



MIND THE GAP: Falling short on conserving biodiversity in BC

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In late April 2019, Canada will be hosting an international gathering of environmental leaders from around the world to discuss progress towards our shared biodiversity protection goals for 2020. As part of these goals, Canada has agreed to protect 17% of our lands and inland waters by 2020 in a connected, representative, well-managed system of protected and conserved areas. In the lead up to these meetings, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society's BC Chapter (CPAWS-BC) has conducted a preliminary analysis of biodiversity conservation in BC and our progress towards these targets.

Using the most recent data from the BC government, CPAWS-BC's analysis indicates that currently, less than 16% of the province can be counted towards the 2020 biodiversity targets. The criteria used to determine this percentage are based on guidance from the international community on defining and categorizing protected areas and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), both of which will contribute to meeting the targets. Additional consideration draws upon recent draft guidelines on OECMs from the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA), an organization composed of representatives from provincial and territorial government agencies responsible for protected areas.

About 15.3% of BC is fully protected under legislated protected areas and other protective designations,

with less than 0.2% falling into the category of OECMs. Recognizing that there are also a number of protected area establishment processes underway in the province, these numbers represent only what is currently contributing to these targets.

Despite the amount of land currently under protective designations, the province continues to witness widespread declines in wildlife populations, which is a strong indication that the status quo is not good enough. Recent studies have found that over half of the world's wildlife populations have been lost in less than half a century. In BC, the story is no different - recently, we witnessed the local extinction of two entire herds of southern mountain caribou, and wildlife populations across the province are approaching the brink.

Given this, CPAWS-BC is emphasizing previous recommendations that the BC government focus on increasing protected areas coverage in the province as the primary means of meeting the 2020 biodiversity conservation targets. This must be done in a way that will protect critical habitat for species at risk, increase connectivity for wildlife movement, and capture important areas for changing climatic conditions.

It is evident that BC's current efforts to safeguard habitat and protect wildlife are not enough - we need to go beyond the status quo if we want to tell a different story about our wild places and the animals that depend on them.



BACKGROUND

In 2010, Canada committed under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to protect at least 17% of our land and inland waters by 2020, and to improve the quality of our protected area systems so they conserve nature more effectively. Since making this commitment, Canada has created the Pathway to Target I. Achieving this target is an important step towards the much larger-scale protection that is needed in the long-term to safeguard functioning ecosystems, healthy wildlife populations, and sustainable communities.

Canada Target I will be achieved through the creation and recognition of protected areas, Indigenous and protected and conserved areas (IPCAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). Protected areas include designations such as national and provincial parks, as well as National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries. Both IPCAs and OECMs are less-established designations in the Canadian legal and policy framework.

What are OECMs?

Other effective area-based measures (OECMs) are defined areas which are actively managed for a purpose other than conservation, yet promote biodiversity as a secondary or ancillary impact of the way it is managed.

Both international guidelines as well as recently drafted Canadian-specific criteria for determining whether areas can be considered OECMs make it clear that

these places must promote in-situ biodiversity conservation, with associated ecosystem services. Other criteria used in determining whether areas are considered OECMs include being geographically defined, actively managed over the long term, and effective at conserving biodiversity in-situ. Canadian standards emphasize the difference between current conservation efforts that can be reversed easily and an OECM that can sustain conservation outcomes over the long term.

To Canada's targets and beyond

In March 2018, Canada's Pathway to Target I National Advisory Panel released their recommendations for moving towards Canada's Biodiversity Targets. This report, Canada's Conservation Vision, recommended that our biodiversity targets "be achieved primarily through protected area networks and may play a greater role post-2020."

This was echoed by the One with Nature report from Canada's Federal, Provincial and Territorial Departments Responsible for Parks, Protected Areas, Conservation, Wildlife and Biodiversity. The top two priorities from this latest report were to expand federal, provincial and territorial protected and conserved areas, and to promote greater recognition and support for Indigenous rights, responsibilities and priorities in conservation. The report states that these government agencies "must continue to play a central role in creating new protected and conserved areas."



