distinguish between native and pen-reared birds (Brennan et al. 2014; Chabot 2014). Pen-reared birds have been thought to be less suitable for reintroduction for a variety of reasons including: lower reproductive and survival success (Perez et al. 2002; Eggert et al. 2009); responding differently to predation threats and being more susceptible to predation (Newman 2015); lower genetic diversity (Evans et al. 2009; Brennan et al. 2014); being less adapted to Ontario winters and habitats (James and Cannings 2003) and posing a potential source of parasites and disease (Olsen et al. 2016). North American Northern Bobwhite populations have been recently shown to have less phylogeographic¹³ structure (relatively low genetic distinctiveness) than previously thought (Williford et al. 2016) suggesting that some mixing of populations, if done properly, could offer conservation benefits. So while some pen-raised birds may not be suitable for reintroduction for the above reasons, inter-breeding with more southerly adapted Northern Bobwhites has the potential to benefit the remaining population if it became necessary in a changing climate (Hamilton and Miller 2015; Jackiw et al. 2015). In Ontario further genetic analysis is needed to confirm the genetic population structure of the extant population on Walpole Island First Nation and identify appropriate strategies for captive breeding and release, if required (Chabot 2014). Chabot (2014) also recommended genetic monitoring if translocation is utilized in Ontario. The potential benefits would include understanding the patterns of geographical expansion from reintroduction areas, dispersal behaviour, connectivity with nearby populations, habitat use and potential sink habitats (Miller et al. 1999; Frankham et al. 2002 in Chabot 2014).

European Fire Ant

The invasive Red Imported Fire Ant (*Solenopsis invicta*) is known to reduce Northern Bobwhite fitness in the United States (Allen et al. 1995; Myers et al. 2014). While this species does not inhabit Canada, nor is it expected to in the near future, a different non-native fire ant in Ontario may pose a similar threat. The European Fire Ant (*Myrmica rubra*) is found in Ontario, and it can have devastating effects on the rest of the ant community. When this ant invades a habitat, all other ant species vanish (Naumann and Higgins 2015), and some non-ant insects can also suffer declines (Naumann & Higgins 2015; Verble-Pearson and Pearson 2016). This ant is also known to kill chicks of ground-nesting birds and reduce birds' reproductive success (DeFisher and Bonter 2013). It is not known whether direct consumption of European Fire Ants would be bad for Northern Bobwhites, as it is when they consume the Red Imported Fire Ant (Myers et al. 2014). But it seems reasonable to suggest that, given the known threat posed by the Red Imported Fire Ant to the Northern Bobwhite in the United States and given the similar effects the European Fire Ant has on local ant communities

¹³ The field of study concerned with the geographical distribution of genealogical lineages, especially within species.

and other insects (i.e., Northern Bobwhite prey) and on other ground-nesting birds, this invasive ant poses an uncertain, but possibly significant threat to the Northern Bobwhite in Ontario.

Herbicide and Insecticide

Herbicide and Insecticide Use

The application of herbicides and insecticides (pesticides) used in modern farming practices can have both direct and indirect effects on Northern Bobwhite. Direct effects include both lethal and sub-lethal effects of ingesting pesticides with food or through contact with pesticides during spraying (Driver et al. 1991; Mineau and Whiteside 2013), and vary with the type of pesticide and the amount ingested by the bird. For example, of three common systemic insecticides, one is rated as practically non-toxic, one as moderately toxic and one as highly toxic to Northern Bobwhite under EPA guidelines (reviewed by Gibbons et al. 2015). Sub-lethal effects result from exposure to pesticides at doses that are not high enough to cause mortality. Sub-lethal effects are more difficult to detect and include reductions in growth and survival (reviewed by Gibbons et al. 2015), increases in predation rates (Buerger et al. 1991), behavioural disturbances, and reduced reproductive and liver function (Turaga et al. 2016). The use of lethally toxic insecticides seems to play a role in grassland bird declines (Mineau and Whiteside 2013). Lopez-Antia et al. (2015) document lethal and sub-lethal impacts of neonicotinoid-seed ingestion on Red-legged Partridge (*Alectoris rufa*) a species in the same order (Galliformes) as Northern Bobwhite. Turaga et al. (2016) investigated impacts of seeds treated with neonicotinoids in Texas and Oklahoma, but found no treated seeds in crops of the birds examined, possibly due to avoidance or other reasons. If birds were avoiding treated seeds, it could help them avoid toxins, but prevent foraging in certain agricultural environments. Overall, evidence suggests that exposure to pesticides is likely having a negative effect on species such as Northern Bobwhite and that more detailed investigation is warranted.

