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Environment Canada Protected Areas Strategy



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FOREWORD

In Canada the legal protection of lands for the benefit of wildlife, habitat and biodiversity conservation is largely led by Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Aboriginal governments. Environment Canada's mandate focuses specifically on the conservation and protection of migratory birds and, with the support of provinces, territories and aboriginal peoples, species at risk and other species of national interest. Environment Canada contributes to this goal through its network of protected areas whose designations and management are supported by legislation.

The purpose of this Strategy is to outline the role, strategic direction, and scope of the Protected Areas Program for the period 2010-2015. This program is delivered by the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS), a Directorate of the Department of Environment (EC). The Strategy builds on the vision and directions provided by the CWS 2010-15 Strategic Plan, the 2005-2010 Protected Areas Strategic Plan, and the 2005 Federal Marine Protected Areas Strategy.

In recent years administrative re-organizations and resource challenges have put stresses on this program while expectations have simultaneously increased. This comes at a time when the full scope of the challenges posed by climate change, and the uncertainties associated with future ecological change, are only now being understood. It is in this context that renewal of the EC protected Areas Program Strategy is conducted.

1 The Context

1.1 HABITAT CONSERVATION

Wildlife and wildlife habitat are vital to the ecological and biological processes that are essential to life itself. Sufficient high-quality habitat is of the utmost importance to the survival of wildlife populations. The maintenance and enhancement of human life depends on the complex interactions among the elements that make up the biosphere, such as habitat and wildlife. These ecological processes are essential for fresh water, clean air, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and other endeavors necessary to human life. Canadians also have a profound attachment to wilderness which is rooted in history and heritage. This has certainly been an important driving force behind wildlife habitat conservation in Canada.

Environment Canada's wildlife conservation mandate is grounded in the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* (MBCA), the *Canada Wildlife Act* (CWA) and the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The MBCA, promulgated in 1917, aims to protect and conserve migratory birds, as populations and individuals, and their nests. The Convention was subsequently amended in 1995 by the Parksville Protocol wherein one of the conservation principles is "...to provide for and protect habitat necessary for the conservation of migratory birds". The CWA, passed in 1973, empowers the minister to carry out activities to promote and support wildlife research, conservation and interpretation. The SARA, passed by Parliament in 2002,

Critical Habitat

Is defined under SARA as the habitat that is necessary for the survival or recovery of a listed wildlife species and that is identified as the species' critical habitat in a recovery strategy or action plan.

aims to prevent "...wildlife species from being extirpated or becoming extinct, to provide for the recovery of wildlife species that are extirpated, endangered or threatened as a result of human activity and to manage species of special concern to prevent them from becoming endangered or threatened". The Act empowers the minister to "...establish codes of practice, national standards or guidelines with respect to the protection of critical habitat". Canada is also a signatory to the 1992 United Nations Convention

on Biodiversity thus providing further incentives to develop and implement conservation strategies. One of the first actions under this convention was the development of the 1995 Canadian Biodiversity Strategy whose purpose is to enhance coordination of national efforts aimed at the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of biological resources.

1.2 HABITAT PROTECTION AND STEWARDSHIP

Canadian governments and non-governmental organizations approach wildlife habitat conservation on two broad fronts. One thrust involves securing land for the protection of wildlife and biodiversity. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area as “an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural

Conservation

As described in the *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy* (1995), conservation is “The maintenance or sustainable use of the Earth's resources in a manner that maintains ecosystems, species and genetic diversity, and the evolutionary and other processes that shaped them. Conservation may or may not involve the use of resources; that is, certain areas, species or populations may be excluded from human use as part of an overall landscape or waterscape conservation approach.”

Conservation is effectively achieved through two distinct but complementary approaches:

Protection

where legal securement of land is obtained, by acquisition or other means, and where those lands are managed for the purpose of conservation.

Stewardship

which encompasses voluntary actions taken on land managed by individuals and organizations for the benefit of target species and their habitat.

and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means”. The second thrust involves stewardship initiatives where land is managed in ways that do not threaten, but will benefit, the long term survival of wildlife populations, biodiversity or the provision of ecological goods and services. The *Wildlife Policy for Canada*, a national policy developed by the Wildlife Ministers’ Council of Canada in 1990, explicitly recognizes that “...habitat conservation requires four mutually supportive approaches: comprehensive systems of protected areas, integration of habitat conservation in the management of public lands, habitat conservation on private lands, and habitat conservation on aboriginal lands”. The policy thus

explicitly recognizes that protected areas are only one component of a broader wildlife conservation approach for Canada. They should therefore be planned and managed as part of a suite of conservation actions that complement each other.

