

DRAFT Government Response Statement
to
Recovery Strategy for the Hudsonian Godwit in Ontario

1 **Hudsonian Godwit**

2 **Ontario Government Response Statement**

3 **Protecting and Recovering Species at Risk in Ontario**

4 Species at risk recovery is a key part of protecting Ontario’s biodiversity. The
5 *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA) is the Ontario government’s legislative
6 commitment to protecting and recovering species at risk and their habitats.

7 Under the ESA, the government must ensure that a recovery strategy is prepared for
8 each species that is listed as endangered or threatened. A recovery strategy provides
9 science-based advice to government on what is required to achieve recovery of a
10 species.

11 Generally, within nine months after a recovery strategy is prepared, the ESA requires
12 the government to publish a statement summarizing the government’s intended actions
13 and priorities in response to the recovery strategy. The response statement is the
14 government’s policy response to the scientific advice provided in the recovery strategy.
15 In addition to the strategy, the government response statement considers (where
16 available) input from Indigenous communities and organizations, stakeholders, other
17 jurisdictions, and members of the public. It reflects the best available local and scientific
18 knowledge, including Indigenous Knowledge where it has been shared by communities
19 and Knowledge Holders, as appropriate, and may be adapted if new information
20 becomes available. In implementing the actions in the response statement, the ESA
21 allows the government to determine what is feasible, taking into account social, cultural
22 and economic factors.

23 The [Recovery Strategy for the Hudsonian Godwit \(*Limosa haemastica*\) in Ontario](#) was
24 completed on January 16, 2024.

25 Hudsonian Godwit is a large subarctic-breeding shorebird (36 to 42 cm in length) 26 belonging to the sandpiper family. The species has grey to brown plumage, long dark 27 legs, and a long upturned bill that is pink-orange at its base with a darkened tip.

28 **Protecting and Recovering Hudsonian Godwit**

29 Hudsonian Godwit is listed as a threatened species under the ESA, which protects both
30 the animal and its habitat. The ESA prohibits harm or harassment of the species and

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31 damage or destruction of its habitat without authorization or complying with the
32 requirements of a regulatory exemption.

33 Hudsonian Godwit also receives protection under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*,
34 1994, which protects adults and young birds, as well as their nests and eggs in Canada.

35 Hudsonian Godwit has one of the longest migrations of any North American shorebird,
36 travelling round trip from South America to subarctic North America each year.
37 Individuals of the species spend the majority of the year in southern Chile and southern
38 and eastern Argentina. During spring migration, birds travel north towards breeding
39 grounds, which involves crossing through Central America and making stopovers in the
40 Great Plains region of the United States and Canada. Migrants then continue to one of
41 three disjunct breeding areas: (i) Alaska (ii) the Mackenzie Delta of the Northwest
42 Territories, and (iii) the Hudson Bay Lowlands of Ontario, Manitoba and Nunavut. The
43 species is considered to have three distinct subpopulations based on the three different
44 breeding areas. Depending on the breeding subpopulation, southbound migration back
45 to overwintering areas often begins with staging at lakes or wetlands in parts of Alaska,
46 the Canadian Prairies, or coastal areas of Hudson Bay, James Bay, the Gulf of St.
47 Lawrence and the Bay of Fundy. Important staging or stopover sites in Ontario include
48 the Albany River Estuary and Associated Coastline Important Bird Area (IBA), the Pei
49 lay sheesh kow IBA, and Chickney Point.

50 Following staging, most birds make non-stop flights over the Atlantic Ocean before
51 stopping over in the Amazon basin, though Alaskan breeders may fly over mainland
52 North America. The Hudsonian Godwit migration ends with birds continuing south and
53 arriving in their wintering grounds on the coasts of Argentina and Chile.

54 In Ontario, the Hudson Bay Lowlands, from approximately the Manitoba border to Cape
55 Henrietta Maria, are an important breeding ground for the species. Individuals of the
56 species typically remain within 50 km of Hudson Bay, but can occasionally be found as
57 far as 100 km inland. The Hudson Bay Lowlands are also important for migration,
58 serving as a staging area for all three breeding subpopulations, where birds rest and
59 consume food and water before migrating south for the winter. Southbound migrants
60 may also occasionally be found in parts of southern and eastern Ontario as they rest
61 and refuel before continuing on to South America. Birds from the Hudson Bay Lowlands
62 breeding subpopulation are generally believed to winter in the southern Patagonia
63 region of Argentina and Chile.

