



OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES (OECM)

COMMON QUESTIONS
AND ANSWERS

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BACKGROUND

With our vast and varied landscapes, Canada is home to stunning natural beauty and some of the richest, natural resources in the world. Because of this, Canada also has a large responsibility for conserving biodiversity.

Expanding protected and conserved areas around the world is one of the most important actions that countries can take to curb the ongoing loss of nature. We need to ensure that Canadians and all people around the world have access to food and abundant, clean water. Conserving nature also helps us in our efforts to address climate change, as well as helping to prevent future pandemics.

Despite efforts to date, even in Canada, there are signs of decline in the health and abundance of key species and the places they call home. Although Canada's network of protected and conserved areas has been increasing in size and quality in recent years, we need to make greater efforts to halt and reverse the loss of nature in Canada. Partnership will be key in continuing to expand this network.

In addition to establishing protected areas, we are making efforts across the country to recognize the conservation efforts already in place and underway – from grassroots to governments. In the Canadian context, we need approaches to conservation that look beyond conventional protection strategies, such as parks and other protected areas, and seek to recognize and encourage good land management practices that are resulting in the conservation of biodiversity, regardless of their primary purpose.

Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are not protected areas. OECMs are complimentary to protected areas and result in the effective, *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity

DID YOU KNOW?

Canada is home to the world's longest coastline, 28% of the world's boreal forest, 25% of the world's temperate forests and 25% of the world's wetlands, along with two million lakes and the third largest area of glaciers on the planet.



through management, regardless of the reason why that management is in place. In other words, these areas achieve the conservation of biodiversity, even if conservation is not the specific intention of management. OECMs currently exist on the landscape across our country, though many are not yet recognized. Recognition of these existing OECMs helps bring to light good conservation work across a variety of land tenures.

OECMs and their recognition is part of the many efforts underway across our country to understand, celebrate and expand the places that are currently conserving nature for generations to come. These areas contribute to local government, provincial, territorial, national and international targets including the Government of Canada's commitment to Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) – the protection of 30% of land and freshwater (and coastal and marine areas) by 2030.

This document aims to address specific questions and misconceptions that commonly arise related to OECMs in the terrestrial and inland-water environments¹.

Technical details on OECMs can be found in the [Decision Support Tool](#), a guide developed to support governments and landowners in deciding whether an area meets the Canadian criteria as a protected area or an OECM. The [Pathway to Canada Target 1 accounting webpage](#) contains additional information.

¹ This document was developed by Environment and Climate Change Canada on behalf of the Pathway to Canada Target 1 initiative and has been informed by discussions with provincial officials and experts in the field.

What are Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (also known as OECMs)?

1. WHAT IS AN OECM?

An Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure (OECM), is an area of land or water with clearly defined boundaries, which is managed in a way that results in the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. This is true even if the management that is creating these positive outcomes is not in place for the specific purpose of conservation.

The official definition of OECM in Canada is: *“a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values”*².



2. WHERE DID THE TERM “OECM” COME FROM?

In 2010 a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, including 20 global targets (Aichi Targets), was adopted internationally.

In 2015, in response to international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, federal, provincial and territorial governments developed 19 biodiversity targets for Canada. The first target – Target 1 (based on Aichi Target 11), is *“By 2020, at least 17% of terrestrial areas and inland water, and 10% of marine areas, are conserved through networks of Protected Areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.”*

In November 2018, Parties to the CBD (including Canada), negotiated and adopted a definition of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECM) (see question 1).

In February 2019, Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments agreed to use the international definition of OECM in the Canadian context through the *One with Nature* report.

In October 2019, pan-Canadian³ criteria, standards, and guiding principles for OECM were agreed upon and published in the Pathway to Target 1 – Decision Support Tool (see question 10).

² This definition aligns with the international OECM definition agreed upon by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It was agreed to by Canada’s Federal Provincial and Territorial Departments Responsible for Parks, Protected Areas, Conservation, Wildlife and Biodiversity (*One with Nature*, 2019).

³ Québec does not participate in the Pathway to Canada Target 1 initiative, but it contributes to the pan-Canadian effort by achieving an identical target for the creation of protected areas on its territory and its inland water.

3. WHY ARE OECMS IMPORTANT IN CANADA?

Canada and other member countries to the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity committed to conserve 30% of lands and waters by the year 2030 using protected areas and OECMs. This is an ambitious target and action towards achieving this target will support nature and help mitigate and adapt to climate change.