1.3 ENVIRONMENT CANADA'S PROTECTED AREAS

Environment Canada protects habitat through marine and terrestrial National Wildlife Areas (NWA), established under the authority of the *Canada Wildlife Act* to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat for the purposes of conservation, research, and/or interpretation, and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries (MBS) established under the authority of the *Migratory Birds Convention Act*. These are managed both as individual sites and as a national network.

Characteristics of Environment Canada's Protected Areas

National Wildlife Areas

Migratory Bird Sanctuaries

Legal authority

Canada Wildlife Act

Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994

Purpose

To protect wildlife and wildlife habitat for the purposes of conservation, research, and interpretation.

To protect migratory birds and their nests.

Title

NWAs require proprietary interest in the land in accordance to the *Wildlife Area Regulations* whereby "wildlife area" means an area of public lands.

MBSs can and have been established on private, provincial or federally owned land.

Prohibited activities

Wildlife Area Regulations outline specific prohibited activities (such as hunting, fishing, damaging or removing plants, conducting agricultural activity, any recreational activity, etc.) unless notices permitting specific activities are posted or a person has obtained a permit.

The *Migratory Birds Convention Act* provides the authority to make regulations prescribing protection areas for migratory birds and nests, and for the control and management of those areas; the extent of this authority for the control and management of the sanctuaries depends upon the conditions of ownership.

Environment Canada has long been a leader in habitat conservation: the first protected site now managed by the Department was established in 1887 (now known as the Last Mountain Lake NWA). The Department's Canadian Wildlife Service manages an evolving network of protected areas, which currently includes 146 National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, conserving over 12.3 million hectares of land. Each site is designated for a particular conservation purpose. National Wildlife Areas are designated on federal lands or water; other departments may

manage sites designated by Environment Canada under a Delegation of Authority, such as the Canadian Forces Base Suffield NWA. Migratory Bird Sanctuaries include federal and non-federal lands where co-operation with other landowners is essential. Collectively, the sites create a network that contributes to national conservation goals. Environment Canada has particular responsibility for migratory birds and

Ecological resilience

The ability of an ecosystem to withstand disturbance without changing self-organized processes and structures.

species at risk and, with support of the provinces and territories, for protecting rare and unique wildlife habitats, and habitat for species of national interest. By conserving these habitats, Environment Canada's protected areas also preserve other wildlife species, prevent species from becoming at risk, and preserve biodiversity at regional and national scales. Furthermore, the network of protected areas in Canada contributes to ecosystem resilience in the face of future ecological

change. The IUCN Position Paper on Ecosystem-based Adaptation prepared for the Climate Change Talks held under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (June, 2009) states that..."maintaining and enhancing the resilience of ecosystems at the landscape scale, through systems of effectively managed protected areas and improvements in the management of surrounding lands and seas" contributes to ecosystem-based adaptation.

Rare and Unique Habitats

Rare or unusual wildlife habitat, of a specific type in a biogeographic region, has special value for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a region because of the quality and uniqueness of its flora and fauna. It includes habitats that always have been rare in a region, as well as habitats reduced to a remnant of their former extent.

1.4 A FEDERAL NETWORK OF PROTECTED AREAS

The Federal government actively pursues protection of habitat through the activities of Environment Canada, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. These activities rest within a broader continuum of conservation actions ranging from the management of regulated areas through to stewardship initiatives on private land. The precise purpose for which protected areas are managed differs greatly between departments. Environment Canada's protected areas are unique because they are

specifically designated and managed to protect wildlife and their habitat. This may include interventions such as habitat restoration, especially for species at risk.

