

Conservation of Ecological Integrity in B.C. Parks and Protected Areas

Released: [23 August 2010](#)

1st Follow-up: [October 2011](#)

2nd Follow-up: [October 2012](#)

Discussed by the Public Accounts Committee: [7 December 2010](#)

2nd follow-up self-assessment conducted by the Ministry of Environment as at August 20, 2012

Self-assessment comments from the Ministry of Environment:

Overall, BC Parks has successfully implemented the Ministry’s commitments regarding the seven recommendations made by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) in the 2010 performance audit on the conservation of ecological integrity in parks and protected areas. For this self-assessment, we have included the original ministry response to each of the recommendations in the first paragraph. The second paragraph outlines the implementation of the commitments made in our response.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION AND SUMMARY OF PROGRESS	SELF-ASSESSED STATUS
<p>Recommendation 1: The ministry update its BC Parks Program Plan so that it includes clarification of ecological integrity and performance targets that adequately address the ministry’s goal of proactive stewardship of ecological integrity.</p> <p><i>Note: Since this was assessed in July 2011 as “Alternative action taken”, the Ministry was not required to provide a response in August 2012. The Ministry Report response and self-assessment presented here are taken from the Ministry’s previous self assessment as of July 2011.</i></p>	<p>Alternative action taken</p>

OAG FINDING: SELF-ASSESSED STATUS

We agree with the ministry’s self assessed status of the recommendation. The Program Plan is being replaced by a strategic document that is due to be published in Summer 2013.

Ministry Report Response:

The BC Parks Program Plan will include a definition of ecological integrity and will clarify how ecological integrity will be considered at a system level as well as an individual protected area level. The program plan performance measures will be updated by the spring of 2011.

Ministry Self-Assessment 2011 – Actions taken, results and/or actions planned (see note):

The existing BC Parks Program Plan is due for a complete update in 2012. As a result, BC Parks will be ensuring that ecological integrity is defined, context is provided and performance targets are included in the new program plan so long as the direction related to ecological integrity is maintained as a key goal of the agency. In the meantime, BC Parks has prepared a definition of ecological integrity that is relevant to the agency, provided context of where it is used as a goal of park management and a number of performance indicators. In the absence of a revised Program Plan, the ADM will be sending a memo to all staff in early September with this information as interim direction until a new program plan is developed..

OAG FINDING: IMPLEMENTATION

We found that the actions taken are as described; the strategic document is to be released in Summer 2013.

Recommendation 2: The ministry complete the strategic direction and procedural guidelines for its Conservation Management Program and ensure that the Conservation Program policies are consistently upheld.

Fully or substantially implemented

OAG FINDING: SELF-ASSESSED STATUS

The Ministry’s self-assessed status is based on the progress made in implementing what they said they would do in their original report response. On this basis, we agree with their self assessed status.

The Conservation Strategy and Conservation Program policies are in final draft form and are expected to be released in March 2013. However, the ministry has only recently begun to update the procedural guidelines, which are being done as needed. On this basis, we find that the recommendation is “partially implemented”.

Ministry Report Response:

BC Parks Conservation Management policy will be updated by the end of the 2011/12 fiscal year.

Implementation:

A review of the existing conservation policy set was completed. Conservation policies have been updated to reflect the BC Parks definition of ecological integrity and consideration of adaptation to climate change. The updated conservation policy set is in the final approval stage and will be available on the BC Parks website once approved. Existing policy gaps will be addressed on an ongoing basis. Strategic direction in the form of a Conservation Strategy (2012-2015) for the program area is in final draft. Once approved, it will also be posted on the BC Parks website.

OAG FINDING: IMPLEMENTATION

We found that the implementation is as described; Conservation Strategy and Conservation Program policies are expected to be finalized in March 2013.

Recommendation 3: Government develop a plan to address current gaps in the parks and protected areas system.

Fully or substantially implemented

OAG FINDING: SELF-ASSESSED STATUS

The Ministry’s self-assessed status is based on the progress made in implementing what they said they would do in their original report response. On this basis, we agree with their self assessed status.

However, this recommendation requires that *government* develop a government-wide plan to address current gaps to conserve ecological integrity in the provincial parks and protected areas system. The Ministry has told us that initiating a government-wide plan is not in their mandate. Also, the original report response noted: “Where there are approved Land Use Plans that include protected area designations, Government does not intend to reconsider recommendations or restart broad scale protected area planning.”

As a result, it is our opinion that an appropriate assessment of the status of this recommendation is “No action taken”. The work being done in assessment of private lands for acquisition, ensuring that ecological representation is a primary consideration, only occurs when someone approaches the Ministry with private land for sale.

Ministry Report Response:

The Ministry will maintain the land acquisition program and ensure that ecological representation continues to be a primary consideration in the prioritization of properties. Work will continue with other provincial resource management ministries to use a variety of land management tools to manage for ecological function across regional landscapes. This includes specific identification and protection of rare and endangered habitats.

Implementation:

BC Parks reviewed and revised the land acquisition criteria to ensure that ecological values are appropriately represented. The revised criteria have been shared with BC Parks regional planning staff for their use in assessing and recommending private lands for acquisition.

OAG FINDING: IMPLEMENTATION

We found that the implementation is as described. The land acquisition criteria are only used when land is offered to the Ministry.

Recommendation 4: The ministry (1) obtain the information it needs in order to determine management actions for the conservation of ecological integrity and (2) ensure that its policy of developing a five-year conservation management activities plan (research, inventory and monitoring) is met.