With the growing awareness and understanding of the need to conserve biodiversity in Canada and around the world, there is a better appreciation for the need to find alignment between creating conservation outcomes and the many ways in which we interact with the land. OECMs are one way to do this.

4. WHY EVALUATE LANDS AND WATERS TO IDENTIFY OECM AND INCLUDE THEM AS PART OF CANADA'S PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS NETWORK?

In the past, the majority of areas officially reported as part of Canada's protected areas network were federal, provincial and territorial government protected areas. This undercounted and undervalued Indigenous, local, industry, and private conservation efforts – efforts that make an important contribution to conserving Canada's biodiversity.

This has started to change with the introduction of the term OECM in the area-based conservation target (Aichi Target 11) of the 2020 global biodiversity framework. Work is underway across the country to identify areas that are already, or have the potential to, conserve biodiversity – whether these areas are government or non-government owned.

Evaluating areas to determine if they meet the criteria as an OECM is important in supporting consistency

in what we report as being an 'OECM' and for fully accounting for existing efforts. Evaluating potential OECMs not only helps to understand which areas and management practices result in the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity across the country, but it can also support identifying how sites can be improved to do so if desired.

5. IS AN OECM THE SAME AS A PROTECTED AREA?

No. By definition, Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are not protected areas. They are sites that deliver the effective, *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. While protected areas have a primary purpose of protecting biodiversity, OECMs generally do not. OECMs typically exist for purposes other than conservation, but are recognized as OECMs because they deliver the effective, *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. For this reason, they are an important complement to protected areas.

6. ARE THERE OECMS IN CANADA RIGHT NOW?

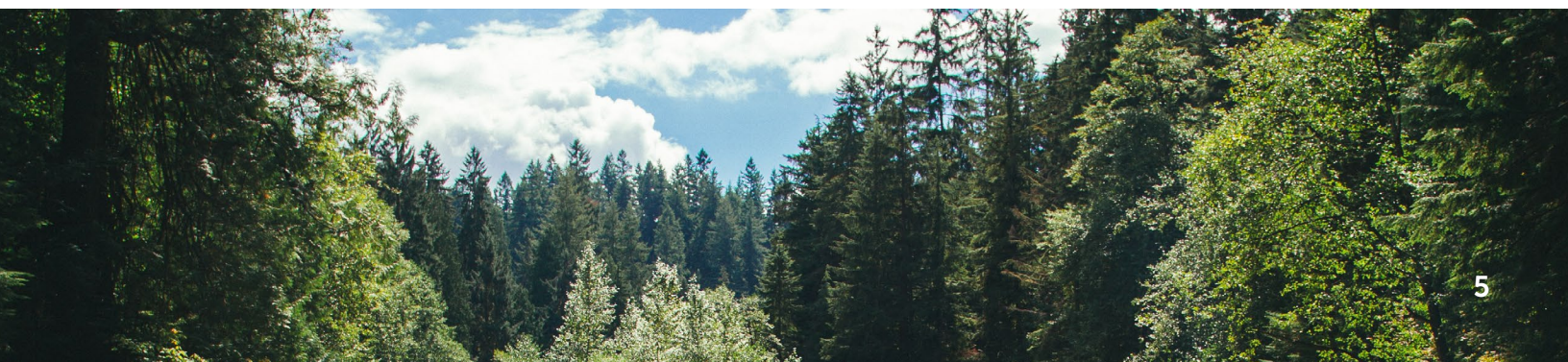
Canada first recognized OECMs in 2016 and both the number and variety of OECMs recognized across the country continues to grow.

