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Canada



PAN-CANADIAN APPROACH
TO TRANSFORMING **SPECIES**
AT RISK CONSERVATION
IN CANADA

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INTRODUCTION

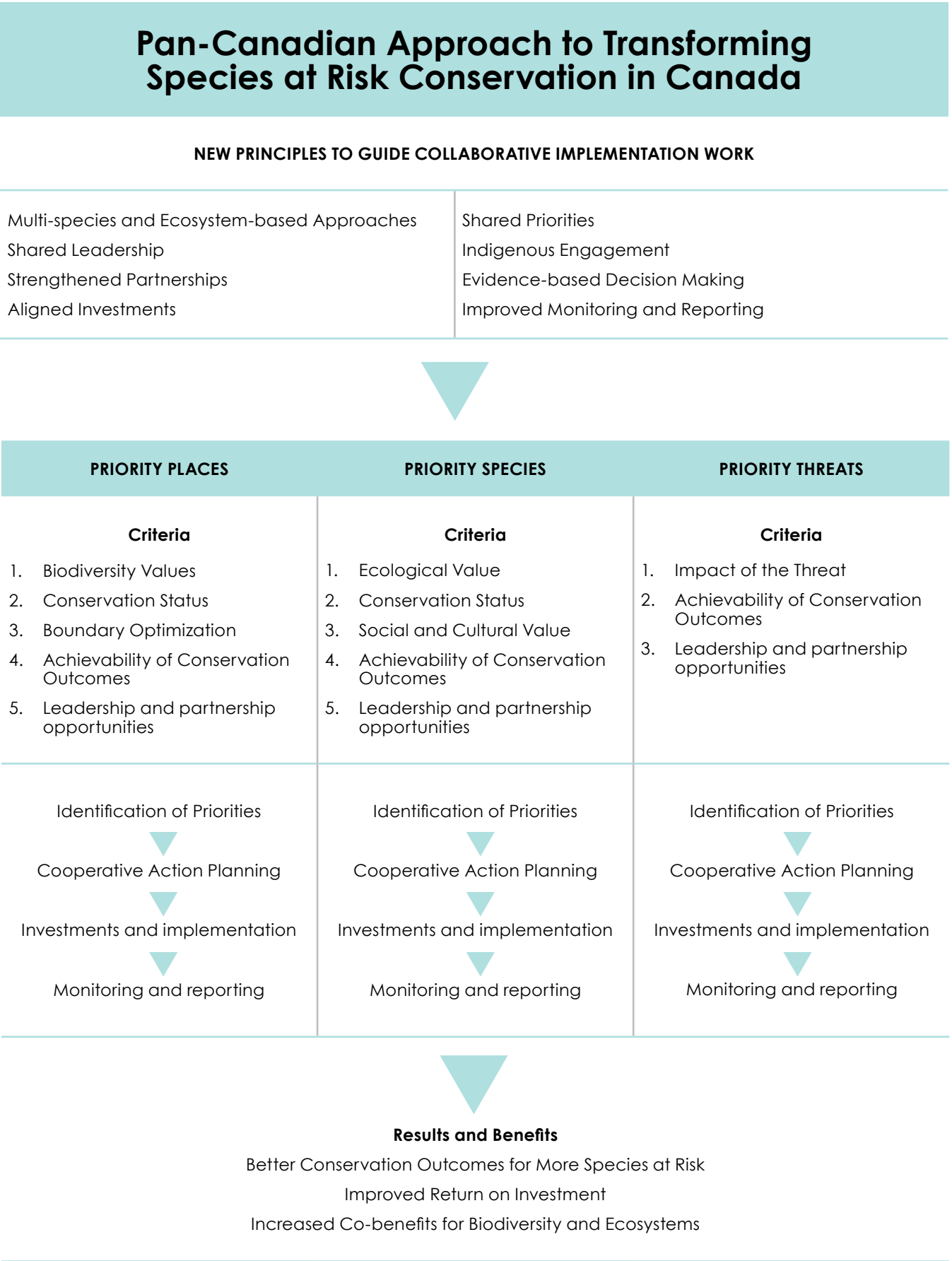
Federal, provincial and territorial governments have been working to conserve Canada's biodiversity for decades.

Recognizing that wild species populations in Canada continue to decline, we are committed to redoubling our efforts. We reaffirm our commitment to the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk and the complementary National Framework. Building on these foundational pieces, we will focus our collaborative work on shared priorities that enable us to meet our collective species at risk requirements to the greatest extent possible through multi-species and ecosystem-based approaches and to strengthen implementation of our common objectives to maximize multi-species and biodiversity conservation benefits.