BC BY THE NUMBERS

15.3% contributed by legislated protected areas

0.14% contributed by OECMs

Designation	Contributes to Canada Target 1?	Notes
<p>Provincial Parks & Protected Areas Created under a number of different legislative acts, the BC provincial protected areas system is made up of over 1,000 individual protected areas, ranging from Class A provincial parks to Ecological Reserves and totalling over 14 million hectares.</p>	Yes	BC Parks and Protected Areas meet all of the criteria for contributing towards Canada's Pathway to Target 1. These areas represent the majority of BC's protected land base that will be counted towards our 2020 targets.
<p>National Parks National Parks and National Park Reserves are established using the Canada National Parks Act. These areas are established and managed to protect ecosystems and manage them for visitors to understand, appreciate, and enjoy in a way that doesn't compromise their integrity.</p>	Yes	Administered by Parks Canada, there are seven national parks and national park reserves in BC, contributing less than 1% to BC's protected land base.
<p>National Wildlife Areas & Migratory Bird Sanctuaries Administered by Environment and Climate Change Canada, National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries are legally designated to manage and protect wildlife, with a focus on migratory birds and their critical habitat.</p>	Yes	There are five National Wildlife Areas and seven Migratory Bird Sanctuaries in BC, which together contribute less than 1% to BC's protected land base.
<p>Private Conservation Lands Private conservation lands include properties designated as Fee Simple, Registered Interests, and Unregistered Interests. This includes owning the title to a parcel as well as conservation covenants, a voluntary and legally binding agreement.</p>	Requires further evaluation	The majority of privately owned conservation properties meet the criteria for counting towards either the protected areas or OECM component of the target; however, due to wide variety of management standards and conservation goals, these properties must be examined on a site-specific basis. Overall, private conservation lands account for less than 0.5% of BC's land base.

Designation	Contributes to Canada Target 1?	Notes
<p>Community Watersheds</p> <p>Community Watersheds exist on Crown land, reserve or treaty land, and privately held land. Crown land, accounting for two thirds of all community watersheds, is available for a variety of tenured and non-tenured land uses including forestry, mining and recreation.</p>	<p>Requires further evaluation</p>	<p>In some instances, community watersheds (such as Capilano and Seymour Watersheds) which have additional protections restricting access and activities would count towards the target as OECMs. The majority of community watersheds, however, allow activities that are incompatible with in-situ biodiversity conservation. Due to the range of activities which are permitted, most of these areas do not qualify as protected areas or as OECMs.</p>
<p>Wildlife Management Area</p> <p>Designated under section 4 of the Wildlife Act, this designation is created with the intent to maintain and manage fish and wildlife habitat. The activities permitted depend on the site-specific management objectives.</p>	<p>Requires further evaluation</p>	<p>Representing a small percentage of BC's land base, most Wildlife Management Areas meet the criteria for contributing to the target; however, not all WMAs prohibit all activities incompatible with biodiversity conservation.</p>
<p>Wildlife Habitat Area</p> <p>Wildlife Habitat Areas (WHAs) are created to meet habitat requirements of an Identified Wildlife element (i.e. specific species or habitat features). WHAs designate critical habitats and are managed to conserve them.</p>	<p>Requires further evaluation</p>	<p>While Wildlife Habitat Areas can contribute to overall conservation of biodiversity in BC, these designations are created on a single species basis and as such, do not meet the criteria for contributing to the targets.</p>
<p>Old Growth Management Areas</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>A recent review of OGMAs by the Forest Practices Board found that these areas are at risk of heavy fragmentation and overall reduction of old-growth due to replacement of areas with smaller or less productive forest. The Board also found that old growth orders generally lack sufficient details to effectively restrict harvesting or road construction. Additionally, logging within OGMAs has been reported, yet it is not actively regulated or managed, adding to the inability of these places to effectively protect biodiversity. Given these shortcomings, these areas are not included as contributing to the targets.</p>

Designation	Contributes to Canada Target 1?	Notes
Wildland Zones	No	The Wildland Zone designation was created through the provincial land-use planning process. They can be found in the Mackenzie and Sea to Sky Land and Resource Management Plans. Wildland Zones prohibit timber harvesting, but do not preclude commercial tourism or mining exploration for occurring. This threatens in-situ biodiversity conservation and does not count towards the target.
Ungulate Winter Range Ungulate Winter Range (UWR) is an area designated under the Forest Practices Code or Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA). These areas provide habitat necessary to meet the winter habitat requirements of ungulate species.	No	Ungulate Winter Range areas secure important habitat for ungulate species, but these designations are seasonal and not in effect year-round. Unless combined with other mechanisms which are in place year-round, UWRs do not count towards the target.

MOVING FORWARD

In BC, we are approaching the 2020 target, and yet species continue to be pushed out of their habitat at an alarming rate and in many can't sustain healthy population levels. By limiting ourselves to only getting to 17% of our lands protected or conserved, without thinking of the bigger picture in the long run, we are signing off on the continued decline of many of the species that we share these lands with.

Based on this analysis, CPAWS-BC's recommendation to the BC government is to urgently prioritize increasing protected areas coverage in the province, as we drive towards our 2020 biodiversity conservation targets.

Creating new protected areas in BC that secure wild-



life habitat and connectivity corridors is a crucial part of the plan to bring declining wildlife populations back from the brink. Given where the province currently sits with the state of our wildlife populations, we know that we need to do more than what we are already doing.

The opportunity presented by Canada's international biodiversity conservation goals for 2020 is driving progress in many places across the country towards safeguarding important wildlife habitat for declining species. It's time for BC to step up to the plate and set an example for the rest of the country, by going above and beyond the politically-negotiated targets and focusing on what nature really needs.