
The Convention of Biological Diversity's Program of Work on Protected Areas and Resulting Implications and Opportunities for Canada

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Abstract

Protected areas have gained renewed international attention with the adoption of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) at the 7th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in February 2004. While Canada has in many ways been a global leader in protected areas establishment and management, effective implementation of the PoWPA will require focused attention by all federal, provincial and territorial protected areas agencies in the immediate future. Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) is coordinating Canada's response to the PoWPA and is suggesting the need for a national dialogue on the role of protected areas in conservation and land-use management. As a first step in this process, CWS is working with all protected areas agencies to develop a National Protected Areas Status Report that examines achievements, gaps, and emerging opportunities for protected areas planning in Canada.

Keywords: *protected areas, biodiversity, National Protected Areas Status Report, Canadian Wildlife Service*

Introduction

Countries from around the world have recently come together under the banner of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (CBD) to articulate a bold and ambitious new vision and workplan for protected areas as an essential means to assist in reducing global biodiversity loss by the year 2010. Canada is as well positioned as any country to deliver on this vision. As one of the world's few countries with remaining opportunities to preserve large un-

fragmented wilderness areas, Canada has demonstrated global leadership as steward of an impressive amount of the world's forest, freshwater, marine, and arctic environments. Each of Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments has extended legislative protection to significant areas of conservation land and most are advancing protected areas strategies. Progress on protected areas establishment has been particularly significant over the past fifteen years, whereby the total amount of land base in protected areas has grown by over 470 000 square kilometres, an area roughly the size of Yukon (WWF, 2003).

Yet considerable gaps remain in Canada's protected areas networks, and protected areas planning has not kept pace with our evolving scientific understanding of the need to preserve ecological processes and function at the landscape level. Further, there is currently no overall strategy to guide the planning efforts of Canada's sixteen federal, provincial, and territorial protected areas agencies. Major land-use decisions continue to be made without consideration of the degree to which conservation objectives in the affected region are being met. And in Canada's marine waters, protected areas planning is still very much in its infancy.

This paper summarizes the recently adopted CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas, provides an overview of the extent to which Canada's protected areas agencies are working together in planning protected areas networks, outlines some of the emerging protected areas opportunities and challenges for Canada, and outlines the approach that Environment Canada is advancing to help Canada meet its commitments under the PoWPA, focusing on the development of a National Protected Areas Status Report as a first step.

The CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas

At the seventh meeting of the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in February 2004, member countries finalized a Programme of Work on Protected Areas with an overall purpose to:

support the establishment and maintenance by 2010 for terrestrial and by 2012 for marine areas of comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically representative national and regional systems of protected areas that collectively, inter alia through a global network contribute to achieving the three objectives of the Convention and the 2010 target to significantly reduce the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels... (Secretariat of the CBD, 2004)

The Programme of Work is an extremely comprehensive protected areas workplan, covering network planning, establishment, management, governance, financing, and aboriginal and community participation, to name but a few areas. It includes 17 outcome-orientated goals, each with associated targets, timelines, and supporting actions.

Participating countries to the CBD have committed to use the Programme of Work on Protected Areas as a means to advance their own domestic protected areas planning efforts. No country is expected to deliver on all of its goals, targets and actions. Rather, countries are being requested to use the Programme of Work as a guidepost to help design their own tailored strategy that addresses their unique protected areas priorities. Ultimately though, countries are expected to deliver on the overall goal of developing comprehensive networks of terrestrial and marine protected areas by 2010 and 2012 respectively. Member countries will accordingly be called upon to report on their progress in meeting these commitments at meetings of the CBD in 2006, 2008 and 2010.

A Federated Approach to Protected Areas Planning in Canada

Canada takes a federated approach to protected areas planning. Each of the country's 13 provinces and territories administers its own protected areas network. At the federal level, protected areas are further owned and managed by three separate agencies: Environment Canada, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Each of these federal, provincial and territorial protected areas agencies operates independently through its own legislation, strategy, and multitude of designated sites, providing for a fulsome and diverse network of protected areas across the country. Meeting Canada's commitments under the CBD will therefore require a coordinated response by these various protected areas agencies.

