

Report of the
British Columbia Task Force
on Species at Risk

January 31, 2011

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* The Task Force received many submissions that contain valuable insights and ideas, which the Task Force would like to record. We provide these in a separate 150-page document.

Acknowledgments

The members of the Task Force would like to express their great appreciation for the efforts of our support team who helped us at every step. Many thanks to:

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We would also like to thank all those who made the effort to submit ideas and recommendations, both by letter and by submission to the ministry website. While in a brief report of 30 pages we could not do justice to everything that was presented, we want to ensure that no ideas were lost and so have recorded all of them in the appendix to the report.

As chair, I congratulate my colleagues on our task force for persisting to the conclusion of an intensive and demanding discussion of an overwhelmingly complex issue. I extend my heartfelt thanks to you, not just for the content of our work, but for the unfailing good nature, humour and respect that prevailed while we worked together.

Bruce Fraser

Executive Summary

British Columbia is almost unique in the developed world in still having such a variety of significant natural areas and values, and so many remaining options for their management. The province is an attractive place to live and work because of those natural values and because of the economic alternatives which they provide. The population of our province will continue to grow, and we will continue to make our living from the land and resources. Our challenge is to maintain prosperity and social harmony while also respecting our responsibilities to steward the land in a manner that will sustain those special natural values on which we depend and for which we, increasingly alone in the world have an ability to ensure their continuance. One of the major components of this stewardship is dealing with species at risk.

The Task Force has been asked by government to develop practical and fiscally responsible recommendations for improving management of species at risk in British Columbia. Accordingly, we have elected to build on the many conservation initiatives that have already been accomplished. Our report provides advice that is aimed at making early gains on both public and private land while proposing direction for the long term that will help to address the continuing pressures of development and climate change.

Until now, following the example of the Accord for the Protection of Species at Risk (1996), the province has been largely focusing on individual species, seeking to prevent extirpation or extinction or to effect recovery at the level of species and populations. A single-species approach does not adequately deal with the unique conditions of British Columbia, which has the greatest biodiversity of any province in the country. Because of that biodiversity, we have an extremely large number of species that are being assessed at risk.

This approach is leading us down a path of increasing complexity, overlapping initiatives and unsupportable costs even as the numbers of at-risk species continue to grow. The Task Force believes that a strategic shift is needed to alter our focus to the landscape level and to incorporate conservation objectives into mainstream resource management decisions at the same time as decisions are made leading to new development.

The report outlines impediments to effective management of species at risk and the remedies needed to address them by refinements to existing statutes, regulations, management systems and citizen engagement practices. Our advice is embodied in our statement of a vision of the future in which the province has successfully balanced its strong resource-based economy with a resilient supporting environment.

In order to contribute to realizing this vision the Task Force makes 16 general recommendations with associated advice on the actions needed for successful implementation.

Recommendations of the Species at Risk Task Force

Approach

- Take an ecosystem-based approach to species at risk.

Legislation

- Strengthen existing legislation.
- Implement the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*.
- Update the Canada-British Columbia Agreement on Species at Risk (2005).

Management

- Support the Conservation Data Centre.
- Support and enhance the Conservation Framework.
- Implement conservation priorities through the resource management coordination process.
- Enable the resource management system to adapt to changing circumstances.
- Establish consistent funding mechanisms.

First Nations Engagement

- Engage First Nations on the basis of the principles of recognition and reconciliation as stated in the New Relationship document.
- Engage First Nations directly in area-based conservation decision-making.
- Encourage First Nations trust in the effectiveness of conservation initiatives undertaken to protect ecosystems and species at risk.

Public Engagement

- Engage private land owners to participate effectively in conservation efforts.
- Engage stakeholders and partners directly in area-based conservation decision-making.
- Encourage public trust in the effectiveness of conservation initiatives undertaken to protect ecosystems and species at risk.
- Launch a wider consultation process.

Task Force on Species at Risk

Terms of Reference

In June 2010 the government of British Columbia struck the Task Force on Species at Risk to advise Cabinet on the following five terms of reference:

- **Vision, Principles and Outcomes** - Where should our conservation efforts be focused, what principles should guide future development of a species-at-risk program in BC, and what are the measurable outcomes that best address the fundamental threats to biodiversity in BC and help us achieve our vision?
- **Environmental Management** - In light of climate change and multiple development demands, what management methods need to be advanced to meet BC's conservation targets?
- **Regulatory Framework** - What changes are required to the existing regulatory framework to ensure we balance ecological and socio-economic considerations and best achieve our conservation targets?
- **Private Land Stewardship** - How do we advance private land stewardship and conserve species and ecosystems at risk on private land in BC while respecting the interests of taxpayers?
- **First Nation and Stakeholder Communications and Engagement** - What are the key elements of a communications and engagement strategy to ensure communities, First Nations, private land owners and all other stakeholders who operate on the province's land and water base understand and value the benefits of species-at-risk conservation?

We took up this task not with the belief that we could solve the species-at-risk problem once and for all, but with the intention to provide government with some practical advice on steps they could take in the right direction. In six months, over the course of six meetings and intervening correspondence, and with the assistance of staff from the Ministry of Environment, the Task Force has addressed the complex of questions at both a long-term strategic and an immediate practical level.

The problem of species at risk is an especially complex one that demands the attention of our whole society. It can only be addressed by considering how to balance our economy with our environment, our cultural heritage with our cultural future and our desire for development with our need for sustainability. Such a vast topic is more than a modest challenge to a group of ten people, working in isolation, with limited time and resources.

The protocol of preparing advice to Cabinet that requires confidentiality has limited our ability to consult widely while developing our recommendations. We addressed this gap in two ways: through a public submission website sponsored by the Ministry of Environment and through our recommendations for further consultation processes once our report is

published. We received a number of thoughtful suggestions through the website that we have used as a check on our own ideas where they spoke to the issues in our terms of reference. A collation of the submissions received is provided in Appendix 3.

It is clear to us that the current imbalance in British Columbia's approach to the province's natural heritage, given the experience elsewhere in Canada and the world, will continue to drive ecosystems and species into decline. We need to make fundamental changes to the way that we manage our land and resources if we expect to change this trend. Given the complexity of the root causes that affect the risks to ecosystems and species, the accumulated administrative arrangements for resource management, the legal obligations arising from the federal *Species at Risk Act* and the extremely varied views in our society, we see our report as a step in a much longer process. The opportunity for British Columbia to take leadership is certainly there, but it will take broad, respectful dialogue with much active collaboration, assertive action and investment to achieve the scale of progress that is needed.

