

CONSERVING, PROTECTING, AND RESTORING ECOSYSTEMS

Integrated planning and management of landscapes and seascapes contributes to the protection, conservation, and restoration of ecosystems. There is now movement to undertake land use planning that examines all land uses in an integrated manner within the context of ecosystems. For example, the British Columbia Growth Strategies Act challenges local governments to develop and implement regional growth strategies to promote human settlement that is socially, economically, and environmentally healthy and that makes efficient use of public facilities and services.

Environmental assessment, a key feature in development planning in Canada, has advanced beyond consideration of impacts on individual species and environmental issues to examination of the cumulative effects of human activities on ecosystems. This includes assessing and reviewing projects to ensure that long-term land use objectives are met on a larger regional planning basis. One example is the Canada-Alberta Agreement for Environmental Cooperation (1999), which provides for an integrated review of projects on Alberta lands when an assessment is required under both federal and Alberta laws.

Federal departments and agencies are required to address potential environmental considerations of proposed policies, plans, and programs by conducting strategic environmental assessments. Through these assessments, environmental considerations can be given attention at the earliest appropriate stage of planning, as are economic and social considerations. The National Capital Commission, in Ottawa, Ontario, for example, undertakes strategic environmental assessments at the land use planning stage, before project environmental assessments are initiated. These strategic assessments provide environmental objectives that aid in the assessment of alternative land use concepts, policies, and implementation strategies. They also provide an understanding of the potential cumulative effects of individual projects by considering their environmental effects in the context of other initiatives contained in a plan.

In all jurisdictions, more work is required to understand more fully the impact of land use practices on ecosystems and to improve land use planning to better recognize the capability and limitations of ecosystems.

Protected Areas Strategy for Yukon

In 1998, Yukon released Wild Spaces — Protected Places: A Protected Areas Strategy for the Yukon. The strategy, prepared through extensive public consultation, was endorsed by the governments of Yukon, Canada, and First Nations. The primary commitment of the strategy is representative protection of each of Yukon's 23 ecoregions.

Biosphere Reserves

Designated by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization through its Man and the Biosphere Program, a biosphere reserve is an identified geographic area where communities work toward the conservation of ecosystems, sustainable use of natural resources, and research, education, and monitoring related to ecosystems. The eight Canadian biosphere reserves include protected areas. Redberry Lake in Saskatchewan and Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia are Canada's most recent reserves. Redberry Lake and its drainage areas provide habitat for nine endangered, threatened, or rare bird species, as well as for more than 180 other species. Clayoquot Sound encompasses a vast range of ecosystems. Core areas of the reserve include the Long Beach Unit of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and over 95 000 hectares of provincial park.