Some of the most notable progress on protected areas in Canada have been initiated through collaboration between protected areas agencies. In particular, Canada's federal, provincial and territorial Ministers of the Environment, Parks and Wildlife came together in 1992 to sign *A Statement of Commitment to Complete Canada's Networks of Protected Areas* (Canadian Parks Ministers' Council, 1992), partially in response to the 1987 recommendation of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) to triple the amount of land set aside in protected areas globally. The signing of the Statement of Commitments was a historic occasion, being the

first time that Canada's protected areas agencies developed a unified vision for their respective networks, namely:

to make every effort to complete Canada's networks of protected areas representative of Canada's land-based natural regions by the year 2000 and accelerate the protection of areas representative of Canada's marine natural regions (Canadian Parks Ministers' Council, 2000).

While no protected area agency fulfilled this ambitious goal, substantial progress was made over these eight years, with over 240 000 square kilometres of land set aside in protected areas, roughly the size of the United Kingdom (Canadian Parks Ministers' Council, 2000).

Further to the 1992 ministerial commitment, a number of additional important collaborative national or pan-Canadian protected areas organizations and initiatives were carried forward. These include the following:

- Canada's parks directors work together under the banner of the Canadian Parks Council. Important recent work of the Council includes developing a parks system management training course, developing a detailed methodology to assess the economic impact of parks, and exploring the linkages between healthy parks and healthy living.
- The Canadian Council on Ecological Areas is a collaborative organization made-up of government and non-government protected areas practitioners from across Canada, undertaking research on conservation area systems design and classification, organizing state-of-the-debate workshops, and hosting the Canadian Conservation Areas Database. CCEA is currently developing the Conservation Areas Reporting and Tracking System, a web-based application allowing for public access to geospatial data for all Canadian public conservation areas, and completing a review on the needs and design for northern protected areas (Wiersma *et al.*, this volume).
- Canada's three federal protected areas agencies, Parks Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada have recently developed and begun implementing a Federal Marine Protected Areas Strategy for Canada (Government of Canada, 2005a). They have further developed a draft Federal Protected Areas Strategy to coordinate the planning of protected areas under federal jurisdiction.

These collaborative efforts have been extremely important to protected areas planning in Canada, allowing for the sharing of expertise and informa-

tion, the development of nationally consistent protected areas standards and protocols, and ultimately bettering the establishment and management of protected areas across the country.

A Coordinated Canadian Response to the Programme of Work on Protected Areas

Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) is coordinating Canada's response to the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas and is suggesting the need for a national dialogue on the role of protected areas in conservation and land-use management. While protected areas agencies across Canada continue to make substantial progress in delivering on their respective protected areas strategies, there has been no coordinated national dialogue on the role of protected areas in conservation planning since the 1992 Statement of Commitments. Many of Canada's landscapes have changed considerably in that time, as has the state of debate regarding the role of protected areas in conserving healthy functioning ecosystems (National Round Table on Environment and Economy, 2003).

If Canada is to meet its commitments under the Programme of Work on Protected Areas, and ultimately if our protected areas networks are to be effective in preserving functioning ecosystems, then we will need to ensure that our collective planning efforts are geared toward meeting the evolving challenges and opportunities that protected areas managers face. Some of these major challenges and opportunities can be summarized as follows:

Challenges

- There is no overall vision or strategy for protected areas in Canada, and no common understanding or formal, collective discussion of what lands Canada needs to set aside for protection (how big, how many, and for what outcomes).
- While much of Canada's conservation efforts over the last fifteen years have focused on preserving representative habitats and addressing the conservation needs of single species, emerging scientific thinking suggests the need to focus on designing conservation strategies at the landscape level that ensure the maintenance of ecological processes and function (Schmiegelow, 2003).
- Major land-use decisions are most often made without landscape-level considerations of whether biodiversity in the region is effectively being conserved. This is particularly the case in respect of boreal, northern and marine ecosystems, whereby major resource developments have

the potential for large-scale impacts on the landscape (National Round Table on Environment and Economy, 2003).

- Marine protected areas continue to be grossly under-represented in Canada, accounting for less than one percent of our vast marine waters (WWF, 2003). Progress has been equally slow in all three oceans.