Part 1: Defining the Challenge of Species at Risk Management in BC

A Heritage at Risk

British Columbia's rich heritage of biodiversity is under pressure from the cumulative effects of a growing population and the consequences of climate change. Together, they are increasing risks to natural systems and individual species through limitations of habitat and ecological function. The resulting challenge to our society is already widely acknowledged.

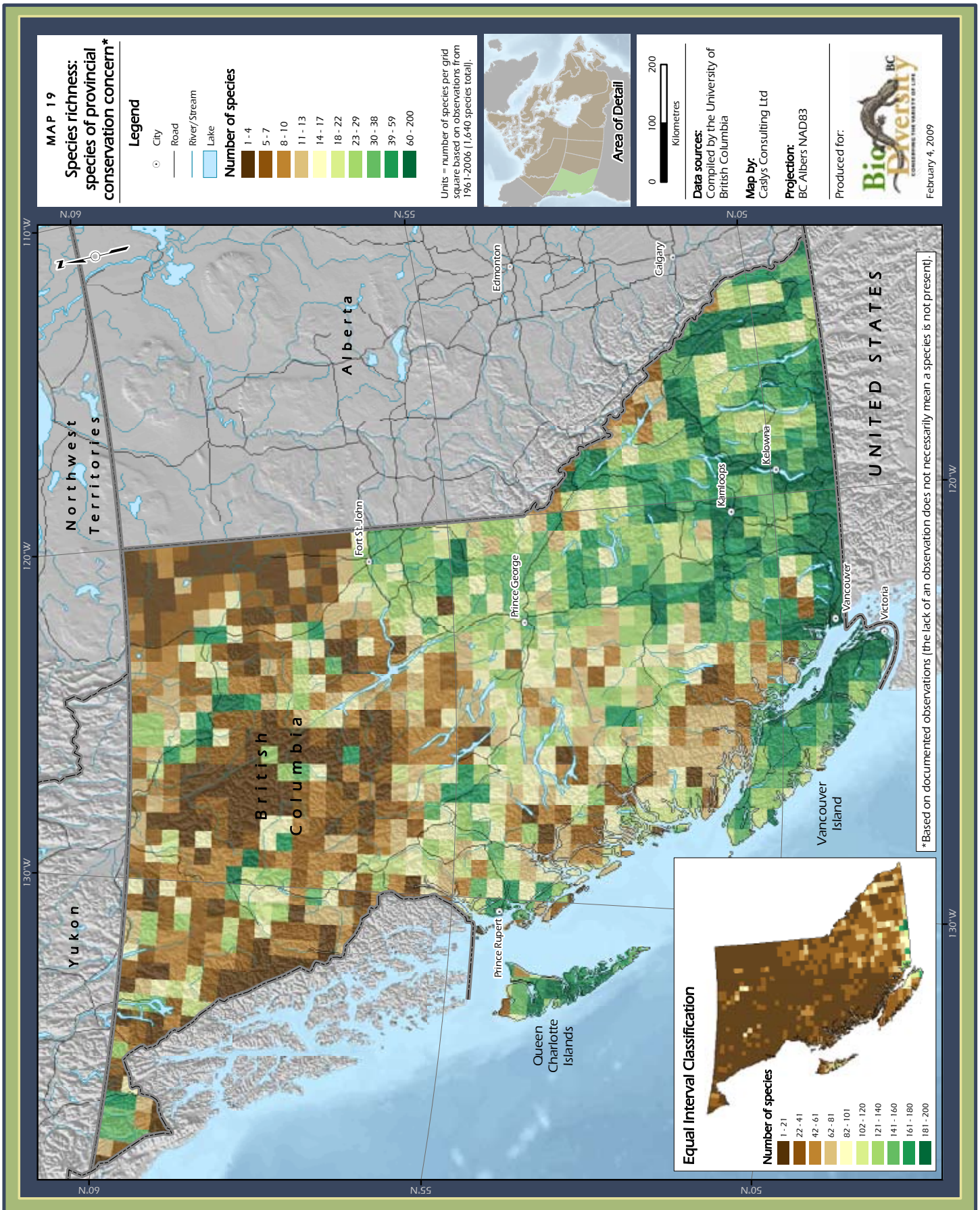
Threats to BC ecosystems and habitats are presently concentrated in areas of greatest development, such as the Okanagan, Lower Mainland, east Vancouver Island, Kootenays and northeast, particularly at lower elevations (Figure 1). While the greatest conservation effort may best be focused on these areas in the short run, all areas of the province will need attention in the long run as development pressures grow and climate change continues.

Nationally, the federal *Species at Risk Act* is an attempt to stem the tide of species losses. In our province, we have established protected areas, adopted legal land management regimes, introduced environmental assessments, adopted wildlife conservation measures, forgone major developments, incorporated best practices and certification into our industrial practices, introduced an agricultural land reserve, and set climate change initiatives in motion. These efforts have been widespread, and supported by the public, civic organizations, government and industry. We are not starting from scratch, but even with all this positive effort, it is clear that in our own best interest we have to do more.

Information on the subject of species at risk in BC reveals a complicated picture:

- different agencies have different species at risk assessment lists (see Table 1)
- BC's rich biogeographic diversity contributes to a more fragmented distribution of species and populations (e.g., islands and high altitude mountain habitat refugias)
- some species are assessed as at risk in BC because they are naturally rare, peripheral in BC, or are discontinuous within their range
- increases in species at-risk lists are influenced by expanding conservation assessments to new taxonomic groups (e.g., fungi, invertebrates), and by sub-dividing species assessments into sub-species, populations and sub-populations
- changes in species at risk lists have most often been influenced by new information and technologies (e.g., DNA techniques) rather than changes in species conservation status
- some regional areas in BC are hot spots for species at risk, while other areas have single, iconic species at risk that occupy large areas of the land base (Figure 1)
- robust trend data is not available for the majority of species in BC; however, the available published data to date suggests that many well-studied vertebrate populations in BC are in decline

Figure 1. Concentrations of species at risk.



