



Miistakis
Institute

Tracking Private Land Conservation:

Summary of the Proposed Database Blueprint

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Proposal for a Private Land Conservation Accounting Scheme for Alberta

The Miistakis Institute is proposing that Alberta needs an approach to accounting for private land conservation that has the following characteristics:



PROVIDES a ...

01

Sustainable, foundational dataset specific to Alberta

At the core of this assessment scheme should be a robust but straightforward database of private land conservation activity in Alberta, that is collaboratively developed, easily updated, sustainable over time, comprised of a minimum number of fields, and freely available. This dataset should serve multiple programmatic uses, but not be designed around any one of them.

02

Catalogue of private land conservation efforts of all types in Alberta

While Canada's Pathway to Target 1 initiative is aimed at efforts that conserve biodiversity, many of Alberta's private land conservation organizations and activities seek to conserve other values of land (agricultural, heritage, scenic, etc.), which are likewise important and valuable to be tracked. The array of database fields should encompass all purposes, but allow biodiversity-focused initiatives to extract relevant data.

03

Credible representation of both private protected areas and private OECMs

Private land conservation efforts focused on biodiversity conservation may result in Privately Protected Areas (PPAs) or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs); both categories need to be credibly assessed and catalogued.

04

Viable validation process

Because many users of the private land conservation information require certainty around the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation, a constructive validation process is needed. This should be based on clear biodiversity conservation criteria, identify valid proxies, be developed by private land conservation experts, be agreed to by the private land conservation community, and use a sampling audit approach versus an exhaustive screening approach.

SUPPORTS ...

05

A variety of Government of Alberta conservation initiatives

Alberta's Regional Plans, Biodiversity Management Frameworks, species management plans, parks plans, and other conservation plans identify the value of conserving private land for biodiversity. The data collected under this scheme needs to be usable for those programs.

06

The needs of Alberta land trusts / conservancies

Land trusts and conservancies in Alberta undertake varying levels of conservation planning internally for their organization, and collaboratively with other land trusts. The data collected under this scheme must be capable of supporting land trusts and conservancies in their land conservation planning.

07

Municipal conservation planning

Alberta's regional plans, revised Municipal Government Act, and other policies increasingly recognize the critical role municipal land use planning can play in biodiversity conservation generally, and on private lands specifically. The data collected under this scheme needs to be usable by local governments for land use planning.

INTEGRATES with ...

08

National and international conservation-area accounting systems

The Pathway to Target 1, and the CARTS database are informed by and contribute to the efforts of the Convention on Biological Diversity, IUCN, and World Commission on Protected Areas to catalogue progress in protecting the earth's biodiversity. While an Alberta-specific system needs to support Alberta-based needs, it should also be aligned with these systems and their definitions, and capable of supporting them by reporting Alberta's private land conservation contribution to biodiversity protection.

09

Other private land conservation data gathering efforts

Programs like the federal Ecological Gifts program or the provincial Land Trust Grant Program gather and rely on private land conservation data and information. As well, various Alberta land trusts and conservancies track conservation information and progress. Ensuring this system can share information and 'speak' to other initiatives will provide both greater efficiency and greater conservation planning effectiveness.



RECOGNIZES the ...

10

Data collection capacity of partners

Designing a one-off snapshot of private land conservation activity is straightforward, but ensuring the on-going sustainability of a cataloguing system means taking into account the limited capacity in both the private land conservation organizations and the government agencies. This system should include identification of and support for an entity to be the provincial reporting body for privately-conserved land in Alberta; this entity should be chosen by the private land conservation community.

11

Need for a description of biodiversity conservation

Although we have robust definitions of *biodiversity* and a clear list of *protective* measures, we do not have a shared description of which actions constitute *biodiversity conservation*. Biodiversity can exist without protection, and legal strength of protection can be measured irrespective of biodiversity. Private land conservation practitioners and conservation area assessors need a shared, purpose-oriented description of which actions would constitute biodiversity conservation in the Alberta context.

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Pivotal role of the land trust community

Though the assessment and cataloguing of biodiversity conservation programs on private land are generally initiated and operated by government agencies, the private land conservation organizations are the lynch pin as holders of the data. As such, they must be given a leadership role in designing this accounting system.

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Concerns and needs of protected areas community

Assessments of privately-conserved land should not be based on criteria created for traditional public protected areas. However, efforts to catalogue private land conservation should be conscious of the potential synergies and overlaps with those efforts to catalogue public protected areas. This system needs to be conscious that the greater the degree of congruence between *protected area* effectiveness measures and *private land conservation* effectiveness measures, the stronger the case can be for both.



CONSIDERS the ...

14

Inevitability of changes in the conserved land base

Private lands, even more so than public lands, are subject to constant changes in pressures, land management knowledge, adjacent land uses, etc. As such, the system needs to be able to account for and represent changes in the conserved land base in an adept and timely manner.

15

Implications of mixed use, expropriation, and sub-surface rights

The simple existence of a non-owner right (sub-surface, expropriation) does not guarantee that biodiversity is not conserved; conversely, the potential for these rights to be exercised does represent some measure of risk to in situ biodiversity. Because private land conservation exists in a complex matrix of land use rights, opportunities, and expectations, a land conservation assessment scheme must address this issue, without defaulting to simple, binary rules.

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Potential replicability for other provincial / territorial jurisdictions

The needs and lessons learned in Alberta will, for the most part, likely be reflected in other provincial / territorial jurisdictions. As such the design phase should consult other provinces/territories, and the resulting system should be provided to those jurisdictions for voluntary adoption or adaptation.



Conclusion

Private land conservation is becoming increasingly important to the Government of Alberta. Several provincial initiatives explicitly note its importance, especially as a complement to more traditional forms of conservation.

As we increasingly seek to use the same acres for ever more dense and complex land uses, this type of conservation will only become more important.

The Pathway to Target 1 creates both opportunities and challenges that need to be navigated.

While the push to get an accurate accounting of the conserved lands in Canada creates momentum to address this issue, it also creates the potential that this long-needed system will inadvertently address the needs of only one program.

However, this need not be the case.