
Building Public Awareness and Support for the Banff Springs Snail

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Abstract: The endangered Banff springs snail (*Physella johnsoni*) is a small, unique mollusc that lives in five thermal springs on Sulphur Mountain in Banff National Park, Alberta. It is found nowhere else on earth. Most park visitors are unaware of the snail's existence and the fragility of thermal spring ecosystems. A communications strategy is an essential component of the Banff Springs Snail Recovery Plan, which works in concert with research, monitoring, and enforcement to protect the species. Key goals of the strategy include protection—prevention of unintentional or careless disturbance of the snail and its habitat; public awareness—making visitors aware of the snail's existence and endangered status; and stewardship—encouraging a sense of responsibility for this tiny snail among park staff, local residents, and park visitors. This targeted communications strategy is now being implemented through on-site signage and exhibits, staff orientation, cartoons, media coverage, and a snail edukit and programming for local and regional schools. Raising public awareness and support for the protection of a tiny endangered snail is a unique challenge requiring creative approaches. An overview of educational tools and approaches is provided.

Key Words: Banff springs snail, *Physella johnsoni*, thermal springs, species at risk, communications strategy, conservation, education, stewardship, Banff National Park, Alberta