Indirect effects of pesticides on Northern Bobwhite come primarily through reductions in food supply, when pesticide use reduces the diversity and abundance of plants, weed seeds and invertebrates that are available for Northern Bobwhite to eat. The use of neonicotinoids is an important consideration as they have become the most widely used class of insecticides in the world (Douglas and Tooker 2015). Neonicotinoids are likely to have significant and wide ranging effects on non-target terrestrial invertebrates (Pisa et al. 2015; Hallman et al. 2014) and could reduce prey availability for Northern Bobwhites in agricultural areas. Reductions to food supply are particularly important for chicks, as chick survival and growth in quails such as Northern Bobwhite, is linked to protein in the diet, obtained by eating invertebrates (especially arthropods) (Nestler et al. 1942; Hurst 1972; Potts 1986; Jackson et al. 1987; DeVos and Mueller 1993; Lochmiller et al. 1993). Adults can also be impacted by reduced invertebrate availability through compromised immune systems, delayed egg laying, reduced egg production and ovary degeneration (Lochmiller et al. 1993; Giuliano et al. 1996). Some of these indirect effects of pesticides on birds have been shown most clearly for the

Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix*), a European quail of similar size and behaviour to Northern Bobwhite. Declines in Gray Partridge populations have been explained by declines in invertebrate food supply caused by herbicides which caused reduced growth and survival in chicks (reviewed by Potts 1986).

5. Population and Distribution Objectives

The population and distribution objectives for the Northern Bobwhite in Canada are:

Short term (5 - 10 years):

- Maintain the existing population on Walpole Island First Nation and where biologically and technically feasible increase the abundance of the existing population to at least 230 adult birds.

Medium term (10 - 20 years):

- If biologically and technically feasible, increase the population on Walpole Island First Nation to at least 500 adult birds and restore it to historically occupied sites on Walpole Island First Nation.

Long term (timeframe to be determined):

- If biologically and technically feasible, to achieve a self-sustaining¹⁴, resilient¹⁵, and redundant¹⁶ population, by establishing at least one viable population on Walpole Island First Nation and re-establish one viable population on the mainland.

The priority for recovering the Northern Bobwhite is through management of the remaining native population and its habitat on Walpole Island First Nation. Environment and Climate Change Canada is committed to working in cooperation with the Walpole Island First Nation towards the recovery and protection of this species and its habitat.

At least 500 birds are required to maintain a single viable¹⁷ Northern Bobwhite population in northern landscapes like Ontario where the birds may experience periodic winter catastrophes (Guthery et al. 2000). At least one viable population on both Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland are likely required to ensure recovery of the species. The current population size on Walpole Island First Nation is not known, but is probably much reduced since the most recent estimate of 230 birds in 2000. Additional surveys and monitoring will provide information on the size, extent and current trend of the existing population. As the populations on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland may have little interaction, the intent of the recovery objectives

¹⁴ The term self-sustaining refers to a population that does not require human intervention for long-term persistence.

¹⁵ The term resilient refers to a population that is of sufficient size to recover from periodic disturbance and avoid genetic collapse.

¹⁶ The term redundant refers to a population with sufficient subpopulations available to withstand catastrophic events and facilitate rescue if necessary.

¹⁷ Having a high probability of survival.

are to establish populations of several hundred adult birds on both Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland, within the species former range, if feasible.