Other protected areas in Canada have different mandates, although they may also protect wildlife as a part of that mandate. For example, Parks Canada's mandate is to protect a representative sample of each of the 39 terrestrial natural regions of Canada in its National Park System for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians. National parks are places for people that are representative of an ecosystem and management of visitation is based on the principle of maintenance of ecological integrity. In contrast, Environment



Canada's National Wildlife Areas are places for wildlife that are selected because they are important for wildlife and are managed for conservation of wildlife. In addition, Environment Canada establishes its protected areas according to biological criteria. It therefore has the flexibility needed to evolve and adapt the network in an ever changing ecological context making EC's protected areas critical to enhancing the capacity of wildlife to adapt to climate change.

1.5 THE PRESSING CHALLENGES OF FUTURE ECOLOGICAL CHANGE

Protected areas are places for wildlife which also prevent habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation. As such they contribute to balancing economic and environmental needs at landscape scales by preserving critical ecosystem components and functions. In recent decades the demands on ecosystems from various sectors of the economy, especially the resource sectors, have increased substantially. As a result of growing economies and populations, both inside and outside Canada, these pressures are not likely to abate in the future. This will likely push the capacity of ecosystems to maintain their structures and

functions to their limits. As development pressures grow the importance of protected areas in providing balance will increase if, and only if, their ecological integrity is maintained, restored where needed, and safeguarded. Faced with a changing climate which will bring its own suite of ecosystem changes the value of protected areas as refuges for biodiversity will only increase. A heightened awareness must be brought to the need to minimize stress on protected areas in order to maintain their resiliency, and thus their critical role as refuges for biodiversity. This will help maintain the capacity of species to respond and adapt to changing ecosystems.

2 The Strategic Framework

2.1 VISION

A network of areas to protect priority habitats required for the conservation of Canada's migratory birds and species at risk as well as rare or unique habitats; that is planned to adapt to ecological change, and managed, in conjunction with others.

2.2 MISSION

Environment Canada identifies, designates, and cooperatively manages protected areas in a network comprised of marine and terrestrial National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries to protect habitat and wildlife, to facilitate understanding of ecological processes, and to promote public awareness and understanding of nature conservation and Environment Canada's role in conservation; ultimately these actions will lead to healthy populations of migratory birds, maintenance and restoration of populations of species at risk and other wildlife of national importance, and the protection of rare and unique habitats.

2.3 GOALS

Through the establishment of a comprehensive, effectively managed, and ecologically sound national network of marine and terrestrial National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries:

1. To ensure protection, in Canada, of habitat essential to the long-term survival of migratory bird populations, as part of coordinated national, continental and hemispheric conservation planning, backed by quality research and supported by a public which understands the need for conservation action.
2. To provide protection of critical habitat for the recovery of populations of species at risk through active management and regulation within existing protected areas, and by designating new protected areas where necessary.
3. To protect rare and unique wildlife habitats, of a specific type in a biogeographic region, or habitats with value for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a region because of the wide range, quality and uniqueness of its flora and fauna.
4. To plan and manage the network of protected areas in such a way as to build resilience, and augment the capacity to adapt, in the face of future ecological change including climate change.

2.4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2.4.1 Protection First

Protection of wildlife and its habitat is the primary purpose of a protected area. All activities on protected areas, on the land or at sea, have to be considered within this priority. This is achieved through legal securement of land and regulation, permitting, enforcement, assessment and monitoring as prescribed in management plans.

2.4.2 Science At The Core Of Protected Areas Planning And Management

Science provides the foundation of network planning and protected areas designation and management. Knowledge of the wildlife, habitats and ecosystems to be conserved forms the core of the foundation while social, economic and political considerations along with Aboriginal traditional knowledge provides additional layers of important contextual information.

2.4.3 Environment Canada Network Designed To Complement Other Conservation Actions

The Environment Canada network is designed to complement the full range of Canadian protected areas and stewardship arrangements. EC recognizes that its network is a subset of larger national and international networks created by governments and non-governmental organizations with different agendas and criteria guiding the selection of areas for protection.

2.4.4 Network Designed And Managed To Adapt To Future Ecological Change

The protected areas network is designed and managed to adapt to future ecological change including changes expected to occur as a result of global warming. This requires that planning take into account both spatial and temporal ecological scales, and adopting an adaptive approach to conservation where new knowledge is collected to inform conservation planning in an iterative manner.

2.4.5 Ecosystem-Based Management of Protected Areas

Environment Canada recognizes the benefits of using an ecosystem approach in the planning and management of its protected areas where they are considered integral parts of broader landscapes managed by individuals and organizations, and to which they also provide ecological goods and services.

