

The Role of Canada's Biosphere Reserves within the Pathway to Canada Target 1

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Context

The Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association (CBRA) has been funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) to lead a project that assists with the identification, recognition, and reporting of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) within and in proximity to Canadian biosphere reserves (BRs). Since hiring a Project Manager in January of 2018, CBRA has produced two reports with key background information and preliminary findings, including a summary of a National Briefing Meeting which took place in Ottawa in February of 2018. The March 2018 report entitled *Assessing Biosphere Reserves for Qualification as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs): A preliminary analysis* is available on CBRA's website (biospherencanada.ca) and provides an overview of work to date.

CBRA has been working closely with members from the Pathway to Canada Target 1's various networks, including Nadine Crookes, Co-Chair of the National Steering Committee (NSC), Danika Littlechild and Eli Enns, Co-Chairs of the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE), Larry McDermott, an Algonquin Elder associated with the National Advisory Panel (NAP), and Chloe Dragon Smith, member of the NAP.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves and OECMs

A UNESCO biosphere reserve (BR) designation signals international recognition that meaningful actions, with measurable outcomes, are being taken to balance conservation initiatives with sustainable development. While BRs do not typically own land, they remain at the leading edge of biodiversity conservation by convening local partners, facilitating regional collaboration and dialogue, and bringing diverse worldviews, approaches, and practices to the table. Geographically dispersed and culturally diverse, Canada's 18 UNESCO BRs are ideal places for piloting projects of national significance.

BRs were originally designed to highlight regions around the world where communities are living in a sustainable balance with ecosystems. If Canadian BRs received legislative tools and adequate resources to achieve their objectives and were governed in a way that included all peoples, communities, and stakeholders who have rights and responsibilities within the region, they would inevitably be considered effective conservation measures beyond the hard lines of their core protected areas.

Looking beyond the core zones of BRs, which are already legislated as protected areas (see Figure 1), there are opportunities for BRs to work with communities to identify, recognize, and report OECMs that fall within the buffer and transition zones.

Findings of CBRA's study to date indicate that many OECMs that have been identified within the boundaries of BRs are already accounted for by other organizations such as The Nature Trust, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited and others. Furthermore, it has come to light that OECMs which are located on Indigenous lands are also likely to qualify as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), such as, for example, Tsá Tué BR.

A Significant Role for BRs within the Pathway to Canada Target 1

Preliminary findings, including conversations amongst BRs and CBRA's Indigenous Circle, as well as comments from ECCC and Parks Canada staff and members of ICE and NAP, indicate that Canada's BRs have a significant role to play in meeting Canada Target 1/Aichi Target 11. Moving forward, BRs can be seen as:

1. **Catalysts for OECMs and IPCAs:** BRs can catalyse the conversation at the community level about OECMs and IPCAs, similarly to how they grew regional support for the BR designation. CBRA is collaborating with ICE to determine how best to support communities within and in proximity to BRs who may have overlapping OECMs and IPCAs. One example already discussed includes CBRA and ICE working together to develop a communications toolkit that has online interactive and printable components. The material will serve multiple target audiences and communities who need more information about OECMs and IPCAs and how to develop them. BRs will also ensure that they are aware of existing conversations happening regionally about OECM identification, recognition, and reporting.
2. **Community Pilots for International and National Goals and Targets:** BRs worldwide have a wealth of experience in building local support and collaborative partnerships that result in specific outcomes around biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and reconciliation. BRs also have an important role to play in communicating the importance of conservation to local and regional partners. CBRA's OECM project will demonstrate that providing financial capacity to Canada's BR network yields meaningful results and exponential benefits to all involved. BRs translate big ideas stemming from international agreements and bring relevance to them within communities across Canada.
3. **OECM Facilitators:** In CBRA's preliminary assessment of OECMs in BRs (report available at biospherecanada.ca), several examples of potential OECMs fell into the following two categories:
 - a. Almost OECMs: With appropriate funding, individual BRs could help mitigate the criteria that are either missing or lacking in qualifying as an OECM, e.g. working with landowners to develop a governance model or put a long-term management plan in place.
 - b. Landowner unaware of Biodiversity Targets: BRs could engage the partner through a presentation or meeting to identify the potential OECM and the requirements to record it, e.g. municipal council, private company, or group of landowners.

Challenges for Recognizing and Reporting OECMs in Canadian BRs

1. **Capacity:** For BRs to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with Indigenous Peoples, play an educational role at the community level, complete the required work to qualify as an OECM, and ensure the long-term effectiveness of reported OECMs, long-term funding is required for both the individual BRs and CBRA as the national level coordinating body.
2. **National Discussions:** As a national network with a role to play in recognizing and reporting OECMs and IPCAs, CBRA should be invited to the national level discussions about conservation.
3. **Process and Timeline:** While the OECM reporting timeline is open-ended, Canada is under pressure to meet Target 1 by 2020. New conservation tools take time to develop, such as fostering relationships with partners, arranging governance, managing conservation, and making time to decipher and respect linguistic and cultural differences that may arise.
4. **Unfinished Canadian Definition:** The Canadian definition of an OECM is still under negotiation and won't be finalized until sometime in 2018.

Moving Forward

Based on what has been learned so far in the OECM project research and meetings, CBRA has identified the following key next steps, funding dependent:

- Convene local meetings to help disseminate information about the Pathway to Canada Target 1 within BRs across Canada and stimulate regional action and ownership of the process;
- Meet annually with CBRA's 20-person Indigenous Circle to deepen our understanding about protocols and meaningful collaboration with Indigenous Peoples across all 18 BRs. (Read CBRA's Indigenous Circle Statement "[Making a Promise](#)" here);
- Engage in international, national, and regional conversations to promote and convey the ways in which BRs can contribute to the Pathway to Canada Target 1 commitments;
- Co-develop a bilingual communications toolkit on OECMs and IPCAs with the Pathway's ICE, and workshop it within all 18 BRs;
- Connect with local partners to identify organizations and agencies that are working on recognizing and reporting OECMs within each BR, and find ways to collaborate;
- Engage with provincial governments to inform them of CBRA's work on OECMs, as provinces are currently those responsible for reporting OECMs to ECCC;
- Identify other Canada biodiversity/Aichi targets that BRs contribute to, and consider other projects that could be of relevance to ECCC;
- Support CBRA project management and coordination and strengthen its capacity to support its membership.

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Appendices: Maps and Figures