Threat mitigation and restoring habitat are needed to achieve the recovery objectives. Specifically, mobilizing partnerships and collectively working to identify habitat restoration opportunities that can promote connectivity between suitable habitats required by Northern Bobwhites. Because Walpole Island First Nation is the only known source of native Northern Bobwhites in Canada, successful recovery requires increasing the amount of habitat available to Northern Bobwhite and increasing the population on Walpole Island First Nation. This needs to be shown to be feasible before recovery activities on the mainland can be advanced. That said identifying opportunities for restoring habitats that focus on connectivity of suitable habitats and reducing threats will also be essential. Identifying habitat restoration opportunities on the mainland is also important in the short-term to evaluate potential recovery sites and guide habitat restoration activities. Targeted restoration activities will support increasing species' abundance at the extant population and help re-establish historical populations. Once habitat restoration opportunities have been evaluated a decision can be made as to whether captive breeding and release is necessary to achieve the recovery objectives.

With approximately 2 hectares of habitat required for every bird, at least 1000 hectares of more or less contiguous, suitable habitat will be necessary to support each population of 500 birds. There is uncertainty whether or not sufficient habitat can be made available (e.g. through restoration) to support population expansion. The short term goal of 230 adult birds will require around 460 hectares of habitat. The medium term goal of 500 adult birds will require approximately 1000 hectares of habitat. A 2008 Walpole Island First Nation habitat analysis suggested 1348 hectares of suitable Northern Bobwhite habitat remained on the First Nation. A habitat assessment is required to determine how much of this habitat remains today as available and connected for use by the species. The long term goal of establishing viable populations on both Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland may be feasible, but it may also not be feasible. Recovery on the mainland will be particularly challenging as little contiguous habitat remains and most is in private ownership. If recovery cannot be achieved for either of these populations efforts will focus on maintaining the survival of the existing population at a level below what would be required for recovery. Extensive, large scale restoration is expected to be necessary before a viable population can be established on the mainland. The timeframe for the long-term objective is unclear at this time. It will depend on the rate of Northern Bobwhite population growth on Walpole Island First Nation, potential merits of captive breeding and release, and the speed at which habitat restoration occurs on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland. The long-term objective may be revised as new habitat assessment data on the mainland becomes available and additional habitat restoration projects are completed.

6. Broad Strategies and General Approaches to Meet Objectives

6.1 Actions Already Completed or Currently Underway

Broad strategies have been identified below to support the recovery of Northern Bobwhite in Canada.

The Walpole Island Heritage Centre has leased lands (5 year tenures) for conservation purposes to reduce the rate of conversion of tallgrass prairie and savannah habitat to agriculture. Over 120 hectares of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna and forest have been protected on Walpole Island First Nation since 2001 through leasing agreements and acquisitions. The Walpole Island Land Trust was established in 2008 to conserve land on Walpole Island First Nation. Between 2002 and 2017 multiple species at risk stewardship projects have been completed on Walpole Island First Nation including the preparation of habitat management and threats mitigation plans, species and habitat surveys, and invasive plant removal/control.

Numerous education and public awareness projects have been conducted on Walpole Island First Nation and in the surrounding area from 2002 to 2016. The efforts included the production of many resource materials that have been provided to schools, at conferences and disseminated throughout the community.

The Rural Lambton Stewardship Network together with the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority have planted over 400 hectares of tallgrass prairie/meadow habitat between 1995 and 2016. Several locations of historical tallgrass prairie habitat have been restored and numerous other sites have been planted with tallgrass prairie seed in Lambton and Kent Counties, much of it funded through the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk.

In 2014 a genetic analysis was completed comparing the genetics of 80 Northern Bobwhite museum specimens from populations in Ontario and Michigan. The study provided insight into the genetic make-up of current versus pre-release Northern Bobwhites in Ontario and supports the contention that native birds persist in Ontario (Chabot 2014).

A provincial grassland stewardship initiative, a provincial government supported action under the Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark Government Response Statement, was established in 2015 to create, maintain and enhance 30,000 hectares of grassland habitat by 2036.

In 2016 the province released the Ontario Pollinator Health Action Plan http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/pollinator/action_plan.htm. Although this plan is targeted to pollinators it may benefit Northern Bobwhite by reducing neonicotinoids in Ontario and increasing the availability of habitat for prey insects of Northern Bobwhite.

In March 2017 the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative signed a five year (2017-2022) memorandum of understanding with Quail Forever to work collaboratively with agencies in the United States and other organizations to promote the restoration of early successional habitat on public and private lands for Northern Bobwhite and other wildlife.

