

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

Released: [August 2010](#)

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

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

### Self-assessment conducted by the Ministry of Environment

Overall, BC Parks has been making good progress regarding the seven recommendations made by the OAG in last year's performance audit on the ecological integrity of 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 our progress to date on the commitments made in our response. As noted below, BC Parks' commitment to a couple of the recommendations are in the process of being finalized, the bulk are well under way and a couple are in early stages.

### Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION AND SUMMARY OF PROGRESS	SELF-ASSESSED STATUS
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> 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><b>Alternative action taken</b></p>
<p><b>Actions taken, results and/or actions planned</b></p> <p>Ministry 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.</p> <p>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.</p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> The ministry complete the strategic direction and procedural guidelines for its Conservation Management Program and ensure that the Conservation Program policies are consistently upheld.</p>	<p><b>Partially implemented</b></p>
<p><b>Actions taken, results and/or actions planned</b></p> <p>Ministry response: BC Parks Conservation Management policy will be updated by the end of the 2011/12 fiscal year.</p> <p>Policy review has been initiated. While we are fully committed to fulfilling the ministry's commitment to this recommendation, we are anticipating that we may need to extend this work beyond March 2012 due to the large scope of this work and the need to have full staff buy in for successful implementation. We are currently re-examining the scope of work which will result in a development of phases of policy review and new policy development. We anticipate that much of the review and updating of existing relevant policy will occur before the end of March 2012. New policy development will likely occur in 2012 and beyond.</p>	

# SELF-ASSESSED PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations (Cont.)

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

**Partially implemented**

### Actions taken, results and/or actions planned

Ministry 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.

BC Parks is committed to reviewing its land acquisition criteria to ensure that ecological values are appropriately represented. The review of these criteria will occur in the Fall of 2011 with any changes to be implemented by end of March 2012.

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

**Partially implemented**

### Actions taken, results and/or actions planned

Ministry 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.

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. We have committed to updating this database and ensuring that all field staff are trained in using it which includes, adding data and using the data to assist with management decisions. Training has occurred in two locations in the winter of 2011. Once staff are retrained on the database, they will be expected to keep it up to date and use it for such things as park management planning, and annual management planning. The second major piece of work related to this recommendation is the development of a long term ecological monitoring program using citizen science. Program development is well underway with key indicators chosen for the major biomes of BC. Simple protocols for each of the indicators are being field tested this summer (winter protocols were tested in the winter of 2011). Staff testing protocols are being asked to provide feedback to ensure that protocols are easy to use and provide useful data. A data storage system is in development. Further roll out of protocols will occur in summer 2012 and beyond.

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

**Partially implemented**

### Actions taken, results and/or actions planned

Ministry response: By the end of 2011/12 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.

Strategic policies for management planning have been drafted and are in the review process. Approvals and roll out for implementation are expected by end of January 2012.

# SELF-ASSESSED PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendations (Cont.)

**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.

**Partially implemented**

### **Actions taken, results and/or actions planned**

Ministry 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.

A working group of BC Parks staff refined the existing Annual Management Planning process in Winter 2011 to ensure a simple and consistent approach across the province. A number of regions tested the revised process and have provided feedback. The working group will regroup in September 2011 to make any revisions. The revised process will be approved and rolled out for implementation in December 2011.

**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**

### **Actions taken, results and/or actions planned**

Ministry 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.

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.