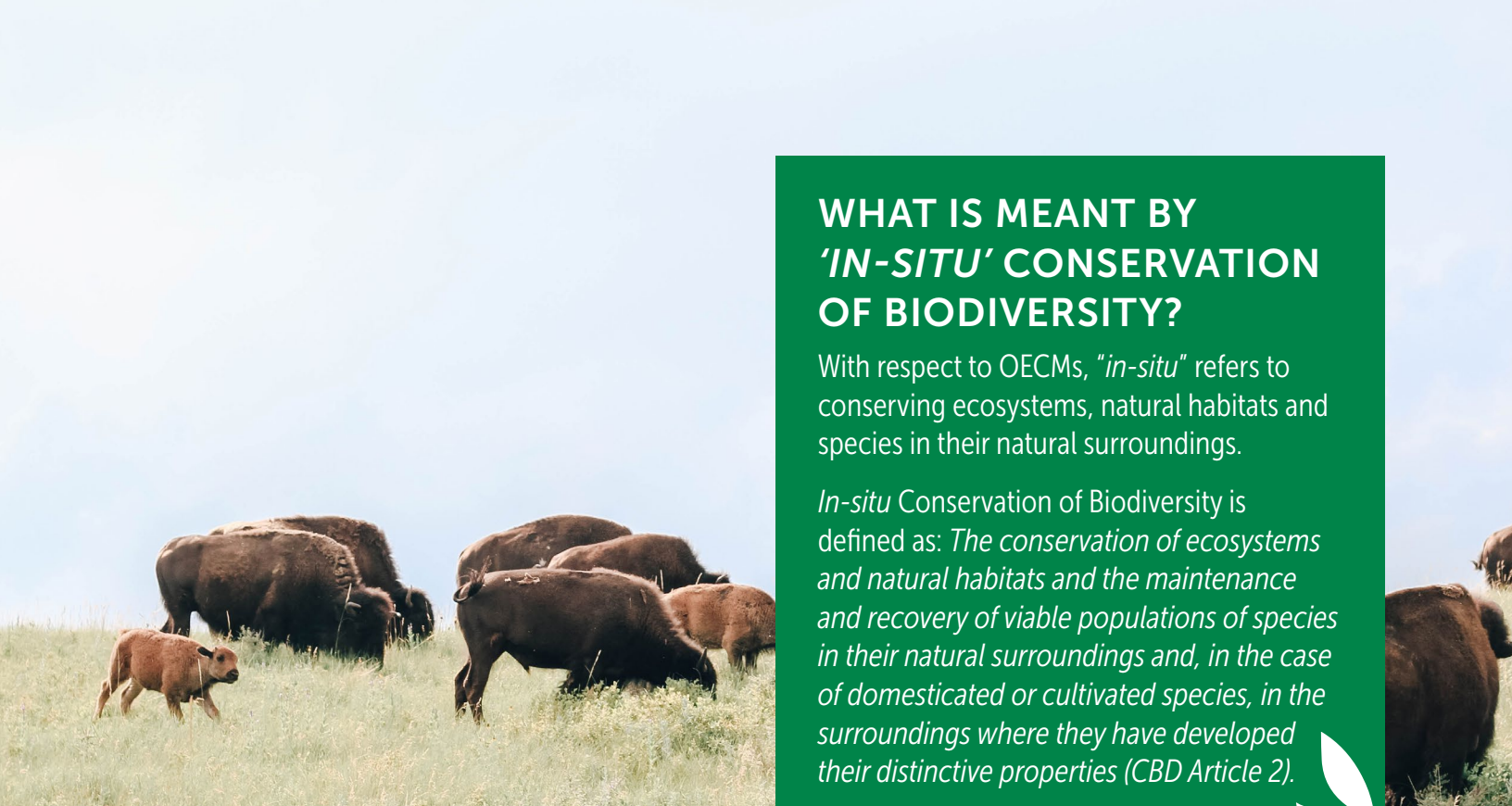
Some of the OECMs recognized as part of Canada's protected and conserved areas network are military training areas, drinking water supply areas, forestry research sites, conservation zones in land use plans, municipally owned forests, and areas of cultural significance.

You can find the latest data on what Canada recognizes as protected and conserved in the

Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database ⁴.

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/national-wildlife-areas/protected-conserved-areas-database.html>





WHAT IS MEANT BY 'IN-SITU' CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY?

With respect to OECMs, "*in-situ*" refers to conserving ecosystems, natural habitats and species in their natural surroundings.

In-situ Conservation of Biodiversity is defined as: *The conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties (CBD Article 2).*



7. IS OECM A LEGAL DESIGNATION?

No. There is no legislation or regulations specific to Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in Canada. Rather, any mechanism or combination of mechanisms that restrict or control activities that are likely to negatively impact biodiversity may be sufficient for an area to be an OECM. This could include a variety of legislation/ legal designations, regulations, policy, management plans, etc.

If a site meets the criteria as an OECM (see question 10), it can be recognized as part of Canada's protected and conserved areas network and included in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database. Existing OECMs may be recognized based on mechanisms and management practices that are already in place. For example, legislation to protect a city's drinking water supply, municipal zoning bylaws, conservation easements with a land trust, etc.

8. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "RECOGNIZE" AN OECM?

Recognition of an OECM means including it in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database – the national data repository used for reporting nationally and internationally on Canada's protected and conserved areas network.