Austin M.A. and A. Eriksson (2009) *The Biodiversity Atlas of British Columbia* 135pp. Available at www.biodiversitybc.org

While there is often room for rationalization among the various assessment agencies, given the numerous issues that affect species at risk assessment lists, it is difficult to assess, identify and agree to a set of practical priorities for conservation investments and actions in BC.

Table 1.
Species Assessed or Legally Listed as At Risk in BC and Canada by Different Agencies

	Agency	Category	Number of Listed Species in BC
Science-based Conservation Assessment Lists	BC Conservation Data Centre	At Risk (red and blue lists; includes extirpated, endangered, threatened or special concern)	1,597 species ¹ with 329 ecological communities
	International Union for Conservation of Nature	Globally at risk (includes critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable, near threatened and conservation dependent)	30 of 106 in Canada ²
	Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada	Extinct, extirpated, endangered, threatened or special concern	233 of 621 in Canada ³
Legal Lists of Species Requiring Recovery, Protection or Management	<i>Federal Species at Risk Act</i>	Extirpated, endangered, threatened and special concern	192 of 467 in Canada ³
	Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species	Species threatened with extinction or where trade must be controlled for benefit of species ⁴	134 ⁵ of 201 in Canada

¹ Includes species, sub-species, populations or variants, as reported by the BC CDC; includes all species (1,207 plant and 390 animals) on the BC CDC red and blue lists (accessed October 2010).

² From iucnredlist.org (accessed October 2010); equivalent to COSEWIC's E/T/SC risk categories.

³ Includes species, sub-species, populations and/or designatable units, as defined by COSEWIC.

⁴ CITES (www.cites.org) Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. CITES Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.

⁵ 25 species on CITES Appendix I, including Sea Otter, Gyrfalcon, Peregrine Falcon, Prairie Falcon and all cetaceans; 109 species on CITES Appendix II.

Implications of the Potential Loss of Species

Increasing numbers of ecological communities and species entering the at-risk lists can be interpreted as an indicator of declining ecosystem condition and extent. This is important because naturally functioning ecosystems lie at the heart of our economy by providing irreplaceable ecosystem services, ranging from clean water to fertile soils to pollination of crops to abundant renewable resources to carbon sequestration. The species that we are potentially losing are the “biological moving parts” that keep our ecological communities functioning.

As the national and provincial legal lists grow, many requiring some obligatory protection or recovery action, we risk swamping our fragmented resource management system and limited conservation resources chasing the needs of individual species. Over 80 species recovery plans are already in place or being prepared in the province. It is not difficult to foresee an increasingly complex pattern on the landscape with a growing area and categories of land and habitat protection and varying management measures.

Protected areas are one instrument British Columbia has used for ecosystem and species conservation, setting aside 14 per cent of land at the highest level of protection. A significant proportion of the province lying outside of protected areas is also conserved to varying degrees if all of the categories of land status were to be included (e.g., the industrial development moratorium in the Flathead Valley, the riparian zones and old growth management and wildlife habitat areas required by the *Land Act* and the *Forest and Range Practices Act*). However, habitat suitability, fragmentation and connectivity have not been adequately addressed in establishing areas for conservation status.

Large protected areas or a patchwork of smaller areas with highly restrictive management regulations is a limited approach, and one that can involve significant economic trade-offs for the province. BC’s protected area system can be complemented by more adaptive measures over larger areas that can accommodate a wide range of sustainable uses without creating unmanageable stresses on ecosystems or species. In such cases, maintaining the key components for sustaining ecosystem and species can be compatible with careful development of economic opportunities.

For all the practical, cultural, moral and spiritual reasons that are presented for conserving nature, we need to arrest and reverse the loss of species, the values that they represent and the functions that they perform. A fundamental shift in perspective is needed – that it is in our own long-term economic best interest to develop an approach to our natural systems that addresses their capacity to provide ecosystem services.

We need to focus on the condition of whole landscapes to avoid ineffective conservation results and a legal gridlock of competing and cumulating individual recovery efforts. We need to invest more in conservation, and need to include the functional condition of ecosystems as one of the key economic components in our system of resource management. We also need to find more effective and more positive ways to work with those who own or have tenure to the lands and resources that are crucial to achieving species protection.

A vigorous ongoing public dialogue about our conservation approach, our methods and our actual results is required. Given this considerable challenge, we need to make the most efficient use of our existing conservation mechanisms and supporting resources.

Impediments to Effective Management

The Task Force recognizes that a number of impediments to effective management must be addressed to deal successfully with the problem of ecosystems and species at risk in British Columbia. These issues are widely acknowledged and many initiatives are already under way to address their consequences.

A valuable summary of the organizational challenges faced by the province regarding species at risk is attached in Appendix 1.

Root Causes of Stress on Ecosystems and Species

- **Expanding Human Footprint:** Steadily increasing numbers of ecosystems and species are being listed with at-risk status because demands on the land base by a growing population are leading to increased cumulative effects.
- **Climate Change:** Climate change is advancing, with consequences arising in the status of ecosystem productivity, the changing distribution of species habitats and the security of ecosystem services. Increasing climate volatility will have very different consequences for the different biophysical regions of the province, so conservation efforts need to be flexible enough to permit regionally based adaptive management. Effectiveness of conservation responses will require active, area-based monitoring of changing environmental conditions, habitat drift and changes in ecosystem services.

Limitations of the Current Approaches to Conservation

- **Single Species Approach:** The federal *Species at Risk Act* has directed action to individual species on federal lands. It may also apply to provincial lands through its safety net provision if a province does not provide matching initiatives.

One result of the single-species approach is that many people believe the way to influence conservation on the larger landscape is to champion the needs of highly visible individual species. In areas of complex jurisdictions with greater biodiversity, such as British Columbia and southern Ontario, it is difficult to implement a single-species approach on a mass scale, making it necessary to set priorities.

Critical habitat requirements arising from a growing number of recovery plans mandated by the federal *Species at Risk Act* for individual species do not factor in cumulative impacts of habitat conservation on the resource management landscape or recognize the need to set priorities for action based on both scientific and socio-economic considerations. Single-species approaches can also have perverse outcomes, with society picking “winners” based on visibility or iconic status while ignoring “losers” that could be equally or more functionally important.

Mounting costs of the species-by-species approach are leading to tardy and incomplete implementation, especially as government capacity and resources are declining. There is potential for gridlock as the needs of competing species interact, the recovery efforts overlap and the consequences for many other land and resource allocations grow.

