

Endangered Species and Spaces

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10.3 Columbia Valley Wetlands

A portion of the wetlands of the Columbia Valley have received at least some degree of protection under various statutes. The Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (joint federal, provincial, private), four national wildlife areas, four provincial wildlife management areas, and numerous small unofficial wildlife management areas collectively protect about 82,720 ha. of these important wetlands. It should be noted, however, that public and commercial recreation, hunting, trapping, logging and mining are still permitted on much of these lands. While some wildlife and plant species may be able to tolerate such disturbances, clearly others cannot. Although some species may receive protection, overall biodiversity protection cannot be guaranteed under such a management regime.

In addition to direct short-term threats from human disturbances, Columbia Basin wetlands face a growing impact from global warming. Small changes in hydrological regime often result in large changes in plant community structure and complete elimination of certain habitats and species. Many wetland species can only tolerate minor changes in nutrient flux and water levels. Global warming will increase demands for human water supply with consequent effects on wetlands. Wetlands are also often seen as good sites for future agricultural production (Hebda, 1994).

Perhaps the greatest immediate threat to wetlands in the basin is the fluctuating water levels associated with the reservoirs. Rapid inundation and/or depletion of water may completely destroy nesting or spawning habitats for a wide range of species.

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