

## **SCIENTISTS URGE FEDERAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF HIGHWAY 413**

Nov 11, 2024

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault

Minister of the Environment and Climate Change

House of Commons

Ottawa, Ontario

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Dear Minister Guilbeault,

We, the undersigned scientists, urge you to undertake a **federal impact assessment of Ontario's proposed Highway 413**.

We urge you to act because this project threatens values that are under clear federal jurisdiction.

Scientific research has shown that the construction of Highway 413 could negatively impact as many as 29 species listed under the federal *Species at Risk Act* and 122 species of birds protected under the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. Based on past research related to the construction of similar highways, fish habitat in over 100 waterways crossing the proposed Highway 413 will be adversely impacted.

Some of the federally protected species that could be harmed are listed as **endangered or threatened**. These include the Red-Headed Woodpecker (Endangered), Jefferson Salamander (Endangered), Western Chorus Frog (Threatened), the Rapids Clubtail (Endangered) and the Redside Dace (Endangered). (The Redside Dace is restricted to only a few streams and rivers in southern Ontario, the majority of which are found along the proposed Highway 413 route).

Failure to protect these species could lead to meaningful reductions in their chances of long-term survival and recovery of these species at risk in Canada.

These threats occur in the context of an Ontario government that is not taking adequate measures to ensure endangered species' survival. Ontario has watered down its *Endangered Species Act*, removing protection for species that are endangered in Ontario but also live elsewhere, an approach that scientists have condemned.

As well, Ontario has initiated a harmful practice that allows developers to destroy endangered species' habitat, provided they pay into a fund managed by the province. They have also just introduced legislation that, if passed, would exempt the 413 from the province's *Environmental Assessment Act*. The Government of Ontario's Bill 212 (*Reducing Gridlock, Saving You Time Act, 2024*) will also allow highway construction work to immediately commence in certain areas before authorizations under other provincial acts (e.g. *Endangered Species Act*) have been issued or Indigenous consultation has occurred. Because of Ontario's poor track record on endangered species' preservation, there is no alternative to a strong federal enforcement role in areas of its jurisdiction.

In the absence of federal action, a proper review of the environmental impacts of the proposed highway will not occur and dozens of federally-listed species at risk could be harmed, perhaps irrevocably.

Thank you for your urgent attention in this matter.

Yours,

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