Finally, both science and experience indicate that this single-species approach is not the best way to proceed in the interests of species themselves. Management of a bundle of species and their habitats, though complex, appears to afford a better prospect of success.

- **Controversy over Priority Assessment:** Some listed species are newly discovered, naturally rare or are represented by peripheral or disjunct populations with population centres across jurisdictional borders. This is leading to differences of opinion about the priority given to conservation efforts mounted within British Columbia.

At-risk lists can be longer than or misleading about the number of ecosystems and species that are actually at risk over their full geographic range and that have component populations that are clearly the responsibility of the province. Species needing priority attention can be caught in cross-border controversies so that parties in the province are uncertain about what is required of them, particularly when addressing outlier or relict populations, the protection of which could require extreme actions, with uncertain results and with major implications for existing land users. The physical diversity of BC results in what will always be a large list of rare, disjunct and peripheral taxa in addition to those for which there is documented conservation concern. With a current list approaching 1,600 plants and animals, it is evident that not all can be of equal priority for management action.

- **Conservation is Seen as a Cost without Balancing Benefits:** Conserving the ecosystem base of resource assets is often treated as a cost constraint on economic development rather than as a primary objective based on the beneficial values of ecosystem services. It is harder to assess the value of ecosystems than to measure the direct economic value of development. Conservation efforts tend to be treated as a cost factor to be minimized or can be seen as necessary only for iconic species with a popular following. The benefits of “free” ecosystem services or the costs of diminishing them are not factored into the cost/benefit aspects of business and land use decision-making.
- **Geographic Variation:** Ecosystems and species at risk are not distributed equally throughout the province, and the causes of their at-risk status are not the same in every location. There are well-documented hot spots of rich biodiversity, intense development pressure or ecosystem and species concern in the province that demand early attention keyed to the particular threat factors of each region and while options still exist.

Administrative Limitations

- **Federal Species At Risk Act:** Proliferation of legal obligations for responses to federal *Species At Risk Act* listing can occur without reference to provincial responsibility for balancing land and resource use commitments with mandated conservation efforts. Frustration with cost escalation and limited provincial relevance of externally imposed solutions are leading to the use of the courts, while collaborative and inclusive methods would in many cases be more productive than litigation. The province has been pressured to react to federal initiatives rather than to focus on internally relevant, realistic provincial priorities.
- **Fragmented Accountability:** Founding legislative mandates along with their associated regulations and policy for management of resources has been spread among ministries and agencies that have not been sufficiently integrated to provide a consistent mechanism for considering conservation requirements in business decision-making on their shared landscape. Legislation governing forest practices is a good example, with forest licensees required to consider the legal implications of the federal *Species at Risk Act*, the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* and the *Fisheries Act* as well as the provincial *Forest and Range Practices Act*, the *Wildlife Act*, the Identified Wildlife Management Strategy and the Old Growth Order among others.

The recent reorganization of resource ministries is intended to address this issue, but will require effective linkage between policy formulation and resource operations.

- **Shrinkage of Budgets:** All governments are struggling to balance the books, maintain health and social programs and keep the tax load manageable. This is not going to change. It has, however, impacted the ability to manage resources and lands. The result is a growing backlog of incomplete conservation efforts and an inability to take advantage of funding leverage with other institutions. This is most telling in the lack of basic research, comprehensive inventories and monitoring of ecosystems and species that could more accurately inform conservation assessments, priorities and decisions.

Lack of Public Agreement

- **Transparency:** It is difficult for the public to distinguish between conservation decisions made on the basis of scientific considerations as opposed to socio-economic ones. Confusion about what course of action is indicated by scientifically established knowledge and what is based on necessary socio-economic considerations can lead to a lack of trust in government decision-making.
- **Public Consensus:** There is insufficient investment in education and engagement of the public, communities, private land owners, First Nations and industry in developing the overall strategy for incorporating conservation into mainstream land and resource use decision-making. Public land use plans are now mostly outdated, have reached their intended expiry date and did not fully engage First Nations. In the absence of relevant and publicly derived land use plans, legal challenges, campaigning and lobbying take the place of seeking cooperative agreements. Proliferation of single species and large geographic scale advocacy campaigns are perceived by some as the only effective avenue for exerting influence.
- **First Nations:** There has been limited participation of First Nations throughout most of the province in land use planning or in developing the overall strategy for incorporating First Nations traditional ecological knowledge and land use practices into mainstream land and resource use decision-making. Some notable exceptions such as the Haida Gwaii Land Use Plan, the Coast ecosystem-based management agreements and the Fort St John Forest Practices Code Pilot may point the way to achieving agreements that more fully involve First Nations.

Lack of Attention to Private Land

- **Engagement with Private Land Owners:** Restrictions on the use of private land are understandably controversial. There is a general lack of effective legislation and existing regulation for species at risk on private land. There are also few provisions for effective and durable incentives that reflect the legitimate needs and interests of owners, lease and tenure holders. Private land contains many habitats that are important to conservation of ecosystems and their threatened species, particularly in the parts of the province that are most heavily developed. These habitats are not being adequately represented in conservation efforts, and constructive private efforts are discouraged by layers of punitive regulation arising from uncoordinated ministry requirements. This negative approach needs to become more positive and proactive.

Part 1: Defining the Challenge

In this document, the Task Force addresses the challenges and impediments to species at risk management in British Columbia. It provides a conservation vision for the future, a set of guiding principles, measurable outcomes that we believe should be achieved, recommendations for action to improve provincial initiatives to conserve species and ecosystems, and a suggested ecosystem-based decision process.

Part 2: A Conservation Vision

The Vision

British Columbia is successfully addressing the cumulative effects of society's growing footprint on the land and waters of the province. As a result, our heritage of ecosystems that provide essential life-supporting services and the diverse species that inhabit them are resilient to the pressures of development and climate change.

The people of the province are enjoying a thriving resource-based economy that is living within its ecological means, equitably balancing the interests of First Nations, communities, private land owners, industries and the general public.

The loss of species is being minimized as the ecosystems of the province are being maintained in properly functioning condition. The province's diversity of ecosystem types, their component species and the ecosystem services that they provide are systematically factored into all land and resource use decisions, both public and private.

