

**A planning Document for a**  
*Northwest Territories*  
*Biodiversity Action Plan*

*First steps*

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### Why do we need a Biodiversity Action Plan?

In November 1995, the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy was approved and ratified by Cabinet, and signed by then Minister of Renewable Resources, the Honorable Silas Arngna'naaq. Upon signing, NWT agreed to make every effort to implement the Strategy in its jurisdiction.

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**Biodiversity** means the diversity of life, which can be explained in terms of genes, species, and ecosystems.

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The implementation mechanism, as stated in the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy, involves:

- ❖ **Strengthening linkages** at the Ministerial level to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy.
  - ✓ These links are already being strengthened within Ministerial Councils. For example, the Minister of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development represents the Northwest Territories on the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council, the Canadian Council of Wildlife Ministers, and the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers. These councils meet to discuss issues that relate directly and indirectly to biodiversity.

- ❖ **Reporting on policies, programs, strategies and actions** that are underway or will be undertaken to implement the Strategy, and subsequently report publicly on progress in implementing the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy at a frequency to be determined.
  - ✓ The Biodiversity Action Plan being proposed in this document would meet that requirement and be a useful tool to earmark future implementation processes.
  
- ❖ **Developing mechanisms to provide opportunities for participation** of regional and urban governments, local and indigenous communities, interested individuals and groups, business interests, and the scientific community in implementing the Strategy.
  - ✓ The Biodiversity Action Plan we develop should provide that opportunity.
  
- ❖ Coordinating our participation to national initiatives in order to **help develop international positions** on biodiversity matters. Help in the development of national and international progress reports.
  - ✓ Governments, groups and residents of the Northwest Territories have been involved over the past five years in providing a northern perspective to challenges related to the Convention of Biological Diversity. These efforts could be tallied and described to form a summary of the experience gained so far by northerners at the international scene. The Action Plan can build from this experience.
  
- ❖ **Reporting periodically** to Canadians and the international community on the status of our biodiversity.
  - ✓ The Biodiversity Action Plan being proposed in this document would meet that requirement and be a useful tool as a benchmark to measure how we improved our reporting capabilities in the future.
  
- ❖ **Challenging and inviting all NWT residents to contribute** toward achieving the goals of the Strategy and take action to conserve biodiversity and to use biological resources in a sustainable manner.
  - ✓ The Biodiversity Action Plan we develop should provide that opportunity. The format we use to communicate our actions and initiatives may be interactive, inviting all agencies, governments, and northerners to exchange ideas and solutions related to issues on biodiversity.
  
- ❖ Exploring mechanisms to provide opportunities for **participation of indigenous communities** in implementing the Strategy through a variety of mechanisms such as resource management agreements, management boards, model forest programs and other means.
  - ✓ The Biodiversity Action Plan we develop should provide that opportunity.

## **What would be an effective Action Plan?**

Some of the present NWT legislation, programs, projects, and activities are already directly or indirectly related to the goals of the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy (Appendix 1). Other essential elements, however, are not met or partly met.

A Biodiversity Action Plan can be viewed as a working tool, and participating in its implementation is thus helping to make and improve that tool – to increase its efficiency.

Like any tool, the Action Plan would be updated in the future to reflect changes in needs, in challenges, and in expectations.

Biodiversity can be related to a very large array of resource activities. The management of renewable and non-renewable resources in the North is shared amongst several agencies and groups. In this context, co-operation is the norm. A single agency cannot give a good picture of the array of achievements related to biodiversity in the North. Accordingly, the Plan would refer to initiatives and actions performed by all agencies and groups responsible for renewable resource management in the NWT.

### ***What would the Plan look like?***

The NWT Biodiversity Action Plan is a tool and a response. The Plan would create two documents:

#### **Report on Achievements**

The first document would

- ❖ List our achievements, summarizing the findings of a searchable list of NWT-based activities and initiatives related to biodiversity issues in the NWT. The list would include activities, initiatives, studies and legislation that relate to biodiversity issues in the NWT and links to lead agencies.
- ❖ Create a tool to quickly find and compare what we have already accomplished to what may be the priorities over the next few years.

#### **Report on Future Actions**

The second document would

- ❖ Help focus on future priorities and on fill gaps in our efforts,
- ❖ Review implementation needs as stated in the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy and compare the current list with those in other areas, especially within Canada and with other northern countries;

As a tool, the usefulness of an action plan document is determined not only by its content, but also by its format. Consequently, the final format of the NWT Biodiversity Action Plan should be carefully planned.