6.2 Strategic Direction for Recovery

Table 2. Recovery Planning Table^a

Threat or Limitation	Priority ^b	Broad Strategy to Recovery	General Description of Research and Management Approaches
All threats	High	Monitor / assess populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct regular population surveys and monitoring in suitable habitat on Walpole Island First Nation and update species and habitat mapping. • Identify opportunities for restoring habitat (including corridors) to increase abundance at the extant population and/or re-establish historical populations; prioritize potential sites on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland for habitat restoration and management. • Review current survey and monitoring methods and develop and implement new standardized methods for accurate population counts and monitoring of Northern Bobwhite, if necessary.
Agricultural development; Residential development; Invasive plants	High	Conserve and manage habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Walpole Island First Nation to enable population and habitat restoration/conservation. • Develop and implement habitat management and restoration methods (e.g., prescribed burning, removal of woody vegetation, control of European Common Reed and other invasive plants in grassland habitats) to maintain and/or restore suitable habitat for Northern Bobwhite at extant and historical population sites, as appropriate. • Conduct comprehensive habitat assessments, possibly through modelling, on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland to determine recovery potential and inform future recovery efforts. • Collaborate with land trusts, conservation organizations and public agencies to identify and prioritize sites for stewardship, easement or other securement techniques or conservation measures to potentially enable Northern Bobwhite to thrive on the mainland in Ontario.
Predation	High	Threat Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with landowners and communities to reduce human-subsidized predation through removal of abandoned structures, eliminating inadvertent feeding and implementing these and other measures on Walpole Island First Nation and in the future on the mainland in potential restoration sites.

<p>Agricultural development; Residential development; Invasive plants; Predation; Indiscriminate burning; Herbicide and pesticide use</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Education and outreach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify best land management practices for Northern Bobwhite habitat. • Conduct outreach with landowners to communicate the possible impacts of land management practices and communicate best land management practices for Northern Bobwhite habitat. • Conduct outreach and awareness to reduce the number of feral cats on Walpole Island First Nation and on the mainland in potential re-introduction sites as required. • Increase public awareness of and provide training for sound ecological use of fire on Walpole Island First Nation. • Increase awareness of integrated pest management and organic farming within the agricultural community and encourage its implementation on or near sites occupied by Northern Bobwhite.
<p>All threats</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Conduct research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the effects of prescribed fire on the Northern Bobwhite population and make recommendations on its use as habitat restoration technique. • Determine factors affecting Northern Bobwhite productivity (e.g., adult, sub-adult, and chick survival in relation to habitat variables). • Evaluate the need for and scope of a translocation and/or captive breeding and release program to contribute to the recovery of the species on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland. • Develop a guidance document to direct the genetics of translocation and captive breeding and release, if they are deemed necessary. • Conduct genetic analyses using samples from the existing population on Walpole Island First Nation and possibly the mainland to inform decisions about a potential captive breeding and release program. • Determine the need for genetic monitoring if translocations or captive breeding and release are needed. • Conduct genetic analyses to understand future patterns of population expansion, habitat use and identification of potential sink habitats. • Evaluate the diet of Northern Bobwhites on Walpole Island First Nation, to determine which plants and animals are used by Northern Bobwhites in this population in relation to their availability in available habitats. • Evaluate the feasibility and necessity of supplemental feeding programs for the existing population and for re-introduction. • Determine the direct and indirect effects of the European Fire Ant on Northern Bobwhite. • Coordinate on relevant research with agencies and organizations in the United States.

Release of non-native, pen-reared Northern Bobwhite	Medium	Population management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once potential recovery sites are identified encourage the province of Ontario to re-assess restrictions on release of pen-reared birds both adjacent to the existing Walpole Island First Nation population (to potentially increase the 50 km buffer) and on the mainland (to establish buffer(s)).
European Fire Ant	Low	Threat mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor European Fire Ants in existing and potential Northern Bobwhite habitat in southwestern Ontario and implement control measures as required.

^a All activities pertaining to the Walpole Island First Nation population will be completed in cooperation with the Walpole Island First Nation.

^b “Priority” reflects the degree to which the broad strategy contributes directly to the recovery of the species or is an essential precursor to an approach that contributes to the recovery of the species.