Management of the human footprint on the land and waters of the province has become a leading objective of resource governance, through rigorous environmental assessment and the monitoring, mitigation and conservation practices of the province's resource sectors.

Stewardship of land and water is being shared with First Nation, regional and local governments and civil society associations that are concerned with the ecological sustainability of their area. British Columbians have accepted the view that healthy ecosystems are the inseparable companions of a healthy economy.

Balance between environmental and economic security is being fostered through strengthening of conservation legislation, a robust system of landscape-level planning, a process of thorough citizen engagement, ongoing articulation of best practices and a stable system of funding for ecosystem stewardship of both Crown and private land.

Guiding Principles to Inform Future Action

Adopt an ecosystems approach.

Arresting and rolling back the increasing numbers of species arriving on threat lists and the conservation of ecosystem services in British Columbia will require action at the ecosystem level.

Set area-based priorities.

Focus on biogeoclimatic zones, ecosystem types and groups of species that have already been identified in the province. Priority setting at the ecosystem level is needed for efficiency given the complexity of the BC environment.

Incorporate existing conservation initiatives.

Recognize and build upon work that has already been accomplished.

Provide for adaptability.

Sufficient funding from both public and private sources needs to be consistently provided to conduct the research, status assessment, monitoring and evaluation that is necessary to enable continuous learning and the responsive management of ecosystems and species.

Make decisions transparent.

Distinguish clearly between science and socio-economic decision-making.

Engage diverse partnerships.

Diverse partnerships are necessary to address the moral, social, scientific, economic and environmental challenges presented by species at risk. All parts of society have responsibility for the solution, and all parties must be treated equitably in both costs and benefits of conservation.

Recognize private contributions.

Recognize that long-term land owners and managers of private land and leases, both current and retired, have a great deal of on-the-ground experience that should be collaboratively incorporated into conservation initiatives.

Meaningfully engage First Nations.

Using the principles articulated in the *New Relationship* (Appendix 2) continue to develop the appropriate government-to-government relationships needed at the provincial and regional levels to effectively incorporate First Nations knowledge, values and practices into shared decision-making.

Recognize industrial experience.

Industrial stewardship initiatives and environmental management systems are an essential part of the collective effort to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem function.

Seek public support.

Seek public understanding and acceptance through education and engagement.

Measurable Outcomes of Task Force Recommendations

Successful recovery of at-risk ecosystems and species.

Systematic monitoring of recovery efforts establishes that they are successful in reducing shrinkage in geographic extent and fragmentation of ecosystems. The geographic ranges occupied by species are stabilized, and population losses are reversed. Populations of species that were in decline begin to rise, and use of suitable historic range is increased. Species that are undergoing climate-forced migration are able to establish successfully in ecologically equivalent sites.

Maintenance of ecosystem services.

Ecosystem function is restored, leading to maintenance and enhancement of ecosystem services.

De-listing of at-risk ecosystems and species.

The numbers of ecosystems and species assessed as at risk by the Conservation Data Centre and listed under the federal *Species At Risk Act*, particularly those identified as high priority by the Conservation Framework, are being systematically reduced.

Effective coordination of federal and provincial initiatives.

British Columbia has its own comprehensive legislation and management regime for ecosystem and species security that removes potential conflict with the federal *Species At Risk Act*. The BC program is not dependent on the courts to articulate land use objectives and practice requirements that should properly be addressed by a balance of environmental, social and economic conditions among the people who must act, pay the bill and deal with the consequences.

Duplication of the federal *Species At Risk Act* and provincial ecosystem/species-at-risk responses is not occurring. The potential of gridlock arising from a large number of federally mandated individual species recovery plans adopted for the same landscape is avoided. Provincial responsibility for land and resource planning and management is maintained.

Contribution from private and leased lands.

Owners and managers of private and leased land are contributing effectively to the ecosystem and species-at-risk conservation program.

Effective delivery of action plans.

Action plans are meeting their ecosystem and species objectives and targets in a timely and effective manner.

Maintenance of a stable funding base.

Sufficient infrastructure and resources have been assembled and deployed to ensure that the goals and objectives of ecosystem/species-at-risk conservation are being delivered in a consistent and continuous manner and that the research, monitoring and evaluation is being carried out and published.

Widespread agreement.

First Nations, communities, owners of private land, industry and the general public are expressing agreement with the ecosystem/species-at-risk conservation process and satisfaction with the outcomes.

Part 3: Recommendations for Action

The Task Force recognizes that the province will need time to refine its approach to dealing with ecosystems and species at risk. We recommend the following strategies and actions to help shape that approach.

APPROACH

E1 - Take an ecosystem-based approach to species at risk.

LEGISLATION

L1 - Strengthen existing legislation.

L2 - Implement the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*.

L3 - Update the Canada-British Columbia Agreement on Species at Risk (2005).

MANAGEMENT

M1 - Strengthen the Conservation Data Centre.

M2 - Strengthen and endorse the Conservation Framework.

M3 - Implement conservation priorities through the resource management coordination process.

M4 - Enable the resource management system to adapt to changing circumstances.

M5 - Establish consistent funding mechanisms.

FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT

FN1 - Engage First Nations on the basis of the principles of recognition and reconciliation as stated in the New Relationship document.

FN2 - Engage First Nations directly in area-based conservation decision-making.

FN3 - Encourage First Nations trust in the effectiveness of conservation initiatives undertaken to protect ecosystems and species at risk.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

P1 - Engage private land owners to participate effectively in conservation efforts.

P2 - Engage stakeholders and partners directly in area-based conservation decision-making.

P3 - Encourage public trust in the effectiveness of conservation initiatives undertaken to protect ecosystems and species at risk.

P4 - Launch a wider consultation process.

APPROACH

The Task Force believes that it would be both more effective and more efficient to address the complex biodiversity of British Columbia and the large number of species receiving “at risk” status by focusing at the ecosystem level rather than at the individual species level.

Recommendation E1: Take an ecosystem-based approach to species at risk.

Action: Group at-risk species by ecosystem.