Inclusion in this database means that a site is officially considered part of the national network of areas that are achieving *in-situ* biodiversity conservation across Canada.

9. CAN OECMS EXIST ON BOTH PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LANDS AND INLAND WATERS?

Yes, OECMs can exist on both public and private lands and inland waters. Examples of OECMs on public lands currently recognized in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Area Database include areas that are part of provincial forests, academic research forests and conservation zones identified within land use plans developed and managed by Indigenous governments. Examples of OECMs on private lands might include University-owned lands, ranch lands, and private lands held by religious institutions.





Process and requirements for evaluating and reporting an OECM

10. WHAT CRITERIA IS USED TO DETERMINE IF AN AREA CAN BE RECOGNIZED AS AN OECM?

Sites are evaluated against a set of criteria derived from the pan-Canadian definition of Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM)⁵. In short, these criteria indicate that an OECM must have clearly defined boundaries and a management regime that effectively protects *in-situ* biodiversity over the long term.

A standardized evaluation tool, called the pan-Canadian Protected Area/OECM Decision Support Tool⁶, has been developed to help determine if the site meets the criteria pertaining to OECMs.

The Decision Support Tool⁷ outlines the eligibility criteria for an area to be recognized as an OECM. A property should meet all criterion in order to qualify for recognition. These are summarized and simplified below:

CRITERIA	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
GEOGRAPHICAL SPACE	The area is clearly defined (i.e., it is a spatially explicit area having boundaries which are agreed upon, static and effectively demarcated).
EFFECTIVE MEANS	Governance mechanisms or management systems are in place and compel the landowner to restrict any activities likely to occur that are incompatible with or that could impact the conservation of biodiversity in the area.
LONG TERM	The intention is that the OECM is permanent and that the governance mechanism cannot be easily reversed or circumvented (See question 17 for details).
TIMING	The <i>in-situ</i> conservation of biodiversity is achieved year-round.
OBJECTIVES	Objectives of the area result in the <i>in-situ</i> conservation of biodiversity. While the area may be managed for other purposes or values, management objectives must exist and must not conflict with the <i>in-situ</i> conservation of biodiversity. Ensuring a site is left untouched can be an effective management objective for some properties.
GOVERNING AUTHORITIES	Any and all relevant organizations, agencies, owners, and rights-holders are committed to a management strategy that results in the conservation of biodiversity within the area. No governing authorities jeopardise biodiversity values of the area.
BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION OUTCOMES	The area has biodiversity values, which are effectively conserved.

⁵ Definition of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures as described in the *One with Nature* report.

⁶ Download the Decision Support Tool via <http://twk.pm/baglz3zqmx>

⁷ Provinces and territories (such as Québec) are beginning to introduce legislation aimed at supporting the recognition of Conserved Areas in Canada.



11. WHO CAN EVALUATE A SITE?

Anyone may evaluate land and in-land water sites using the publicly available Decision Support Tool. Best practice is to verify the relevant landowner's interest in doing so before starting an evaluation.

Landowners may be approached by the federal, provincial, or territorial governments or other interested parties to see if they are open to having their lands evaluated and recognized as part of Canada's protected and conserved areas network. Landowners may also request that the federal, provincial, or territorial government evaluate their land and recognize the good management in place that is already resulting in the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. This can also help the landowner in understanding what could be done to better support the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity so their land could be recognized as an OECM should the land owner decide to make changes to address any gaps identified.

12. WHAT TYPE OF LANDS OR INLAND WATERS CAN BE CONSIDERED FOR EVALUATION?

Any land or inland water area managed in ways that effectively conserves biodiversity as a whole for the long term can be evaluated.

Such areas could include, but are not limited to, local government parklands, drinking water supply areas, university owned research stations, conservation authority lands, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), Indigenous owned land, permanent set-asides within managed forests, ranch lands that maintain native grassland ecosystems, or privately owned OECMs.

13. CAN OECM BOUNDARIES SHIFT OVER TIME?

No. OECMs are recognized based on specific geographic or legal boundaries and these boundaries must be static.

For sites already recognized as an OECM, if land management practices change unexpectedly such that conservation of biodiversity is compromised, then recognition of the area can be withdrawn and the site removed from the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database.

14. WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES ARE COMPATIBLE OR INCOMPATIBLE WITH AN OECM?

There is no single or definitive list of activities that are compatible or incompatible with an OECM. Whether an activity is compatible or incompatible can be determined by whether or not it supports or undermines the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity.