These priorities will be guided by agreed principles and common criteria to support a transformative approach to operationalizing species at risk conservation, as detailed below (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1



I. PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE COLLABORATIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSERVATION ACTION

While there is shared agreement on the need to transform approaches to species at risk and biodiversity conservation, and more specifically to shift to more multi-species and ecosystem-based approaches, more targeted and collaborative efforts, and greater emphasis on implementation, progress is at a preliminary stage. There is a strong desire and commitment to accelerate progress. Federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) governments have agreed to the following set of principles to guide collaborative work and to operationalize the transformation to multi-species and ecosystem-based approaches, building on existing collaboration through the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk, and federal-provincial/territorial bilateral agreements on species at risk conservation:

MULTI-SPECIES AND ECOSYSTEM-BASED APPROACHES

1. Wherever possible, jurisdictions will develop and implement multi-species, ecosystem-based and/or threat-based initiatives that collectively maximize the ability to protect and recover species at risk, recognizing in some circumstances single-species approaches may be preferred or necessary to meet our collective species at risk protection and recovery obligations.

SHARED PRIORITIES

2. When applicable, FPT governments will work together to focus conservation efforts on shared priority places, species and threats. A set of shared priorities, identified and selected bilaterally or multi-laterally as appropriate, will be a focus of collaborative implementation over the next 5-10 years, based on:
 - Common framework and criteria using best available science, traditional knowledge, lessons learned, and other considerations, including focusing efforts where:
 - There are significant numbers of species at risk and high biodiversity values;
 - There is a conservation urgency for immediate or near-term actions;
 - It is biologically and technically feasible to improve conservation outcomes, while respecting cultural, traditional and economic values;
 - We can build on and leverage existing partnerships;
 - There is an individual species at risk concern which requires species-specific action; and
 - There are opportunities to address other government priorities (e.g. economic development) and optimize outcomes across multiple objectives.
 - An intent to identify a suite of priority places and species and threats that provide broad national coverage from coast to coast to coast, with the goal to include at least one priority place-based approach in each province and territory;
 - A joint process with provinces, territories, Indigenous peoples and other partners; and
 - Public input.

SHARED LEADERSHIP

3. Planning and implementation approaches will recognize and emphasize shared FPT jurisdiction, and who is best positioned to act, including:
 - Acknowledging and leveraging the benefits of joint planning and implementation;
 - Recognizing provincial and territorial, and in some areas, Indigenous jurisdictional roles and responsibilities to manage the land base;
 - Providing federal leadership by example, where the federal government has lead responsibility (aquatic species, migratory birds, national parks, marine and coastal areas, other lands administered by the federal government) and has a leadership role to convene and coordinate multi-jurisdictional initiatives;
 - Recognizing and using the many FPT tools that can be used to advance conservation and protection outcomes for species at risk, with emphasis on a “stewardship-first” approach; and
 - Adopting collaborative and innovative approaches to achieve conservation outcomes.

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

4. Planning and implementation approaches will aim to renew relationships and strengthen collaboration between our governments and Indigenous peoples, by:
 - Recognizing and respecting the role of Indigenous peoples in the conservation of species at risk and biodiversity more broadly;
 - Increasing capacity for Indigenous-led community stewardship planning and action; and
 - Co-developing stewardship agreements.



STRENGTHENED PARTNERSHIPS

5. Planning and implementation approaches will recognize the benefits of strengthening partnerships, and in particular engagement of Indigenous peoples, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others in planning and taking action.

STRENGTHENED EVIDENCE-BASE FOR DECISION MAKING

6. Evidence to support species at risk recovery action planning and implementation will be improved through:
 - Collaborative research to ensure more robust and effective identification of key threats, critical habitat and effective recovery actions;
 - Collaborative research to develop effective multi-species approaches;
 - Co-application of traditional ecological knowledge and science; and
 - Development of tools for assessment of conservation scenarios to inform decision making.

ALIGNED INVESTMENTS

7. Investments will be aligned with shared priorities, recognizing:
 - The need for targeted, cost-shared investments that result in tangible actions and outcomes on the ground;
 - The value of leveraging funds from the private sector, philanthropic foundations and individual citizens to help advance recovery work; and
 - The value of ensuring investments are guided by place-based and/or priority species and/or threat-based stewardship plans and agreements.

IMPROVED MONITORING AND REPORTING

8. Monitoring and reporting of actions, expenditures and outcomes will be improved to enable:
 - More robust and comprehensive assessments of progress regionally and nationally; and
 - More transparent, tangible and compelling communication of results to Canadians.



