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# Alberta, Private Land Conservation, and the Pathway to Target 1: Interim Issues Assessment

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## **Alberta, Private Land Conservation, and the Pathway to Target 1: Interim Issues Assessment**

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## Introduction

The following Draft Issues Assessment is intended to inform Alberta's Minister of Environment and Parks, as she meets with her counterparts from across the country, and co-chairs the Pathway to Target 1 initiative.

For each issue, we have also included summarized versions of the response to the issue, and the associated recommendations that can be found in our larger report.

This is a companion document to the *Contribution of Alberta Private Land Conservation to Biodiversity Protection – Interim Recommendations DRAFT* and *Proposed definition of Biodiversity Conservation in Alberta*. All three of these documents are part of the AEP-funded project: *Contribution of Alberta Private Land Conservation to Biodiversity Protection*.

That project is due to be complete December 31, 2018, but as the FPT Ministers meeting is taking place this month (June 2018), both the Interim Recommendations and this Interim Issues Assessment were created in Draft form and made directly available to the Minister.

The Draft Recommendations are currently being circulated to project participants for their comments.

## Issues Assessment

At this stage in the Miistakis Institute's research on this topic, it seems likely the Minister will face these issues:

### **Recognition of private land conservation in the 17% target is currently not adequate nor appropriate**

- Private land conservation has as much conservation certainty as traditionally protected areas (we can show this)
- Private land conservation is known to protect biodiversity (we can show this)
- Private land conservation can lead to *Privately Protected Areas (PPAs)*, *Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)*, or neither ... so cannot be considered homogenously
- Traditional protected areas have six classes under IUCN guidelines; private land conservation has no divisions, and thus it is measured against the highest bar of protection

*We need ...*

- A set of classes for both Privately Protected Areas (PPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)

### **The lack of a definition of 'biodiversity conservation', particularly in the Alberta context, is hampering screening and cataloguing exercises**

- '*Biodiversity*' is well defined, and '*protection*' is rigorously defined (but simply as a function of legal restrictions)
- However, *protection does not equal biodiversity conservation* (Banff's rock and ice are protected but provide no biodiversity)
- Privately Protected Areas (PPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are currently judged based on how similar their *legal structure* is to traditional protected areas, not on their contribution to biodiversity conservation

*We need ...*

- We need a clear definition of what is or is not 'biodiversity conservation' to assist screening of protective and conservation measures of all types (we have a proposed definition for biodiversity conservation that we are currently testing)

## Existence of sub-surface access potential on private land conservation areas is currently grounds for wholesale exclusion from the 17% target

- Because sub-surface rights are generally not restricted in private land conservation, these areas are discounted wholesale because of '*potential*' surface disturbance
- This is, in fact, no different from parks given that Regulations allow the Minister to grant *any type of land use disposition* in a Park
- Thus '*likelihood*' is more the issue than '*ability to*'

*We need ...*

- To demonstrate this inequity between traditional protected areas and private land conservation AND
- To provide compromise mechanisms to satisfy both 'protected areas' perspectives and 'private land conservation' perspectives; these could include
  - Enact by regulation (perhaps under ALSA, perhaps under AER) surface disturbance guidelines similar to those in existence for native prairie
  - Commit to no new leases under lands subject to private land conservation
  - Commit to no lease renewals under lands subject to private land conservation

## Accounting exercises (like the 17% target) rely on the alignment of data collection methods between all affected parties

- The Pathway to Target 1 initiative, provincial/territorial governments, and land trusts each gather data in different ways, but also for *different reasons*
- CARTS (Conservation Reporting and Tracking System) in current form only measures publicly protected areas, but more importantly, only measures legislative protection intensity (not actual *biodiversity conservation*)

*We need ...*

- A minimal but comprehensive set of database fields that can be aligned to ensure they 1) do not overwhelm capacity of land trusts, 2) serve Alberta regional planning goals, 3) align with CARTS, and 4) align with International standards
  - This can be done and Miistakis has a preliminary set of fields that we are testing

## Creating a national number and program, while ensuring process respects individual provinces/territories, and individual land trusts

- Provincial and national processes need to be in alignment, but do not need to be identical
- The private land conservation community across Canada must be involved in a leadership role in setting standards for private land conservation

*We need ...*

- The Pathway process to convene a forum of land trusts and other private land conservation entities to develop protocols and standards for measuring the contribution of private land conservation to national biodiversity conservation

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