As part of the evaluation process to determine if a site is an OECM, activities are considered based on the *impacts* they have on biodiversity in the area, the extent and likelihood of those impacts occurring, and whether decision-makers have the capacity and willingness to manage those impacts over time.

- Compatible activities are activities that do not compromise the *in-situ* conservation regardless of their scale, intensity, or extent of impact.
- Potentially compatible activities are activities that, if managed effectively (e.g., limited in scale, intensity, or extent), would not compromise *in-situ* conservation.
- Incompatible activities are those that have effects that prevent or impair the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity or compromise the area's objectives.

It may sometimes be appropriate to evaluate different zones within an area separately. For example where incompatible activities or infrastructure occur in parts but not all of a given area. This may result in portions of a broader area qualifying as an OECM.

Any person conducting an evaluation can propose a site as an OECM based on their assessment using the pan-Canadian Decision Support Tool. This includes their assessment of activities they deem likely to occur that may or may not be compatible with the conservation of biodiversity.

Monitoring may be needed in order for a site to qualify as an OECM in cases where there is uncertainty around an activity's potentially negative impact on a site's biodiversity (see question 22).

The Decision Support Tool (DST) provides additional guidance that may be helpful for landowners or interested parties considering OECMs (see question 10).



15. HOW ARE ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES CONSIDERED WHEN RECOGNIZING OECMs?

Economic activities are considered in the same way all activities are – whether an activity is compatible or incompatible can be determined by whether or not it supports or undermines *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity.

Environmentally damaging industrial activities and infrastructure should be excluded from OECMs. However, the existence of subsurface rights held by a third party, is not, in and of itself, reason to rule an area out from further screening as a potential OECM. As with any other activity, effective means must exist such that there are no significant impacts on *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity.

Some economic activities are known to be beneficial to the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity when practiced in a sustainable way – cattle grazing in native prairie grasslands are a great example of this.

When evaluating a site to determine if it is an OECM, the key is to identify evidence to demonstrate that activities likely to occur will not compromise the *in-situ* conservation of biodiversity. In other words, whether or not there are *effective means* to manage these activities – and that effective conservation outcomes can and will be delivered by the area (see more in question 18).

Sites intended for ecological restoration can be recognized as OECMs once they meet the criteria (see question 10).

16. IS THERE A MINIMUM SIZE FOR AN OECSM?

There is no set minimum size for OECSMs. So long as there is evidence that the management practices in place provide positive, long-term benefits to biodiversity *in-situ* and the site meets all criteria (see question 10), the area may be recognized as an OECSM. OECSMs are complementary to protected areas and together they form networks that support the long-term survival of biodiversity. No single protected area or OECSM will respond to all needs for all species or ecosystems at all scales, yet this may be accomplished by a broader network of areas.

In some cases, small sites can contain rare and valuable ecosystems. They may also be important to maintaining key ecosystem services or connecting multiple areas together. A site assessment using traditional knowledge, Indigenous Science, and/or western science can help to outline the ecological value of a site.

Ecological values determine size requirements. A site or complex of sites may need to be a certain size in order to be effective in conserving the biodiversity found within.

17. WHAT IS MEANT BY LONG-TERM? HOW LONG DO OECSMS NEED TO BE IN PLACE TO BE RECOGNIZED?

While there can never be an absolute guarantee that any area will be conserved in perpetuity, the *intention* must be that OECSMs are permanently conserved and that the mechanisms creating conservation outcomes cannot be easily reversed or changed.

It is understood that there are instances where non-governmental entities, including private entities, may lack mechanisms for conservation in perpetuity; nevertheless, OECSMs — like protected areas — should have clear provisions to distinguish them from areas that are either clearly intended to be temporary in nature, or for which there is no evident commitment to the long-term.

Often, the mechanism will clearly express an intention of permanence and contain safeguards that make reversal or modification difficult (e.g., requirement for a legislative process with public involvement; conservation easements with 999-year timeframe; measures that survive changes in policy direction or land tenure). If permanence is not a stated intent upheld by all relevant governing authorities, there should be a well-rationalized expectation that the area will continue to be conserved indefinitely.

An example of intention is in areas where strong governance mechanisms or management systems are in place where the mechanism automatically renews after the relevant time period.

Another example are conservation zones identified in land use plans developed by Indigenous governments where there is a clearly expressed intent to conserve the area permanently and where multiple orders of government have approved the plan (and would therefore all need to approve changes to its status).