II. CRITERIA AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IDENTIFYING SHARED PRIORITIES

A. CRITERIA AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IDENTIFYING PRIORITY PLACES IN COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS

A priority place may be described as a defined geographic area of high biodiversity value with a recognizable ecological theme and social relevance that may be intuitively identified as a distinct “place” by the people that live there and manage its infrastructure and renewable and non-renewable natural resources. Proposed criteria and considerations for identifying priority places in collaboration with partners could include the following five elements:



1. **Biodiversity Values:** Identification of significant species at risk and other biodiversity values on a regional or national scale:
 - a. High numbers of species at risk;
 - b. High biodiversity, including other wildlife that are not at risk (including migratory birds, fish and other aquatic species, and species of traditional and customary importance to Indigenous peoples); and
 - c. Unique assemblages of biodiversity, species at risk, and other wildlife.
2. **Conservation Status:** A recognition that biodiversity values are declining and being impacted by identifiable human-caused threats:
 - a. Extent of species at risk critical habitat (identified and potential) and wildlife habitat;
 - b. Risk of species at risk critical habitat and wildlife habitat destruction; and
 - c. Extent of existing or potential conservation actions with high probability of success.
3. **Boundary Optimization:** An appropriate spatial size to focus conservation efforts:
 - a. Ecosystems, watersheds and habitats;
 - b. Land title/tenure and activities;
 - c. Biodiversity values;
 - d. Threats/sectors; and
 - e. Communities with primary interests in conservation outcomes and therefore public profile.
4. **Achievability of Conservation Outcomes:** A pragmatic opportunity to begin to achieve significant and measurable conservation outcomes within a reasonable timeframe (5–10 years), recognizing improvements in conservation status usually takes a long time (10–50 years) and conservation efforts must be ongoing to sustain gains:

- a. Conservation opportunities for preventing extirpation and/or extinction of species at risk;
 - b. Conservation opportunities for advancing protection and recovery of species at risk consistent with population and distribution objectives;
 - c. Conservation opportunities to prevent species from becoming at risk and maintaining/improving ecosystem services;
 - d. Threat/risk management potential (effectiveness); and
 - e. Partnership leveraging potential (resources and influence).
- 5. Leadership and Partnership Opportunities:** A multi-jurisdictional context that includes mandates, responsibilities, and roles for the Government of Canada, provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples, municipalities, and others:
- a. Existing partnerships;
 - b. Potential for expanded or new partnerships (with provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples and other partners, including municipalities, industry, landowners, environmental non-government and community-based organizations, academia, and Canadians);
 - c. Opportunities to address other FPT government¹ and Indigenous peoples' priorities (e.g. sustainable development, existing or planned land use plans) and optimize outcomes across multiple objectives;
 - d. Ability to expand on, "scale-up," and export successes and lessons learned; and
 - e. Consistency with jurisdictional responsibilities and roles under Species at Risk Act (SARA) and other legislation for the management of fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.

B. CRITERIA AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IDENTIFYING PRIORITY SPECIES IN COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS

Collaborative approaches focused on single-species may be preferred or necessary to deliver conservation actions in complex threat scenarios and for ecologically important, widely distributed and transboundary species and their ecosystems. Focusing efforts on delivering conservation outcomes for a manageable number of priority species, and that address multiple barriers to recovery through-out their range, can have significant co-benefits to multiple species at risk, other wildlife, and related biodiversity values. Collaborative, multi-jurisdictional protection and recovery action is already underway for Boreal caribou and Southern Mountain Caribou. Proposed criteria and considerations for identifying a national set of priority species in collaboration with partners and that will resonate with Canadians, could include the following elements:



1. **Ecological Value/Role:** Identification of wide ranging species with a significant keystone, umbrella or previously ecologically important role, on a regional or national scale:
 - a. Distributed across large landscapes and areas, often transboundary;
 - b. Nature and extent of the species' past and/or current ecological, conservation and/or evolutionary role and value;