6.3 Narrative to Support the Recovery Planning Table

The approaches above focus on conserving and, where feasible, increasing, the distribution and abundance of the extant population on Walpole Island First Nation and re-introducing native Northern Bobwhites to the mainland. Activities also highlight the need for habitat restoration. The recovery effort for Northern Bobwhite will be completed in cooperation with Walpole Island First Nation. Various stakeholders will also need to be engaged including private and public landowners, land users, planners, non-government and government organizations. Partnerships will need to be developed with willing landowners and conservation groups particularly when considering re-introduction on the mainland. Habitat protection, management and restoration are of the utmost importance to recover Northern Bobwhite, as habitat loss and fragmentation have been the most significant threats to the species. On-going implementation of best management practices to control European Common Reed and other invasive plant species will be needed. Assessing habitat for interspersed key habitat types and ensuring sufficient quantity and connectivity of habitat, particularly of winter habitat, will be required to guide habitat restoration on Walpole Island First Nation and the mainland. Threat mitigation will be necessary to reduce predation and other causes of mortality and encourage population growth of the remaining population on Walpole Island First Nation and eventually, if feasible, a re-introduced population on the mainland. Outreach and education will be needed to reduce exposure to herbicides and insecticides and encourage ecologically appropriate use of fire on Walpole Island First Nation. Further restriction of game bird hunting preserves on the mainland will need to be considered as locations for habitat restoration and re-introduction are identified and prioritized. Collaboration with agencies and organizations involved in Northern Bobwhite research in the United States will be important to use lessons-learned from the extensive amount of work completed and underway south of the border. Where technically feasible, further genetic analysis in the form of a monitoring program could provide more insight into the genetic diversity of Northern Bobwhites on Walpole Island First Nation and if necessary birds on the mainland, and also help understand future patterns of population expansion, dispersal behaviour, habitat use and identification of potential sink habitats (Miller et al. 1999; Frankham et al. 2002 in Chabot 2014). It could also help evaluate the need for and scope of a captive breeding and release program, if deemed appropriate and feasible. As a potential threat European Fire Ant presence and impact on Northern Bobwhite will need to be monitored.

7. Critical Habitat

7.1 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”.

Critical habitat for the Northern Bobwhite cannot be identified at this time for Walpole Island First Nation or the mainland. A schedule of studies has been included that describes the activities required to complete the identification of critical habitat in support of the population and distribution objectives. The identification of critical habitat will be updated when the information becomes available, either in a revised recovery strategy or action plan(s).

7.2 Schedule of Studies to Identify Critical Habitat

Table 3. Schedule of Studies to Identify Critical Habitat

Description of Activity	Rationale	Timeline
Work with Walpole Island First Nation to secure the necessary information and identify critical habitat.	Further work is required to complete the identification of critical habitat to meet the population and distribution objectives.	2018-2025
Update population status and distribution on Walpole Island First Nation and confirm the current extent of suitable habitat.	Information on population status and presence of suitable habitat is required to allow for critical habitat identification.	2018-2025
Where possible, restore historically occupied suitable habitat(s) on Walpole Island First Nation.	Identify additional critical habitat.	2018-2025
Identify priority sites for habitat restoration and species re-introduction on the mainland. With the assistance of landowners verify occurrences.	Identify critical habitat at priority sites on the mainland.	Unknown at this time. To be determined.

8. Measuring Progress

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

Short term:

- The existing population on Walpole Island First Nation will be maintained and where biologically and technically feasible the abundance of the existing population will be increased to at least 230 adult birds.

Medium term:

- If biologically and technically feasible, the population on Walpole Island First Nation will be increased to at least 500 adult birds and its distribution increased to historically occupied areas on Walpole Island First Nation.

Long term:

- If biologically and technically feasible, a self-sustaining, resilient, and redundant population will be achieved, and at least one viable population on Walpole Island First Nation will be established and one viable population on the mainland will be re-established.

9. Statement on Action Plans

One or more action plans for Northern Bobwhite in Canada will be posted on the Species at Risk Public Registry by December 2023.

