

CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY IN CANADA

A Journey in Progress

A Tradition of Conservation...

Canada's natural wealth is the envy of many nations, and is supported by a strong tradition of conservation and sustainable use. An important component of this wealth is Canada's biodiversity — the variety of genes, species and ecosystems, and the ecological processes of which they are a part.

Biodiversity is our life support system. It can be seen in the wetland ecosystems that clean our water, the insects that pollinate our crops, the microorganisms that contribute to medical research, and the forests that cleanse our air.

Biodiversity provides enormous economic, cultural and spiritual benefits, and its decline worldwide is one of the most serious crises facing humanity.

Canada is committed to protecting its own biological diversity, and to working with others to help conserve the biodiversity of the planet. In 1992,

Canada took new steps on its journey to protect this natural wealth by becoming the first industrialized country to ratify the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity*.

Signs Along the Way

Since 1992, Canadians have contributed significantly to federal, provincial and territorial efforts to act on commitments to conserve biodiversity. Together, these partners have designed a road map called the *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy* to guide them on their journey. The following are just some signs of the progress we have made so far...

Conserving areas of ecological importance

- Canada has seen unprecedented growth in its federal, provincial and territorial networks of protected areas over the past 10 years. Over 24 million hectares of land — an area the size of the United Kingdom — have been added, ranging from small parks to huge wilderness areas.

- Five new national parks have been created, encompassing more than 66 000 square kilometres of Arctic and Boreal landscapes. Interim protection is in place for another 51 300 square kilometres of land, which will become four new parks once the agreements are in place. All of these parks were created through agreements with First Nations communities.

- Canada continues to expand the List of World Heritage Sites recognized for their universal value. New sites were added in Quebec and Nova Scotia. Waterton Lakes National Park in Alberta is now on the List as part of the Waterton/Glacier International Peace Park World Heritage Site. British Columbia's Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park was added to the Klauane/Wrangell-St. Elias/Glacier Bay World Heritage Site, making it the largest natural World Heritage Site on the planet.

- Five natural areas in Canada, including British Columbia's Clayoquot Sound, were declared Biosphere Reserves by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). To further strengthen the program, the Canadian Biosphere Reserve Association was formed in 1997.

- The federal *Income Tax Act* was amended to strengthen the ability of Canadians to contribute personally to conserving biodiversity. As a result, there have been more than 265 donations of private land made through the Ecological Gifts Program, protecting over 21 000 hectares of wildlife habitat.

- More than 850 000 hectares of wetlands have been secured, enhanced and managed for conservation purposes under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

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Protecting species at risk

- The 1996 *Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk* is an effective federal-provincial-territorial approach to habitat and species protection that encourages stewardship, conservation and legislation.

- The proposed federal *Species at Risk Act* stresses a cooperative approach and stewardship based on solid science to protect species at risk.

- Of the species listed in 2001 as endangered or threatened by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, 85 are the direct focus of recovery efforts, and 42 are part of broader ecosystem-based initiatives. All Canadian jurisdictions cooperated to assess the status of over 2000 species.

- Stewards across Canada are restoring thousands of hectares of habitat and over 180 kilometres of shoreline for more than 220 species under the *Habitat Stewardship Program* for species at risk.

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Managing our natural resources

- Companies are changing the way they do business in order to help conserve biodiversity. From pollution prevention to the sustainable use of resources, environmental performance is becoming a measure of corporate performance.

- To meet Canadians' expectations of a growing economy in harmony with a healthy environment, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency came into force in 1995.

- Healthy forest ecosystems and biodiversity conservation are two objectives of the *National Forest Strategy, Sustainable Forests: A Canadian Commitment (1998-2003)*. A new strategy is being developed and will be released at the ninth National Forest Congress in Ottawa, in May 2003.

- Canada's Model Forest Network is a leading example of sustainable forest management. Eleven large-scale working models in nine provinces are being used to develop tools for biodiversity conservation.

- Canada's *Oceans Act*, enacted in 1997, adopts an ecosystem approach to maintaining biological diversity and productivity in the marine environment. Under the Act, marine protected areas are being established to protect marine resources and their supporting habitats including unique habitats, marine life at risk, the habitats of commercial and non-commercial fish and areas of high biological productivity and diversity.

- Under the *Marine Conservation Act*, National Marine Conservation Areas protect special areas and promote conservation. The governments of Canada and Quebec passed legislation creating the jointly managed Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park.

- Freshwater and marine fish are protected through the administration and enforcement of the habitat provisions of the *Fisheries Act* and the application of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Policy for the Management of Fish Habitat.

- Environment is a major part of the new *Agricultural Policy Framework*, designed to foster improvements in the quality of water, soil, air and biodiversity. The framework's priorities include wildlife habitat availability, species at risk, and economic damage to agriculture from wildlife. Increasing awareness of the environmental risks and benefits of agricultural practices will make biodiversity and agriculture more compatible. Farmers will have better stewardship tools, environmental planning will be encouraged, and incentives will be provided to accelerate agri-environmental action.

- Conserving the genetic diversity of plants is essential for sustainable agriculture. In June 2002, Canada became the first industrialized country to ratify the *Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.

Engaging citizen scientists

- Many Canadians assist with the monitoring, assessment and reporting of biodiversity through the Ecological Monitoring and Assessment Network, while thousands of others are involved in volunteer efforts to conserve and restore habitat for wildlife.

Respecting and preserving traditional knowledge

- Traditional knowledge held by Aboriginal communities in Canada contains a wealth of information on biodiversity. This information is being applied in managing vital habitat and wildlife species, such as the Peary Caribou.

- Canada works with other countries through the *Convention on Biological Diversity* and other international efforts to ensure that traditional knowledge is respected, preserved and used with the approval and involvement of indigenous and local communities.

Working with other nations

- Canada is the proud host of the Secretariat of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* in Montréal, on behalf of all Parties to the Convention.

- Among its many programs to link biodiversity and development, Canada is involved in the Iwokrama International Rain Forest in Guyana. By making biodiversity part of tropical forest management, this project provides ecological, economic and social benefits to local communities.

- Canada is supporting the efforts of local governments in China to manage protected areas in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Using six nature reserves as demonstration sites, the goal is to promote sustainable development for poor populations in the region.

- The Equator Initiative was launched in 2002 to promote sustainable community livelihoods and reduce poverty through the sound management of biodiversity. The United Nations Development Programme manages the initiative in partnership with the Government of Canada, the Ottawa-based International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and the United Nations Foundation.

- Assessing the role of uncultivated foods in Bangladesh and conserving agricultural diversity in India are just two projects under the IDRC's Sustainable Use of Biodiversity Program Initiative.

The Journey Continues...

Like the evolution of nature, the implementation of the *Convention on Biological Diversity* is a continuous journey. It is a journey that requires the support and involvement not only of governments, but also of individuals, conservation groups, Aboriginal communities, businesses and industries.

As part of their ongoing effort to put the *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy* into practice, the Government of Canada and the provinces and territories have agreed to collaborate on a number of cross-cutting priorities. These include biodiversity science, invasive alien species, biological information management, monitoring and reporting of biodiversity status and trends, and engaging Canadians in stewardship.

The journey will never truly end. As new challenges arise, new solutions will have to be found to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy a world rich in biodiversity.

For more information

For information and data related to global conservation and the sustainable use of our living world, visit the Canadian Biodiversity Information Network on the Internet at www.cbin.ec.gc.ca.