- i. May be described as playing a critical role in maintaining the structure of an ecological community, affecting many other organisms in an ecosystem and helping to determine the types and numbers of various other species in the community;
 - ii. Evolutionary distinctiveness; and
 - iii. Contribution to ecosystem health, integrity or services;
 - c. Extent of global responsibility for the species; and
 - d. Potential for multiple species and ecosystem benefits.
2. **Conservation Status:** A recognition that the species status is declining and being impacted by identifiable threats:
 - a. Available information and mapping of human activities and implications for species recovery;
 - b. Extent of species at risk critical habitat (identified and potential);
 - c. Risk of critical habitat and wildlife habitat destruction; and
 - d. Vulnerability to other threats.
 3. **Social and Cultural Value:** Species is socially and culturally valued, and may be considered to have iconic status.
 - a. Indigenous interests and values; and
 - b. Extent of existing community interest and support.
 4. **Achievability of Conservation Outcomes:** A pragmatic opportunity to begin to achieve significant and measurable conservation outcomes within a reasonable timeframe (5–10 years), recognizing improvements in conservation status usually takes a long time (10–50 years) and conservation efforts must be ongoing to sustain gains:
 - a. Recovery strategy and/or stewardship plan is completed or near completion, or there is high value and urgency in producing a “national recovery strategy and/or stewardship plan”;
 - b. Conservation opportunities for advancing protection and recovery of species at risk consistent with population and distribution objectives;
 - c. Threat/risk management potential (effectiveness);
 - d. Partnership leveraging potential (resources and influence).
 5. **Leadership and Partnership Opportunities:** A multi-jurisdictional context that includes mandates, responsibilities, and roles for the Government of Canada, provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples and other partners:
 - a. Extent of existing partnerships or engaged citizenry;
 - b. Potential for expanded or new partnerships;
 - c. Need for coordination across multiple jurisdictions;
 - d. Opportunities to address other FPT government' and Indigenous peoples' priorities (e.g. sustainable development, existing or planned land use plans) and optimize outcomes across multiple objectives; and
 - e. Consistency with jurisdictional responsibilities and roles under SARA and other legislation for the management of fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.

C. CRITERIA AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR IDENTIFYING PRIORITY THREATS/SECTORS IN COLLABORATION WITH PARTNERS

Effective conservation of species at risk requires identifying and alleviating threats to their existence. Determining high impact sector activities or threats at the national or regional scale, where there is an opportunity to have a positive impact through sector-based or threat-based mitigation initiatives, is one of the key strategies to improving conservation outcomes across Canada. Proposed criteria and considerations for identifying the relative importance and priority of sector initiatives and threats, could include the following elements:



1. **Impact of the Threat:** Identification of sector-based activities and/or threats that are prevalent and have impacts at regional or national scales. Different threats and sector-specific activities have varying levels of impact, depending on the species, habitats or ecosystem/landscapes of concern. Assessing threat impact is multi-factorial, and includes consideration of:
 - a. The timing of the threat (e.g. the threat could be in the past, immediate and ongoing, and/or likely to occur in the future);
 - b. Its scope/scale or magnitude (e.g. the number and/or proportion of species, habitats, ecosystems affected);
 - c. The severity of the impact/risk (e.g. the overall declines caused by the threat); and
 - d. The irreversibility of the threat (e.g. degree to which the effects of the threat can be reversed and biodiversity values restored).
2. **Achievability of Conservation Outcomes:** A pragmatic opportunity to achieve significant and measurable conservation outcomes within a reasonable timeframe (5–10 years):
 - a. Available information about the potential effectiveness of conservation action, whether regulatory, policy-based, or on the ground action, to alleviate the threat;
 - b. Return on investment (e.g. cost-effectiveness); and
 - c. Partnership leveraging potential (resources and influence).
3. **Leadership and Partnership Opportunities:** A multi-jurisdictional context that includes mandates, responsibilities, and roles for the Government of Canada, provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples and other partners:
 - a. Opportunity to positively influence sector policy and/or improve management practices;
 - b. Need for or value in coordination across jurisdictions, and/or for regional vs national approaches;
 - c. Extent of existing partnerships or engaged citizenry;
 - d. Potential for expanded or new partnerships; and
 - e. Consistency with jurisdictional responsibilities and roles under SARA and other legislation for the management of fish, wildlife, and other natural resources.

III. RESULTS AND BENEFITS

1. **Better Conservation Outcomes for More Species at Risk:** Aligned priorities and investments create synergies for multiple species and habitats with a focus on addressing root causes of declines.
2. **Improved Return on Investment:** Maximize number of species for which recovery and protection actions are being implemented through investing in multi-species priorities with broad national coverage.
3. **Increased Co-benefits for Biodiversity and Ecosystems:** Multi-species and ecosystem approaches for species at risk create co-benefits for:
 - The conservation of biodiversity more broadly;
 - The provision of ecosystem services and human health and wellbeing; and
 - Climate change mitigation and adaptation.