64 Hudsonian Godwit breeds in subarctic and boreal region wetlands, often near coastal
65 mudflats or major river systems. The species shows a preference for transition areas

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66 between coastal tundra and the tree line. These regions are dominated by herbaceous
67 plants, with scattered trees and shrubs, which provide cover for nests. Members of the
68 species likely begin breeding at two years of age, with breeding pair formation occurring
69 soon after spring arrival. Nests are built in shallow depressions in soil or vegetation on
70 dry hummocks near water, usually 200 to 500 m away from other nests. A single clutch
71 of approximately four eggs is laid within two weeks and incubated for three to four
72 weeks before hatching. Hatching success is upwards of 80 percent, but eggs and chicks
73 may be lost due to predation by Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and various bird species
74 including Northern Harriers (*Circus hudsonius*), Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) and
75 Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Both parents protect chicks until they fledge,
76 which usually occurs within three weeks. The generation time of Hudsonian Godwit is
77 estimated to be seven to eight years. The species primarily feeds on invertebrates
78 throughout its range (insects and gastropods on breeding grounds, and worms, bivalves
79 and crustaceans elsewhere), but will also feed on plants during migration. Migratory
80 stopover and winter habitat includes a variety of salt and freshwater wetlands that
81 provide abundant terrestrial and aquatic prey.

82 Monitoring over recent decades has shown a global decline of over 90 percent since
83 1980. Surveys on wintering grounds suggest the Hudson Bay Lowlands breeding
84 subpopulation may be decreasing upwards of four percent per year, though the rate of
85 decline has not been quantified specifically for Ontario breeders. Due to its dependence
86 on various habitats throughout North, Central and South America, Hudsonian Godwit is
87 exposed to both local and global threats. Habitat alteration and severe weather events
88 due to climate change threaten the species throughout its range due to storms, drought,
89 flooding and sea level rise. Changes in food availability, increased predation and
90 reduced nesting habitat are also likely to impact Hudsonian Godwit due to the effects of
91 changing climate on other species. Breeding habitat is threatened by hyperabundant
92 Snow Geese (*Anser caerulescens*) and Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*), which
93 reduce plant cover required for nesting by overgrazing. Migratory stopover sites in
94 South America are threatened by hydropower dams, which alter habitat, and stopover
95 habitat throughout the Americas is being degraded by pollution and sedimentation from
96 land use changes, agriculture, shipping and other industries. Hunting may pose a threat
97 to Hudsonian Godwit in some parts of its global range.

98 Much of what is known about Hudsonian Godwit is based on research conducted
99 outside of Ontario, and many knowledge gaps must be addressed to effectively protect
100 and recover the species. Due to its broad geographic range and high mobility,
101 systematic surveys are required to better understand the species' distribution during the
102 breeding period, and to identify key migratory staging and stopover sites in the province.
103 Standardized monitoring is also required to better understand the species' ecology,

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104 habitat use, population size and viability in Ontario. Research to determine home range
105 size is necessary to effectively protect habitat, and threat assessments are needed to
106 inform recovery approaches.

107 Hudsonian Godwit is a migratory species that relies on habitat and experiences
108 numerous threats outside the province. It is recognized that recovery will require
109 collaboration and recovery efforts at a variety of scales. Maintaining important breeding,
110 staging and stopover habitats within Ontario and supporting inter-jurisdictional efforts to
111 protect and conserve shorebirds will be key to the global recovery of the species.

112 **Government's Recovery Goal**

113 The government's goal for the recovery of Hudsonian Godwit is to achieve a stable or
114 increasing number of breeding pairs in Ontario in order to support a self-sustaining
115 Hudson Bay Lowlands breeding subpopulation.

117 **Actions**

118 Protecting and recovering species at risk is a shared responsibility. No single agency or
119 organization has the knowledge, authority or financial resources to protect and recover
120 all of Ontario's species at risk. Successful recovery requires inter-governmental co-
121 operation and the involvement of many individuals, organizations and communities. In
122 developing the government response statement, the government considered what
123 actions are feasible for the government to lead directly and what actions are feasible for
124 the government to support its conservation partners to undertake.

125 **Government-led Actions**

126 To help protect and recover Hudsonian Godwit, the government will directly undertake
127 the following actions:

- 128 • Continue to protect Hudsonian Godwit and its habitat through the ESA.
- 129 • Continue to collaborate with partners and other jurisdictions to fill knowledge
130 gaps and implement conservation actions for subarctic shorebirds through
131 initiatives such as the Ontario Shorebird Survey, James Bay Shorebird Project
132 and Burntpoint Creek Research Station shorebird ecology studies.