Fully or substantially implemented

OAG FINDING: SELF-ASSESSED STATUS

The Ministry’s self-assessed status is based on the progress made in implementing what they said they would do in their original report response. On this basis, we agree with their self assessed status.

Regarding the first part of the recommendation, the ministry uses the Conservation Risk Assessment Tool and the Long Term Ecological Monitoring Program to gather information which the ministry represents is sufficient for determining management actions for the conservation of ecological integrity. As such, we agree that this part of the recommendation is “fully or substantially implemented”, although it was beyond the scope of this review to determine whether or not the information gathered in this way is adequate for this purpose.

Our assessment of the second half of the recommendation is that the Ministry has taken “alternative action”, since the recommendation was to ensure that the policy was met, and the ministry has instead rescinded that policy. A new information policy exists within the DRAFT Conservation Policies; This policy no longer includes a 5-year conservation management activities plan.

Ministry Report Response:

Staff training will occur on the use of the Conservation Risk Assessment (CRA) tool and annual business plans will be updated to include targets for completion of the risk assessments. BC Parks will update its policies to reflect advancements in the CRA model. The ministry will continue to develop the Citizen Science Monitoring Program for protected areas and pilot this approach in regions in 2011/12.

Implementation:

The BC Parks Conservation Risk Assessment is an existing tool that holds both information about ecological values and threats to those values on a park by park basis. Updating this database occurs on an ongoing basis. Refresher training for staff groups commenced in 2011 and is ongoing through 2012/13. Regional Conservation Specialists are accountable for training regional staff and for seeing that the CRA is up to date in their region. The goal is to ensure that all field staff are trained in using CRA which includes, adding data and using the data to assist with management decisions. The second major piece of work related to this recommendation is the development of a long term ecological monitoring program using citizen science. The program has been rolled out in summer 2012 in eight major biomes of BC. Simple protocols for key indicators continue to be field tested with data beginning to be collected in all regions. A data storage system has been developed. The program will continue to grow in the years to come as more sites and volunteers come on board.

OAG FINDING: IMPLEMENTATION

We found that the implementation is as described.

Recommendation 5: The ministry review and update its Master Plans Policy (1) to clarify what type of management plan is required for each park and protected area, (2) how ecological integrity in each area will be conserved and (3) when each plan should be reviewed and updated.

Fully or substantially implemented

OAG FINDING: SELF-ASSESSED STATUS

We agree with the ministry’s self assessed status of the recommendation.

Ministry Report Response:

By the end of 20 11/12 the Management Plan policy will be updated to reflect current approaches. This will include the shift from prescriptive to outcome based direction. Management plans will be developed and reviewed on a priority basis using a risk management approach subject to available funding.

Implementation:

Strategic policies for management planning are largely complete and in the final approval stage. The strategic policies will be available on the BC Parks website once approved.

OAG FINDING: IMPLEMENTATION

We found that the implementation is as described; the Master Plans Policy is expected March 2013.

Recommendation 6: The ministry conduct annual planning for each park and protected area to determine what actions are needed to address conservation objectives, threats and stressors, determine priorities from this plan, and monitor and evaluate action items against conservation objectives.

Fully or substantially implemented

OAG FINDING: SELF-ASSESSED STATUS

The Ministry's self-assessed status is based on the progress made in implementing what they said they would do in their original report response. On this basis, we agree with their self assessed status.

The ministry has revised their Annual Management Planning process, and as a result while annual planning occurs in each region, it is not done for each park and protected area in the region. Instead, the ministry considers it more appropriate to do planning for some parks and protected areas every 3-5 years. On this basis, our assessment against the recommendation is "alternative action taken".

We found evidence that threats, stressors and priorities are included in the priority planning process. The Ministry represented that conservation objectives are also considered, and while they were included in some plans, it was beyond the scope of our review to determine if they should have been considered in the plans that had no such objectives listed.

Ministry Report Response:

BC Parks will revise the Annual Management Planning (AMP) process using best practices by the end of 2011/12. The revised process will assist the agency in identifying key priorities to undertake and include a process to evaluate and monitor progress.

Implementation:

BC Parks refined the existing Annual Management Planning process in Winter 2011 to ensure a simple and consistent approach across the province. The revised process was approved and rolled out for implementation in December 2011. All regions completed AMPs in 2011/12 which helped to set business plan priorities.

OAG FINDING: IMPLEMENTATION

We found that the implementation is as described.

Recommendation 7: The ministry report periodically to the Legislative Assembly and public on how it is conserving ecological integrity in the province's parks and protected areas system.

Fully or substantially implemented

Note: Since this was assessed in July 2011 as "Fully or substantially implemented", the Ministry was not required to provide a response in August 2012. The Ministry Report response and self-assessment presented here are taken from the Ministry's previous self-assessment as of July 2011.

OAG FINDING: SELF-ASSESSED STATUS

The Ministry's self-assessed status is based on the progress made in implementing what they said they would do in their original report response. On this basis, we agree with their self assessed status.

As described in their response, the Ministry is reporting to the public via their Annual Report on their website. There is no specific reporting to the Legislative Assembly, and the ministry has no plans to do so. Accordingly, our assessment of the status of the recommendation is "Alternative action taken".

Ministry Report Response:

The ministry will consider options for enhanced reporting of parks program performance measures. The annual report published on the web will include more comprehensive information on all measurable program outcomes.

Ministry Self Assessment 2011 – Actions taken, results and/or actions planned - (see note):

The 2010/11 Annual Report for BC Parks is being developed. It is expected that the report which includes information about the BC Parks conservation program will be released in September 2011.

OAG FINDING: IMPLEMENTATION

We found that the actions taken are as described.