- In setting priorities for action to conserve or recover at-risk populations, group species by related habitat needs and ecological relationships, to the extent possible, based on their resident ecosystems.
- Employ the biogeoclimatic zone classification now in widespread use in the province as the basis for definition of “ecosystem” and for setting relevant levels of aggregation for conservation purposes.
- Employ the ecosystem-based approach to ensure that the full life cycle requirements of a species can be met.
- Treat species at risk and declines in common species as a potential indicator of distress in the ecosystems that provide habitats essential for the full life history of individuals and populations.
- Develop conservation strategies and initiatives that focus on the properly functioning condition of ecosystems, including capacity for intact nutrient cycling, historic biodiversity, capacity to recover from disturbance within a natural range of variation and resilience to degradation by invasive species, chemical pollution or climate change.
- Maintain ecosystem representation on water and land, with connectedness across human land use patterns and artificial jurisdictional borders.
- Acknowledge and respond to the confluence of ideas that is taking place globally, regionally and locally to integrate the recovery of species at risk with maintaining ecosystems in properly functioning condition so as to sustain ecosystem services critical to the economies of human societies.
- Provide clear direction to decision makers to make the maintenance of ecosystem services through ecosystem and species conservation a core mandate of the integrated business planning process conducted by resource ministries. Mainstream ecosystem services as one of the valuable resources to be coordinated and recognize the importance of conserving ecosystems and species currently at risk or moving in that direction.
- Task ministries and institutions with the responsibility to bring valuations of ecosystem services to the socio-economic decision-making process in order to enable their proper consideration as justification for ecosystem and species conservation and formalization as objectives set by government, including looking at emerging practices elsewhere in the world.
- Recognize that ecosystem- or landscape-level bundling of species for conservation initiatives may not always be sufficient and that supplementary measures for dealing with individual species will still be required, particularly with rare species, those with limited geographic distributions or those with wide-ranging habitat requirements.
- Recognize that ecosystems have no political boundaries.

Action: Consider risk factors other than habitat loss.

- Add the concepts of “threat and risk assessment” and “threat and risk abatement planning” to the stock of research approaches and ecosystem and species intervention tools to supplement or provide alternatives to land set-asides of habitat. This would enable recognition of the wide variety of factors that may be relevant, for example, invasive species, pollution and overharvesting.

LEGISLATION

The Task Force believes that reliance on a single-species regulatory framework will not address the fact that there are a significant number of species at risk in British Columbia. Such an approach treats symptoms at the individual level rather than root causes at the ecosystem level. A more effective strategy would be based on a regulatory framework that addresses both species and ecosystems.

Recommendation L1: Strengthen existing legislation.

Action: Improve the consistency and effectiveness of regulatory and administrative mechanisms.

- Review the components of existing legislation dealing with the conservation of the province’s natural capital (i.e., elements of the *Land Act*; *Land Amendment Act, 2003*; *Forest and Range Practices Act*; *Oil and Gas Activities Act*; *Water Act*; *Wildlife Act*; *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*; *Parks Act*; *Ecological Reserves Act*; and others as appropriate), to:
 - determine the effectiveness of existing legislation in dealing with the species and ecosystem challenges noted in this report, and
 - identify any gaps that might exist.
- Upon completion of this review, either amend the legislation to address conservation of the province’s natural capital in a consistent manner or develop stand-alone legislation that fulfils the ecosystems-based approach recommended by this Task Force.
- Ensure that the amended legislation includes sufficient enforceable regulatory mechanisms to be effective (for example, mandatory time frames).
- Make a single ministry accountable for the delivery of conservation results specified in the amended legislation, regulations and policies. By integrating conservation initiatives with the coordinated management of natural resources, more structured decisions can be made, with greater certainty for all parties on the use of the land and waters of the province and a greater likelihood that unintended consequences can be avoided.
- Ensure the long-term well-being of ecosystems, species and ecosystem services by making them an explicit responsibility of government at the Cabinet Environment and Land Use Committee and Cabinet.
- Initiate research necessary to define the scope of amendments to existing legislation at the same time as bringing forward the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*.

Action: Set up a provincial legislation consolidation team.

- Under the authority of the *Environment and Land Use Act*, establish a government legislative writing team to prepare legislation to consolidate the acts, regulations and policies that are related to the conservation of species and ecosystems, which represent the natural capital of the province.
- Support the legislative writing team with the broader consultative process that engages First Nations, communities, private land owners, stakeholders, industry and the public.

Recommendation L2: Implement the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*.

Action: Bring into force the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*.

- As a short-term measure, while a consolidation of conservation legislation, regulation and policy is being launched and the strategic ideas of the Task Force are being considered, bring into force the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004* through passing of a Species at Risk Regulation to provide the Ministry of Environment with a clear mandate for protecting at-risk species and their residences and to participate effectively in resource management coordination processes and decision-making.
- Begin application of the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004* and regulations on Crown land immediately. Leave application on private land until the recommended incentive mechanism is established (see recommendation E2 - Private Land).

Recommendation L3: Update the Canada-British Columbia Agreement on Species at Risk (2005).

Canada and British Columbia have signed an agreement to govern the means by which the requirements of the federal *Species at Risk Act* are to be reflected in the conservation practices employed in the province.

Action: Present the British Columbia strategy.

- Update the substance of the Canada-British Columbia Agreement on Species at Risk to reflect the legislative, management and engagement initiatives recommended by the Task Force on the cooperative implementation of the federal *Species At Risk Act* that both meets the intent of this act and provides greater implementation flexibility for the province.

MANAGEMENT

The Task Force believes that the province already has conservation mechanisms in place that, with suitable refinements, can play an increasingly effective role in the conservation of ecosystems and species.

Recommendation M1: Support the Conservation Data Centre.

Action: Enable the Conservation Data Centre to gain more British Columbia-specific information about species and ecosystems.

- Maintain the existing Conservation Data Centre (CDC) as the primary provincial mechanism for creating the science-based, long list of ecosystems and species at risk according to the criteria provided by NatureServe. Also take into consideration lists derived from the federal *Species at Risk Act* and International Union for the Conservation of Nature and the published results of peer-reviewed scientific literature.
- As a result of the high number of species on the at risk lists and BC's complex biodiversity, increase the level of investment in gaining more British Columbia-specific information about species and ecosystems to improve the accuracy of risk assessments.
- Recognize that the lists arising from the Conservation Data Centre and other sources are dynamic in nature, changing over time as scientific research leads to a more complete understanding of our complement of species and ecosystems and the nature of the risks that they face both within British Columbia and over their wider geographic range.
- Improve systematic scientific scrutiny of assessment criteria and results, providing for more ongoing peer evaluation, including from outside government, of risk assessment sources and their relevance to British Columbia. Reference should also be made to First Nations and other local experience and understanding of species and their significance.
- Recognize that certain currently common species, which play a major role in the ecosystems of the province and are also of public concern, will also need conservation attention to prevent them from declining toward at-risk status.
- Ensure that the information base required to assess levels of risk to ecosystems and species is maintained through a consistently funded program of scientific research by ministries and institutions.
- Invite the CDC to participate in the ecosystem-based approach to aid action priority-setting.