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- 133 • Continue to hold spillers accountable through the enforcement of the
134 *Environmental Protection Act* and implement the Ministry of the Environment and
135 Climate Change Emergency Response Plan (2017) as necessary to respond to
136 environmental spills within Ontario.
- 137 • Undertake communications and outreach to increase public awareness of
138 species at risk in Ontario (e.g., through Ontario Parks Discovery Program, where
139 appropriate).
- 140 • Continue to monitor populations and mitigate threats to the species and its
141 habitat in provincially protected areas, where feasible and appropriate.
- 142 • Educate other agencies and authorities involved in planning and environmental
143 assessment processes on the protection requirements under the ESA.
- 144 • Encourage the submission of Hudsonian Godwit data to Ontario’s central
145 repository through the [NHIC \(Rare species of Ontario\) project in iNaturalist](#) or
146 directly through the [Natural Heritage Information Centre](#).
- 147 • Continue to support conservation, agency, municipal and industry partners, and
148 Indigenous communities and organizations to undertake activities to protect and
149 recover Hudsonian Godwit. Support will be provided where appropriate through
150 funding, agreements, permits and/or advisory services.
- 151 • Work with all levels of government, communities and sectors to take action on
152 climate change, and to report on progress in reducing greenhouse gas
153 emissions.
- 154 • Conduct a review of progress toward the protection and recovery of Hudsonian
155 Godwit within five years of the publication of this document.

156 **Government-supported Actions**

157 The government endorses the following actions as being necessary for the protection
158 and recovery of Hudsonian Godwit. Actions identified as “high” may be given priority
159 consideration for funding under the Species at Risk Stewardship Program. Where
160 reasonable, the government will also consider the priority assigned to these actions
161 when reviewing and issuing authorizations under the ESA. Other organizations are
162 encouraged to consider these priorities when developing projects or mitigation plans
163 related to species at risk.

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164 **Focus Area: Monitoring and Research**
165 Objective: Address knowledge gaps related to Hudsonian Godwit distribution,
166 habitat, biology and threats.

167 In order to better focus actions to support the protection and recovery of Hudsonian
168 Godwit, it is important to understand which parts of the province the species uses
169 throughout its life cycle. Standardized survey methods will improve knowledge of the
170 species' distribution during breeding, staging, and migration, and allow for Ontario-
171 specific population estimates. Identification of key habitat areas used by the species is
172 essential to understanding threats and prioritizing management activities. Targeted
173 research relating to threats across the species' range will help clarify factors driving
174 declines and appropriate mitigating actions. This knowledge, combined with information
175 on current population status and demographic rates, is necessary to develop population
176 viability models that will allow for the development of quantitative recovery targets and
177 better-informed recovery approaches.

178 **Actions:**

- 179 1. **(High)** Continue to implement existing standardized surveys (e.g.,
180 Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, Ontario Shorebird Survey) and, where
181 necessary, develop or promote the systematic application of
182 standardized inventory and monitoring protocols to:
- 183 i. determine Hudsonian Godwit breeding distribution and population
184 trends in Ontario, and, where necessary and appropriate, on the
185 wintering grounds of Ontario breeders
 - 186 ii. locate, identify and describe Hudsonian Godwit habitat used for
187 breeding, staging and migratory stopovers in Ontario, including
188 through the use of radio telemetry or GPS tracking, where
189 appropriate
 - 190 iii. identify key habitat areas used by one percent or more of the Hudson
191 Bay Lowlands breeding subpopulation
- 192 2. **(High)** Conduct research to improve knowledge on Hudsonian Godwit
193 biology and ecology, such as diet, home range size in breeding areas,
194 demographic parameters (e.g., nest success, juvenile survival, adult
195 survival), and minimum viable population size.
- 196 3. Investigate the impacts and potential mitigation measures of known and
197 potential threats to Hudsonian Godwit in breeding, staging and migration
198 habitat. Targeted areas of research may include:

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- 199 i. **(High)** climate change and severe weather
200 ii. **(High)** overgrazing by Snow Geese and Canada Geese in the
201 Hudson Bay Lowlands
202 iii. dams and other natural system modifications
203 iv. pollution and sedimentation
204 v. hunting
- 205 4. As appropriate, encourage the recording, sharing and transfer of
206 Traditional Ecological Knowledge on Hudsonian Godwit, where it has
207 been shared by communities, to increase knowledge of the species and
208 support future recovery efforts.

209	Focus Area:	Management
210	Objective:	Maintain or improve Hudsonian Godwit habitat and mitigate threats
211		to Ontario breeders and migrants.

