

## Rare dragonfly in Minesing wetlands declared at-risk species

Sara Carson

An endangered dragonfly could lose its only known Canadian habitat if development takes place atop the Snow Valley ski hill, says Ellen Schwartzel, acting Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (ECO).

And she blames the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for not doing enough to protect the Hine's emerald dragonfly and its habitat in the Minesing wetlands.

"That was a very good example of where the science says this is what's needed and where the ministry stopped short of protecting that habitat," Schwartzel said.



*This Hine's emerald dragonfly was spotted close to the Minesing Wetlands at North Simcoe Railtrail near Sunnidale Road. CHRIS EVANS*

The ECO's annual report released Nov. 3 and titled *Small Things Matter*, used the Hine's emerald as one example of the province not following a species' recovery strategy, prepared under the Endangered Species Act.

"The province has had the opportunity to show some on the ground successes for the Endangered Species Act, they haven't yet done that. And that's disappointing," Schwartzel said.

The Hine's emerald recovery strategy, created in 2013, recommends its protected habitat include the Snow Valley Uplands because its groundwater feeds the entire wetland. Schwartzel is calling on the ministry to take recommendations in the recovery strategy seriously because the area is under development pressure.

"Given the specificity of this recommendation in the recovery strategy, and with no explanation of the ministry's decisions provided, the ECO concludes that the MNR opted to favour development, rather than to prioritize the protection of this species at risk habitat," the ECO's annual report states.

The habitat regulation for Hine's emerald includes a 500-metre area around the habitat used by the species. Ministry spokesperson Jolanta Kowalski said this area protects the flow of groundwater into the wetlands, and aquatic areas used by the species. But, she added, this does not mean development outside the habitat won't require provincial approval.

"If activities outside this area are likely to have an adverse effect on the habitat, they may still require authorization under the Endangered Species Act to consider the needs of the species," she said.

Kowalski added the recovery strategy is one source of information used to develop habitat regulations.

"Biological consideration of the species, community knowledge, socio-economics, and public input contribute to best available information by which habitat regulations are ultimately determined," she said.



*Chris Evans said it's unknown what level of human disturbance this dragonfly can tolerate.* BRERETON FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB PHOTO

Chris Evans, president of the Brereton Field Naturalists' Club, discovered the Hine's emerald here in 20074. It is also found in Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and Missouri. He said it's unknown what level of human disturbance this dragonfly can tolerate.

"Perhaps its extirpation from other areas of Ontario indicates that we are damaging our aquifers and water supplies in ways we do not yet understand. Why not identify and protect all known and potential Hine's emerald habitats from human development until we know the safe limits of our impacts?" he said.

Water levels are very important to the Hine's emerald because these dragonflies reproduce and live as larvae in crayfish burrows that are very sensitive to disturbance, said local naturalist Bob Bowles. He takes part in the annual dragonfly count in the Minesing wetlands.

"Any development of the area would impact greatly on the Hine's emerald," Bowles said.

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