The final format of the plan may be assessed and prepared as the plan progresses, but we can already point that the most important information in the Plan will likely be

- ❖ The actions (legislative and policy initiatives, programs, projects, activities), listed under appropriate strategies,
- ❖ The responsible bodies for each Action, and
- ❖ The time frame for completion of each Action.

To date, we have yet to tally our initiatives and actions that would be related to the biodiversity convention, and we have yet to report, in a systematic fashion, on our success and challenges regarding the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy in the NWT. An Action Plan would accomplish these tasks.

***NWT initiatives related to biodiversity***

A number of initiatives in the NWT are, by their nature, directly related to the issues of resource conservation and ecologically sustainable development:

- GNWT Economic Framework,
  - Protected Areas Strategy,
  - General Status of Wild Species in the NWT,
  - Cumulative Impact Assessment Framework,
  - Consultations on a new Wildlife Act and on Species at Risk Legislation,
  - Northern Ecosystem Initiative,
  - Northwest Territories Greenhouse Gas Strategy,
- among others.

These are related to some elements in the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy. Such initiatives are examples of actions that would be listed in a Biodiversity Action Plan in the NWT.

## First steps towards a Biodiversity Action Plan?

The initial work on the Plan could involve:

### **Phase 1 - Team building**

Creation of an open working group - including members of any agencies or groups currently performing activities directly related to biodiversity in the NWT and were interested in working on the plan.

### **Phase 2 - Drafting of NWT Achievements Report on Biodiversity**

Canadian Biodiversity Strategy lists a total of 157 specific strategies to help in the implementation of the different aspects of the UN Biological Diversity Convention. Some strategies may not be relevant from a northern perspective. Furthermore, it may be more efficient for us to merge some other strategies.

The **first step** would involve reviewing the list of strategies, then **selecting and organizing strategies** to reflect our needs and perspective (Appendix 2).

The **second step** would involve **listing activities and programs** under each strategy. Lists already exist that were created for other purposes: program reviews, questionnaires about monitoring initiatives, etc. The principles used to decide which types of activities are included in the plan would be based on the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy.

### **Phase 3 - Publication of NWT Achievements Report on Biodiversity**

This published report would provide a benchmark for comparing our progress in the future.

### **Phase 4 - Drafting of NWT Future Actions Report on Biodiversity**

A second report would be drafted to analyze gaps in our actions, address priorities, and propose future efforts. This report would set direction for the conservation of biodiversity in coordinated manner in the NWT. It would be a tool to engender cooperation and to establish a set of principles and deadlines to measure our successes.

## Appendix 1 - Convention of Biological Diversity and the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy

Almost all human actions and decisions can lead to changes to biodiversity and influence its conservation. In consequence, most political and social agreements related to biodiversity embrace a vast array of disciplines. The Convention of Biological Diversity and the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy are not exceptions:

### *Convention of Biological Diversity*

The UN Convention of Biological Diversity was ratified by over 100 countries since 1992 and is generally viewed as the highest-level umbrella for developing and re-assessing other agreements and strategies that aim at implementing resource conservation and ecologically sustainable development.

The **Convention has three main objectives:**

- 1) The **conservation** of biological diversity,
- 2) The **sustainable use** of its components, and
- 3) the fair and equitable **sharing of the benefits** that arise out of the use of genetic resources.

### *Biodiversity Strategies*

Lower-level strategies on biodiversity take into consideration sets of needs and concerns that are specific to individual countries (e.g., Canadian Biodiversity Strategy) or groups of countries sharing a particular context (e.g., Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy).

- Some strategies were developed in parallel to the UN Convention of Biological Diversity and are now being re-assessed to determine how they could be co-implemented with the UN Convention (e.g., International Co-operative Strategy for the Conservation of Biological Diversity in the Arctic Region, and the Canadian Forest Strategy).
- Other strategies cover specific areas related to biodiversity: Proposed National Accord and Framework on Endangered Species (National), Canadian Forest Strategy (National).

The Canadian Biodiversity Strategy is Canada's response to the UN Convention of Biological Diversity. It sets these goals and essential elements to our implementation efforts:

### **GOAL 1 - Active conservation and sustainability**

To **conserve** biodiversity and use biological resources in a **sustainable manner**

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The seven Essential elements of Goal 1 are:

- Maintaining of viable population of wild flora, fauna, and other organisms
- Protecting important areas
- Recovering species and restoring ecosystems
- Using biological resources in a sustainable manner
- Addressing the control of harmful alien organisms
- Addressing the causes and effects of atmospheric changes
- Addressing concerns about growing human population and settlement

### **GOAL 2 - Increase capabilities**

To improve our understanding of ecosystems and increase our **resource management capability**.