212 A significant portion of the world’s Hudsonian Godwit population breed in or migrate
213 through Ontario. Efforts to maintain or increase habitat quality and manage local threats
214 will support birds relying on these areas. Focus should be placed on key habitat areas
215 (i.e., those breeding grounds and staging or stopover sites that support at least one
216 percent of the Hudson Bay Lowlands breeding subpopulation). Recovery efforts that
217 benefit multiple species at risk should be considered whenever possible. A collaborative
218 approach will be essential in the ongoing management of the species.

Actions:

- 219 5. **(High)** In collaboration with landowners, land managers, conservation
220 organizations and Indigenous communities, identify and mitigate site-
221 specific threats to Hudsonian Godwit at breeding, staging and stopover
222 habitat, and restore or rehabilitate habitat in Ontario where necessary
223 and appropriate.
224
- 225 6. Collaborate with partners and other jurisdictions on initiatives to conserve
226 key habitats within and outside of Ontario, such as efforts being
227 undertaken through the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve
228 Network.

229	Focus Area:	Stewardship and Awareness
230	Objective:	Increase the level of public awareness and engagement in
231		protecting and recovery Hudsonian Godwit throughout its global
232		range.

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233 Hudsonian Godwit is a highly mobile species that uses habitat across North, Central
234 and South America, and is impacted by global and local threats throughout its range. It
235 is important to promote awareness and collaborate with the international community to
236 ensure protection and stewardship activities reduce threats to the species in migration
237 and wintering habitat. When possible, information should be shared with other
238 jurisdictions to enhance understanding of the species and coordinate efforts. Within
239 Ontario, partnerships with interested Indigenous communities and organizations will
240 improve knowledge sharing and stewardship opportunities.

241 **Actions:**

- 242 7. **(High)** Collaborate with other jurisdictions, organizations and
243 communities throughout the global range of Hudsonian Godwit to:
- 244 i. promote awareness of the species and its threats
 - 245 ii. encourage consistent monitoring and data sharing
 - 246 iii. identify, protect and manage habitat
 - 247 iv. research, increase awareness of, and mitigate the impacts of climate
248 change on the species
 - 249 v. encourage rapid response to spills and other discharges to surface
250 water
- 251 8. Maintain or develop partnerships with Indigenous communities and
252 organizations to share knowledge and obtain input on recovery actions.
- 253 9. Implement initiatives in human-populated parts of the species' range to
254 reduce human disturbance in key habitat areas where necessary, such
255 as:
- 256 i. posting educational signage about the species and its threats
 - 257 ii. implementing requirements for dogs to be leashed
 - 258 iii. restricting access to portions of shorelines if negative impacts are
259 observed

260 **Implementing Actions**

261 Financial support for the implementation of actions may be available through the
262 Species at Risk Stewardship Program. Conservation partners are encouraged to
263 discuss project proposals related to the actions in this response statement with Ministry
264 of the Environment, Conservation and Parks staff. The Ontario government can also
265 provide guidance about the requirements of the ESA, whether an authorization or

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266 regulatory exemption may be required for the project and, if so, the authorization types
267 and/or conditional exemptions for which the activity may be eligible. Implementation of
268 the actions may be subject to changing priorities across the multitude of species at risk,
269 available resources and the capacity of partners to undertake recovery activities. Where
270 appropriate, the implementation of actions for multiple species will be co-ordinated
271 across government response statements.

272 **Performance Measures**

273 Progress towards achieving the government's goal for the recovery of Hudsonian
274 Godwit will be measured against the following performance measures:

- 275
- 276 • By 2039, the Hudson Bay Lowlands breeding subpopulation is stable or
277 increasing.
 - 278 • By 2039, the number of breeding pairs in Ontario is stable or increasing.
 - 279 • By 2054, the Hudson Bay Lowlands breeding subpopulation is stable and self-
280 sustaining.

281 **Reviewing Progress**

282 The ESA requires the Ontario government to conduct a review of progress towards
283 protecting and recovering a species no later than the time specified in the species'
284 government response statement, which has been identified as five years. The review
285 will help identify if adjustments are needed to achieve the protection and recovery of
286 Hudsonian Godwit.

287 **Acknowledgement**

288 We would like to thank all those who participated in the development of the Recovery
289 Strategy and Government Response Statement for the Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa*
290 *haemastica*) in Ontario for their dedication to protecting and recovering species at risk.
291

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292 **For Additional Information:**

293 Visit the species at risk website at ontario.ca/speciesatrisk

294 Contact the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

295 1-800-565-4923

296 TTY 1-855-515-2759

297 www.ontario.ca/environment