2.4.6 Environment Canada Works with Others

Environment Canada works with Aboriginal peoples, communities, partner organizations and other governments and federal departments to enhance compliance and protection, to complement capacities and to foster education about wildlife conservation.

2.5 STRATEGIC APPROACHES

2.5.1 The ecological integrity of protected areas is maintained and enhanced

The conservation value of Environment Canada's protected areas must be maintained in the face of increasing challenges. Invasive alien species and human impacts on individual protected areas are having significant effects at sites south of 60°. Demands are growing for access to resources within the boundaries of protected areas. Climate change will pose significant risks to existing infrastructure and, especially north of 60° where the changes are expected to be the greatest, may undermine the original conservation mission through changes in the biophysical make-up of these ecosystems.

These challenges will be met by modernizing regulations, management plans and policies. On the ground infrastructure will be maintained, the permitting of activities will be reinforced by an updated policy, enforcement of regulations will be better informed and compliance with regulations will be promoted. An increasing emphasis will be put on monitoring wildlife and habitats in order to track change and, where possible and feasible, ensure that ecological integrity is not jeopardized. This will be done through consultations with program staff and stakeholders, and in collaboration with co-management partners where necessary.

2.5.2 A national network of protected areas is established with partners, that provides resilience, redundancy of priority habitats and complements other networks.

The enhancement and consolidation of an EC network of protected areas which is efficient at meeting its conservation objectives and resilient to future ecological change will be done most efficiently in partnership with other conservation organizations. It is essential to plan the EC network as a subset of larger national and international networks. A growing number of organizations, governmental and non-governmental, are involved in securing areas for the protection of wildlife and habitats. These organizations have different agendas and criteria guiding the selection of areas for protection. Yet, as a collective, they complement each other.

The first step in the harmonization of efforts will involve better targeting of EC priorities as part of conservation planning for migratory birds at the scale of Bird Conservation Regions and to meet critical habitat protection needs for species at risk. Working with conservation partners when designating new

sites or expanding existing sites will increase the efficiency of the acquisition process, especially south of 60°. In the North, collaboration with Territorial governments and aboriginal peoples will be essential for the identification and designation of new protected areas. This will also require that guidance be provided on the implementation of co-management committees. As networks are planned with a greater number of partners and stakeholders, more effective planning tools will be developed, validated and used. Network planning will need to be responsive to change through better monitoring and assessment of the network; this will also involve supporting enforcement activities through the use of remote sensing tools.

2.5.3 The public understands and supports the role and importance of protected areas

Beyond their immediate value for wildlife conservation protected areas will play an increasing role in enhancing ecosystem resilience in the face of future ecological change stemming from climate change and increasing anthropogenic stressors. It is therefore important that the public understand and value the role and importance of protected areas. Faced with competing economic interests governments will be supportive of protected areas if the public understands their importance to society. The public will also be more willing to limit their activities and impacts on individual protected areas.

Efforts to build public understanding and support will be concentrated on two fronts: the development of on-site interpretation infrastructure for selected NWAs and a greater web presence for EC's protected areas. This will be done in partnership with other government departments responsible for the national network of protected areas.

3 Developing and Managing the Network

The three strategic approaches will be implemented in consultation with stakeholders, in collaboration with other government departments and other conservation partners and, the process and the results will be communicated to the public. Policies, regulations, and guidance documents will be reviewed and updated, including: the *Wildlife Area Regulations*, a policy with respect to selection, modification, and de-listing of protected areas, the *Policy on Permitting Prohibited Activities in Protected Areas*, and the other relevant protected areas policies and guidelines. Management plans will be developed for each of Environment Canada's 146 protected areas, infrastructure will be maintained or improved, new sites will be established, and research and monitoring will be directed at better understanding ecological integrity and improving site conditions. Ongoing coordination within Environment Canada will ensure effective enforcement of regulations by the enforcement branch and compliance promotion by CWS. Finally, Environment Canada's network of protected areas will be integrated into regional and national planning efforts in respect of the national network of private, provincial, territorial, and other federal parks and protected areas.

Details regarding the Strategic Action Plan will be developed through Environment Canada's annual work planning process and will be implemented as human and financial resources allow.

WWW.ec.gc.ca

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