

National Leadership and Regional Management of the Ecological Reserves Project

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Introduction

As a signatory to the 1992 Caracas Declaration on Parks, Protected Areas and the Human Future, Canada is required to contribute to a global network of protected areas, representative of the nation's diversity of ecosystems. In its Report to Parliament, Forestry Canada has undertaken to "ensure the preservation of representative areas of each forest ecosystem in Canada" (Forestry Canada 1993).

The Department's commitment is made primarily through the Green Plan project, Ecological Reserves. The project is national in scope, with activity in most establishments. Leadership is provided from the Pacific Forestry Centre, with Dr. T.J. Drew as Lead Regional Director General and D.F.W. Pollard as the designated Team Leader. The project is modestly funded (\$80 000-\$100 000 per annum, 1992-1996), and relies heavily on partnerships with provincial and other agencies with direct responsibility for protected areas. (The term "Ecological Reserves" has specific meanings in different agencies, and has led to some confusion about the aspirations of Forestry Canada. The more general term "protected areas" will be used in most cases.)

Problem or Opportunity

The project was initiated with a workshop in Toronto, April 1992, to which representatives of several government and non-government organizations were invited. The workshop was designed to allow participants to discuss obstacles to the completion of a national network of protected areas, and to develop an appropriate Strategic Plan for the project. The following priorities were identified.

- The National Conservation Area Data Base (NCADB), developed by State-of-the-Environment Reporting (SOE), Environment Canada, should eventually meet national needs for measuring and guiding progress in protected areas. However, it contains virtually no information on ecosystems, and cannot at present be used to assess how well the diversity of forest ecosystems is represented in protected areas.
- There is a shortage of knowledge, particularly among agencies maintaining protected areas, on the way forest ecosystems function; this shortage can compromise the objectives of a protected area.
- Progress in completing a network is hampered by a widespread lack of appreciation about the value of protected areas to society.

Objectives and Progress to Date

To ensure adequate representation of Canada's diversity of forest ecosystems

National and regional forestry data sets (e.g., Canadian Forest Resource Data System, provincial forest inventories) are being canvassed under contract by Ducks Unlimited, for input into the NCADB. Ecoregions and Ecodistricts have been adopted as a provisional framework for assessing progress in a protected areas network.

The project followed advice from our partners, notably CCEA and World Wildlife Fund Canada, and refrained from developing a National Register of Forested Ecological Reserves. However, the Minister and senior levels of management already need an assessment of the status of the envisaged network, at the best level of approximation. Priorities for 1993-94 thus include preparation of a provisional national list of protected areas, compiled according to criteria of representivity.

Improved planning and management of ecological reserves and adjacent lands

This problem will be addressed at selected sites in Model Forests. An analysis of existing protected areas in and close to Model Forests was conducted on the basis of the NCADB. Some 95 listed areas were located within the 10 Model Forests, and a further 88 occurred within 10 km of their boundaries. Results of the analysis and an outline of the project were presented at the second national meeting of Model Forest representatives at Hinton, November 1992.

Up to three well-conceived proposals, aimed at improving the effectiveness of protected areas in or near Model Forests, will be funded in 1993-94.

Advocacy and information in support of a continental network of protected areas

The completion of a continental network of protected areas will be promulgated as a vital part of global conservation strategy. Regional, national, and international efforts towards this goal will be advocated through senior level policy positions, articles in professional journals, appropriate representation at key conferences, and presentations to decision-makers (see references).

References

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