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Appendix A: Subnational Conservation Ranks of Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) in Canada and the United States

Northern Bobwhite (<i>Colinus virginianus</i>)				
Global (G) Rank	National (N) Rank (Canada)	Sub-national (S) Rank (Canada)	National (N) Rank (United States)	Sub-national (S) Rank (United States)
G5	N1	Ontario (S1) British Columbia (SNA)	N5	Alabama (S5), Arizona (S1), Arkansas (S5), Colorado (S4), Connecticut (S4), Delaware (S4), District of Columbia (S1), Florida (SNR), Georgia (S5), Idaho (SNA), Illinois (S5), Indiana (S4), Iowa (S5B), Kansas (S5), Kentucky (S5), Louisiana (S3), Maryland (S5), Massachusetts (S2), Michigan (S4), Minnesota (SU), Mississippi (S3S4), Missouri (S5), Montana (SNA), Nebraska (S5), New Hampshire (SX), New Jersey (S5B,S5N), New Mexico (S5B,S5N), New York (S4), North Carolina (S5), Ohio (S5), Oklahoma (S5), Oregon (SNA), Pennsylvania (S1), Rhode Island (S4B,S4N), South Carolina (S4), South Dakota (S4), Tennessee (S2S3), Texas (S4B), Vermont (SNA), Virginia (S5), Washington (SNA), West Virginia (S3B,S3N), Wisconsin (S2S3B), Wyoming (S1)

Table A-1 – Conservation Ranks of Northern Bobwhite in Canada and the United States. (NatureServe 2015)

Rank Definitions (Master et al. 2012)

N1/S1: Critically Imperilled: At very high risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction due to very restricted range, very few populations or occurrences, very steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.

S2: Imperilled: At high risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction due to restricted range, few populations or occurrences, steep declines, severe threats, or other factors.

N3/S3: Vulnerable: At moderate risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction due to a fairly restricted range, relatively few populations or occurrences, recent and widespread declines, threats, or other factors.

S4: Apparently Secure: At a fairly low risk of extirpation in the jurisdiction 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 due to a very extensive range, abundant populations or occurrences, and little to no concern from declines or threats).

S#S#: Range rank: A numeric range rank (e.g., S2S3 Vulnerable/Imperilled or S1S3 Critically Imperilled/Vulnerable) is used to indicate any range of uncertainty about the status of the species or ecosystem.

SNA: Not applicable: A conservation status rank is not applicable because the species or ecosystem is not a suitable target for conservation activities.

SNR: Unranked: Subnational conservation status not yet assessed.

SX: Presumed Extirpated – Species or ecosystem is believed to be extirpated from the jurisdiction. Not located despite intensive searches of historical sites and other appropriate habitat, and virtually no likelihood that it will be rediscovered.

B: Breeding - Conservation status refers to the breeding population of the species in the nation or state/province (e.g., S3B).

N: Non-breeding - Conservation status refers to the non-breeding population of the species in the nation or state/province (e.g., S4N).

Appendix B: 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](#)¹⁸. 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](#)'s¹⁹ (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.

The approaches in this recovery strategy will clearly benefit the environment by promoting the recovery of the Northern Bobwhite in Canada. The potential for the strategy to inadvertently lead to adverse effects on other species was considered. Many at risk and rare species occur in tallgrass prairie and savanna habitats. Therefore, it is expected that recovery efforts for Northern Bobwhite will benefit many species that occur in these habitats, such as Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*), Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*), Colicroot (*Aletris farinosa*), Dense Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*), Willowleaf Aster (*Symphotrichum praealtum*), Eastern Foxsnake (*Pantherophis gloydi*) and Butler's Gartersnake (*Thamnophis butleri*). However, the timing and frequency of management activities such as prescribed burning have the potential to negatively affect some species. It will be important to consider the needs of a wide variety of species when designing a fire regime targeted to Northern Bobwhite. Habitat securement, policy, and stewardship approaches are not expected to have any adverse effects on habitat or co-occurring species. 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: Population and Distribution Objectives and Strategic Direction for Recovery.

¹⁸ www.ceaa.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=B3186435-1

¹⁹ www.ec.gc.ca/dd-sd/default.asp?lang=En&n=CD30F295-1