The three Essential Elements of Goal 2 are:

- Improving our ecological management capability in research, in traditional knowledge and in inventories at the landscape, species and genetic levels
- Increasing resource management capability in terms of data and information management, integrated planning, ecological management, environmental assessments, emergency planning, and training
- Increasing our capacity for long-term monitoring

### **GOAL 3 - Promote**

To **promote** an understanding of the need to conserve biodiversity and use biological resources in a sustainable manner.

### **GOAL 4 - Support with incentives and legislations**

To maintain or develop **incentives and legislation** that support the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of biological resources.

### **GOAL 5 - Work on international initiatives**

To **work with other countries** to conserve biodiversity, use biological resources in a sustainable manner and share equitably the benefits that arise from the utilization of genetic resources.

## Appendix 2 - The Northwest Territories Context

**Challenges** related to ecologically sustainable development and the protection of biological resources exist in the North that are unique in Canada.

- ❖ **The NWT economy is characterized by a duality.** Modern development involving monetary transactions, wage employment and often large-scale enterprises coexist with extensive traditional activities such as subsistence harvesting of biological resources involving no direct monetary transactions. The value of biological resources may thus be greatly underestimated if traditional use is not properly considered.
- ❖ **There is increasing pressures on northern ecosystems.** Increasing industrial activities throughout the World impacts on northern ecosystems. In addition, the NWT's human population is growing rapidly, and there is increasing non-renewable resource development and increasing commercial use of biological resources.
- ❖ **There are areas where land claims are outstanding.** In vast areas where a Land Claim Agreement is still unsettled, there exist further inefficiency in determining opportunities, and uncertainty in determining responsibilities and ownership. Settlement of Land Claims in many areas of NWT resulted, for example, in clarifying rules and responsibilities for resource development and in giving more control to the people.
- ❖ **There is minimal access to information and to support services in many areas of NWT.** Easily accessed data, information and services are important components of the implementation process. Advances in communication technologies may alleviate this problem in the near future, but sharing of information in a timely fashion in the North still represents a challenge.

On the other hand, major **opportunities** related to ecologically sustainable development and the protection of biological resources exist in the North that are also unique in Canada and in most of the World.

- ❖ **The NWT is vast and relatively pristine.** Habitat fragmentation is the loss and subdivision of portion of a given habitat and the corresponding increase in other habitats in the landscape. It is one of the most important contributors to the loss of biological diversity in temperate regions. Fragmentation is scale dependent and cumulative. In the NWT, opportunities exist to gather basic information on wildlife species and ecosystems that are relatively unfragmented and undisturbed, and to alleviate early the effects of fragmentation at a wide range of spatial scales.
- ❖ **The NWT harbor people with complementing knowledge perspectives.** Our understanding of the complexities of ecosystem dynamics and of how to best preserve their integrity requires that we pursue studies from many perspectives. Integrating scientific and traditional ecological knowledge is recognized as a potentially significant contributor to that understanding.

This description of the NWT context is based on points made in the Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development's Business Plan published in 1996.

### ***Proposed Guiding Principles***

(Based on the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy 1995)

- ❖ Biodiversity has ecological, economic, social, cultural and **intrinsic values**.
- ❖ All life forms, including humans, are **ultimately connected** to all other life forms.
- ❖ All NWT residents depend on biodiversity and have a **responsibility** to contribute to biodiversity conservation and to use biological resources in a sustainable manner.
- ❖ All NWT residents should be encouraged to understand and appreciate the value of biological diversity and to **participate** in decisions involving the use of our air, water, land and other resources.
- ❖ An **ecological approach** to resource management is central to conserving biological diversity and using our biological resources in a sustainable manner.
- ❖ **Development** decisions must reflect ecological, economic, social and cultural values.
- ❖ **Healthy, evolving ecosystems** and the maintenance of natural processes are prerequisites for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of biological resources.
- ❖ **Off-site measures** may be required to support the conservation of some species and populations and are essential to ensuring the sustainable use of many northern resources.
- ❖ The knowledge, innovations and practices of **indigenous** and local communities should be respected, and their use and maintenance carried out with the support and involvement of these communities.
- ❖ The conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources should be carried out using the **best knowledge available** and approaches refined as new knowledge is gained.
- ❖ The conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of biological resources require local, regional, provincial, territorial, national and global **cooperation** and a sharing of knowledge, costs and benefits.