Opportunities

- Aboriginal communities are playing an ever more important role in the establishment and management of protected areas, particularly through the negotiation of land claims agreements. Traditional ecological knowledge is increasingly being used to inform conservation and land-use strategies, and areas of cultural importance are also beginning to be identified and protected (National Aboriginal Forestry Association and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Association, 2003).
- The need for integrated land-use planning which informs conservation and resource-use decisions is widely being recognized (National Integrated Landscape Management Coalition, 2004). Many provinces and territories have advanced pilot integrated land-use planning initiatives (Canadian Parks Council, 2004). The conservation community has begun to advocate and pursue a “Conservation First” strategy to land management, whereby conservation opportunities are secured in advance of resource development (National Round Table on Environment and Economy, 2003).
- Some major resource industry companies are taking a proactive approach to conservation and land-use management, participating in integrated land-use planning processes, partnering with governments and/or conservation organizations to support or advance a “conservation first” approach to land use, and in certain cases relinquishing rights or title to ecologically significant Crown lands in order to allow for these lands to be set aside as protected areas.
- The last decade has seen a considerable emergence of land trust organizations across Canada dedicated to the preservation of ecologically significant private lands, particularly in southern landscapes where protected areas opportunities are scarcest (Watkins and Hiltz, 2001).
- Particular effort has been concentrated in the last five years in conserving Canada’s boreal forests, one of world’s last intact forests, after repeated calls for action, including that by Canada’s Senate (Senate Subcommittee on the Boreal Forest, 1999) and the National Round Table on Environment and Economy (Lee, 2004). The Western Boreal Conservation Initiative, the Boreal Ecosystems Analysis for

Conservation Networks, the Canadian Boreal Initiative, the Boreal Songbird Initiative, and the Sustainable Forest Management Network are all advancing research and conservation efforts in our boreal forests.

- The federal government is advancing Phase I of an Oceans Action Plan for Canada (Government of Canada, 2005b), including undertaking integrated oceans management in five areas and beginning initial implementation of the Federal Marine Protected Areas Strategy (Government of Canada, 2005a).

The time would appear to be right for a renewed conservation vision for Canada, with protected areas playing a central role. Environment Canada has embarked on a Competitive and Environmental Sustainability Framework with an aim to make Canada sustainable within a generation, including acting as a “*world leader in the conservation of natural heritage*” (Environment Canada North Star Team, 2004). At the same time, Canada’s deputy ministers are in the process of considering a Biodiversity Outcomes Framework for Canada that would identify a series of performance and placed-based outcomes designed to help deliver on the *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy*.

Canada’s National Protected Areas Status Report

Recognizing the need for a renewed understanding of the role of protected areas in conserving Canada’s natural capital, deputy ministers responsible for wildlife, endangered species, fisheries and forestry agreed in June 2005 to support the development of a National Protected Areas Status Report. The purpose of the Status Report is to provide a comprehensive assessment of protected areas planning efforts by Canada’s federal, provincial and territorial protected areas agencies, thereby allowing for an understanding of emerging accomplishments, gaps, opportunities, and constraints for protected areas planning in Canada. The Status Report will examine both terrestrial and marine protected areas and will include:

- an accounting of existing lands and waters within each protected areas network;
- an overview of existing protected areas legislation, policies, and strategies;
- a review of differing protected areas planning objectives being utilized (i.e., representative landscapes, conservation of special elements, preservation of ecological processes and function, etc.);

- the contribution that aboriginal communities, industry, and NGOs are making in protected areas planning, establishment, and management;
- an assessment of protected areas management, science, and monitoring practices;
- the supporting role that ENGOs are playing in securing private conservation lands;
- an overview of efforts to date to integrate protected areas networks into the broader landscape; and,
- a preliminary exploration of future priorities for protected areas planning in Canada.

Environment Canada is coordinating the development of the Status Report as lead agency responsible for meeting Canada's commitments under the CBD PoWPA. A standardized questionnaire is being used as the primary means to gather relevant information from each of the sixteen protected area agencies. An advisory committee has been established to provide strategic and technical guidance in all aspects of report development. Membership of the Advisory Committee includes: the three federal protected areas agencies, the Canadian Parks Council, the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas, the Federal, Provincial, Territorial Working Group on Biodiversity, and a "non-parks" protected areas agency.

Deputy ministers will consider the Status Report's findings and recommendations at their June 2006 meeting. The report will also help Canada to report internationally on its progress in implementing the PoWPA.

Next Steps – A National Dialogue

The Status Report will provide a comprehensive picture of our country's progress on protected areas planning as a first step in a broader national dialogue on emerging protected areas opportunities and priorities for Canada. It is intended that this national dialogue will enable government, aboriginal, and non-government partners to explore together the strategies needed to ensure an effective role for protected areas in conserving Canada's natural capital, consistent with the overall purpose of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas to develop comprehensive terrestrial and marine networks of protected areas by 2010 and 2012 respectively.

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