Recommendation M2: Support and enhance the Conservation Framework.

Given the physical and biological diversity of British Columbia, the lists of candidate species (those potentially requiring management action) will always be large, and the implied individual management attention to each will always exceed capacity. After the initial identification of ecosystems and species at risk by the CDC, management policy and recommended action is assigned by the Conservation Framework on a priority basis by status, urgency, quality of supporting data, legal obligations and practicality.

The Task Force agrees that the Ministry of Environment's Conservation Framework (CF) is the logical and desirable foundation for setting ecosystem and species at risk priorities. We suggest that a review of the existing Conservation Framework process is required.

The objective is to ensure a consistent, transparent ranking system that reduces ecosystem and species at risk lists to more manageable levels by priority and directs assessed priority levels to specific management and conservation policies and actions.

Action: Set realistic area-based priorities.

- Task the Ministry of Environment, with external advice as necessary, to publish and present to government annual, ecosystem and area-based lists of scientific and professional priorities with proposed initiatives for action. Recommendations could be partitioned to enable the practical scaling and routing of conservation responses to routine action under existing statutes or to extraordinary action. More complex measures may be required where there are substantial delivery costs, major implications for stakeholders or scientific uncertainty about the effectiveness of proposed recovery strategies.
- Ensure that ecosystems with their included species that are not listed as high priority do not become regulatory surprises producing inadvertent legal barriers to development activity that would be better treated as management design considerations requiring adaptive responses.
- Provide for ongoing critical review of the criteria employed by the Conservation Framework to establish conservation action priorities, such as provincial responsibility for globally unique biogeoclimatic zones, ecosystems and species; issues of recovery feasibility; the strategy of an area-based ecosystem approach with bundling of species for integrated consideration; and multijurisdictional collaboration initiatives needed to address species with cross-border, disjunct and peripheral distributions.
- When establishing priorities for conservation under the Conservation Framework for implementation under the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*, concentrate on the areas of most urgent need identified by Biodiversity BC in *Taking Nature's Pulse* and other literature identifying biodiversity hot spots or areas of high risk.
- Recognize that certain currently common species, which play a major role in the ecosystems of the province and are also of public concern, will also need conservation attention to prevent them from declining toward at-risk status.
- Recognize that efforts in the north of the province may be more profitably focused toward preventative measures, while in the more heavily populated south the focus may necessarily be on restorative measures as well as prevention.
- In the long run, ensure that all regions of the province are assessed for the nature of threats to existing species and ecosystems and the degree of prevention or rehabilitation that is required in the regionally appropriate conservation responses.

Action: Make scientific monitoring and published updates mandatory.

- Make regular updates of the status of Conservation Data Centre listed ecosystems and species and Conservation Framework priority listed ecosystems and species mandatory, and make provision for the necessary research, monitoring and regular publication.

Recommendation M3: Implement conservation priorities through the resource management coordination process.

Action: Employ the interministry resource management coordination process, in which the province has already invested heavily, for implementing the area-based conservation priorities established under the Conservation Framework.

- Make use of the resource management coordination process as the framework for:
 - integrating the resource ministry policies for ecosystem and species conservation,
 - integration with provincial, regional, sub-regional and First Nations area-based planning, and
 - coordination and consideration of the cumulative effects of development and climate change.
- Incorporate scientific measurement and economic valuation of ecosystem services alongside traditional cost/benefit assessments in economic management decision-making. Maintenance of ecosystem function, conservation of species and production of ecosystem services need to become explicit objectives set by government to inform the work of the resource management coordination process at the provincial, regional and sub-regional deliberations of the resource ministries. Conservation should be seen not as economic values lost but as economic values maintained and enhanced.
- Conduct strategic regional assessments, including ecosystem representation mapping, to prepare a baseline of landscape-level conditions that can be used by resource managers to assess the potential implications of individual projects, particularly their implications for the interests of First Nations and their impact on conservation priorities.
- To ensure objectivity, put into place monitoring, evaluation and auditing mechanisms that are independent of the resource ministries.
- Make professionally conducted landscape-level planning a necessary management tool for assessing and managing the cumulative effects of development pressures, conservation requirements and climate change responses.
- Integrate the research effort on and resource management responses to climate change at the regional and sub-regional level as critical inputs to and outputs of the resource management coordination process. Assemble budgets and human resources accordingly.
- Where ecosystems and their component species are identified as area-based priorities for specific zones, task the Natural Resource Board to establish area-based professional planning teams to develop, in consultation with local stakeholders, the specific conservation responses that will be incorporated into coordinated resource management actions.
- Task the Natural Resource Board to establish a separate, widely consultative, area-based and time-limited socio-economic assessment process, employing explicit published criteria, to enable government to decide whether it can afford the costs and accept the implications of investing in the more complex actions that may be needed to implement the scientific/professional priorities. Model this process and the staff team necessary to deliver it on the work of the Species at Risk Coordination Office as it developed advice to government on the Mountain Caribou recovery program.

Action: Set up an implementation team from within the resource ministries responsible to the Natural Resource Board.

- Task the team with preparing the information and tools needed by resource ministry staff to achieve successful implementation of the *Wildlife Amendment Act, 2004*, with developing the private land incentive program and with preparing a public information program to explain what is being undertaken as well as initiating the wider consultations recommended by the Task Force.
- Task the team with conducting a series of pilot projects in areas of greatest landscape-level pressures to test the strategy of ecosystem-level bundling of species and to make recommendations on the utility for wider application.
- Require a report to be published on the progress of the work of the implementation team one year from commencement.

Recommendation M4: Enable the resource management system to adapt to changing circumstances.

Actions: Invest in the research, monitoring and evaluation functions essential to resource management.

