



PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

Copper Redhorse Protection: An Unreasonable Delay Triggers a Legal Remedy

Montreal, January 7, 2021 – Today, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) and the Quebec Environmental Law Centre (CQDE) filed a lawsuit in Federal Court against the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans currently lags eight years behind with its obligation to activate measures to prohibit the destruction of the Copper Redhorse's critical habitat.

“According to a provision of the *Species at Risk Act*, once the critical habitat of an aquatic species has been identified, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has 180 days to issue an order to protect the portions of the critical habitat that remain unprotected. This order should have been issued by the Minister at the latest on December 17th, 2012” explains Me Frédéric Paquin, one of the lawyers representing CPAWS and the CQDE.

Me Paquin will work with Me Anne-Julie Asselin, lawyer at Trudel, Johnston & Lespérance.

The Copper Redhorse is a species of fish unique to Québec and it is currently endangered. Its distribution range is extremely small, being limited to the freshwater portion of the St. Lawrence River, between St. Louis and St. Pierre Lakes, as well as some of its tributaries. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada's (COSEWIC) last report documents observed and inferred declines in distribution range, habitat quality and number of mature individuals.

“While the Copper Redhorse's situation deserves close attention from the authorities and concrete action, the federal government ignores its legal obligations and thus becomes an accomplice to the tragic decline of this species that is unique to Québec”, argues Alain Branchaud, biologist and executive director of the Québec Chapter of CPAWS (SNAP Québec). “The Copper Redhorse is an evolutionary marvel and the ultimate responsibility, to the entire world, to ensure its survival and recovery rests on our shoulders” adds Mr. Branchaud.

“Recent decisions with regards to the Western Chorus Frog file indicate that courts now take biodiversity protection very seriously. Protecting endangered species has become a fundamental value in our society and time limits prescribed by the *Species at Risk Act* have been highlighted in many court judgements” comments Geneviève Paul, executive director of CQDE. “The CQDE is once again at the forefront to ensure that environmental laws related to biodiversity conservation are respected across the country”, concludes Mrs. Paul.

The CQDE and CPAWS hope this case will be resolved rapidly. The federal government will soon have to make a decision with regards to the Port of Montreal’s expansion project in Contrecoeur, a project that, were it to be authorized, would lead to the destruction of a portion of the Copper Redhorse’s critical habitat.

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INFORMATION

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