SECTION 3



Landowner implications of evaluating and reporting OECMs

18. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO LANDOWNERS OF EVALUATING AND RECOGNIZING OECMS IN THE CANADIAN PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS DATABASE?

There are currently no fiscal or regulatory advantages for lands being recognized as OECMs. However, OECM recognition highlights biodiversity – positive efforts and encourages greater collective action to conserve nature for all. By recognizing a site as an OECM you help celebrate conservation leadership by a wide range of actors and encourage others to take similar action.

OECM recognition can also create positive social licence for landowners or tenure holders managing these sites.

In some cases, governments and/or third-party conservation organizations may also provide financial incentives for participation in certain conservation actions on sites that could qualify as OECMs.

19. DOES OECM RECOGNITION PLACE ANY NEW OR SPECIAL RESTRICTIONS ON HOW LANDOWNERS MANAGE THEIR PROPERTIES?

No. Recognition as an OECM does not result in any additional policy or regulatory restrictions for the property (see question 7). However, to be recognized, the Canadian criteria must be met, including that management regimes ensure that conservation outcomes will continue for the long-term (see question 17).

20. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR LANDOWNERS IF LANDS ARE EVALUATED BUT DO NOT MEET THE CANADIAN CRITERIA?

As part of the evaluation process to determine whether a site qualifies as an OECM, some gaps may be identified that would need to be addressed in order to fulfill the criteria. In those cases, landowners may decide to adjust their practices or add additional mechanism if they want to continue to seek recognition. This is a voluntary decision taken by the landowner – not one that is imposed. If gaps are identified and are not addressed the area will not be recognized as an OECM.

Types of gaps will vary from property to property and may require the development of additional site policy, written agreements, or a change in management practices. This gap identification can also assist land owners in identifying ways that their properties can create better, long-term conservation of biodiversity.

21. WOULD RECOGNITION IMPACT OR PLACE RESTRICTIONS ON WHAT ADJACENT LANDOWNERS CAN DO ON THEIR PROPERTY?

No, the evaluation and potential resulting recognition apply only to the specific site in question.

22. DOES RECOGNIZING AN OECM CREATE REQUIREMENTS FOR ONGOING MONITORING?

No, having a site recognized as an OECM does not commit the landowner to meeting any specific monitoring requirements.

In some cases however, monitoring may be needed in order for an area to be recognized as an OECM to begin with. For example in cases where there is uncertainty around site activities and their potential negative impact on the site's biodiversity. If this is the case in large, remote areas, satellite imagery may be sufficient.

When monitoring data is not available, other information is used in the evaluation process and conservation outcomes can often be inferred from other sources such as species abundance information (e.g., surveys or harvesting reports), discussions with site managers and knowledge holders, or management effectiveness assessments. The value of monitoring an OECM is in gaining confidence that an area is indeed resulting in the conservation of biodiversity. Certain management practices are well studied and, if implemented in a particular landscape, are known to support the in-situ conservation of biodiversity.

23. WHAT SITE-SPECIFIC INFORMATION IS USED TO DETERMINE AN AREA MEETS THE CRITERIA AS AN OECM?

- The location and boundaries of the site;
- Resource and land management plans;
- Information regarding the governing authorities and landowner;
- Activities occurring and expected to occur on the site;
- The existing relevant legislation, regulations, bylaws, policy or conservation instruments that apply to the site;
- The ecological condition of the site.

24. HOW IS PERSONAL INFORMATION OR INFORMATION ABOUT THE SITE SHARED?

Recognized OECMs are included in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database. This database is published online and data are downloadable as well as visible on an [interactive map](#). Information that is made public by necessity includes the boundary of the site (spatial data), as well as details including the site name, date of protection, and managing organization.

Private areas may be noted simply as "private" rather than providing the name of a landowner/tenure holder. A managing authority will still need to be specified in this case.

Personal information will not be shared publicly without consent from the landowner/tenure holder.



Related Resources

Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database

contains spatial data for all of Canada's protected areas and OECMs. It is used to track Canada's progress towards biodiversity targets and to track the quality of the network. CPCAD can be found at:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/national-wildlife-areas/protected-conserved-areas-database.html>

Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCA):

to learn more about IPCA, see

<https://www.conservation2020canada.ca/ipcas>

Decision Support Tool

and related resources can be found at:

<https://www.conservation2020canada.ca/accounting>