- The provincial program to address ecosystems and species at risk will require research, monitoring and evaluation at several levels both as it is developed and as it is implemented. This effort will need to be focused on biological assessments that increase our knowledge of ecosystems and species along with the sources of risk that affect them. It can also be used to improve the administrative organization and decision-making processes, including the setting of priorities and the blending of scientific and socio-economic considerations.
- Provide consistent funding to enable the necessary programs of research, monitoring and evaluation to proceed on a scheduled basis and to ensure that the information developed is publicly reported and archived for ready access.
- Consider establishing a “Conservation Registry” to record and publish area-based summaries of conservation efforts to enable the cumulative effect to be monitored and for participants to work effectively together.

Action: Build on but also refine the base of protected areas and other conservation lands.

- Acknowledge the positive value and build on the significant contribution of existing protected areas and conservation lands such as parks, conservancies, ecological reserves, wildlife management areas, wildlife habitat areas, old growth management areas and riparian reserves.
- In planning for additional habitat conservation, invest in a comprehensive inventory of existing protected and conservation areas, recognizing that they may not have been explicitly established to provide full representation or the needs of particular species and ecosystems at risk.

- Ensure that monitoring and evaluation processes are in place to assess how well the current protected and conservation areas are contributing to species and ecosystem conservation objectives and that the information is included in the priority-setting mechanism of the Conservation Framework.
- Ensure that assessments of lands and water bodies to be given conservation status take into consideration representativeness of ecosystem variation, functionality of ecosystem processes and interconnectedness among areas to provide for genetic exchange, to allow for climate-forced migration and to accommodate larger predator-prey systems that cross many boundaries.

Recommendation M5: Establish consistent funding mechanisms.

Action: Consider a range of funding mechanisms to provide consistent support to conservation efforts.

- Consider employing a mechanism like “development cost charges,” commonly used by municipal authorities, to establish a provincial fund to support ongoing ecosystem/species at risk conservation science, monitoring and incentive/stewardship programs.
- Investigate market-based mechanisms to generate funds available on the basis of carbon management offsets, biodiversity conservation, protected ecosystems and species recovery programs that are being developed as tradable assets.
- Consider supporting or establishing as needed a provincial stewardship foundation, with a start-up grant from government, to attract non-government sources of funding and to provide coordinated support to civil society organizations. Consult with partners before instituting any funding mechanism that could inadvertently compete with existing efforts.
- Establish a fund, in collaboration with the Union of BC Municipalities, similar to the one that supports wildfire management plans at the community level, to enable local governments to work with private land holders on planning and implementing species and ecosystem conservation initiatives.

FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT

The Task force believes that First Nations acceptance and support for accelerated ecosystem and species conservation initiatives will require engagement of First Nations at all levels of the resource management co-ordination process. For this engagement to be meaningful it needs to be consistent with the vision and principles embraced by the New Relationship:

“We are all here to stay. We agree to a new government-to-government relationship based on respect, recognition and accommodation of aboriginal title and rights. Our shared vision includes respect for our respective laws and responsibilities. Through this new relationship, we commit to reconciliation of Aboriginal and Crown titles and jurisdictions.

We agree to establish processes and institutions for shared decision-making about the land and resources and for revenue and benefit sharing, recognizing, as has been determined in court decisions, that the right to aboriginal title “in its full form”, including the inherent right for the community to make decisions as to the use of the land and therefore the right to have a political

structure for making those decisions, is constitutionally guaranteed by Section 35. These inherent rights flow from First Nations' historical and sacred relationship with their territories.

The historical Aboriginal-Crown relationship in British Columbia has given rise to the present socio-economic disparity between First Nations and other British Columbians. We agree to work together in this new relationship to achieve strong governments, social justice and economic self-sufficiency for First Nations which will be of benefit to all British Columbians and will lead to long-term economic viability.”

The above quotation is the Statement of Vision from the New Relationship document. The complete document is available at www.newrelationship.gov.bc.ca/shared/downloads/new_relationship.pdf

Recommendation FN1: Engage First Nations on the basis of the principles of recognition and reconciliation as stated in the New Relationship document.

Action: Open direct discussions with First Nation organizations.

- Initiate direct discussions between government and senior First Nations organizations, including the First Nations Summit, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the Assembly of First Nations regional office to ensure that the relevant recommendations of the Task Force are consistent with the principles of the *New Relationship* (Appendix 2) and are adapted cooperatively as needed.

Recommendation FN2: Engage First Nations directly in area-based conservation decision-making.

Action: Implement a systematic First Nations involvement process.

- Make provisions for the education and direct engagement of First Nations at the provincial, regional and sub-regional levels of the resource management coordination process.
- Respect individual First Nations government-to-government relationship with the province.
- Systematically incorporate indigenous local land and resource knowledge, use and values.
- Develop and deliver a communication/information strategy directed at First Nations to explain why the species and ecosystem conservation processes are necessary.

Recommendation FN3: Encourage First Nations trust in the effectiveness of conservation initiatives undertaken to protect ecosystems and species at risk.

Action: Ensure First Nations representation on any oversight board or any process that would perform monitoring and auditing functions.

Action: Improve transparency of decisions.

- Include review of First Nations specific socio-economic criteria when undertaking such studies or reviews of the potential impacts of conservation actions on the interests of First Nations.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Task Force believes that public acceptance and support for accelerated ecosystem and species conservation initiatives will require thorough engagement at all levels of the resource management coordination process.

Recommendation P1: Engage private land owners to participate effectively in conservation efforts.

Action: Initiate development of a private land incentive program.

- Begin immediately to prepare a performance-based incentive program to encourage owners of private/leased lands to take positive action to protect at-risk species and ecosystems, based upon the existing Environmental Farm Plan model (www.ardcorp.ca/?page_id=14). In this context it would provide both technical support for conservation assessment and action planning and performance-based funding to assist with necessary conservation initiatives.
- Initiate the development of a private land incentive program within one year by including explicit conservation elements in selected mature farm plans and introduce the approach for other categories of privately held lands as pilot projects for specific area-based conservation planning.
- Ensure that the incentive program includes a focus on small operators where limited capacity must be recognized.
- Consider including species and ecosystem conservation incentive measures in land tenure and resource use licence agreements where the land is still owned by the Crown.
- Where tax incentives or other mechanisms that reduce industrial costs are contemplated, conduct an assessment of any implications for international trade agreements.
- Where large tracts of private land are located in critical areas, where many species and ecosystems at risk are concentrated, consider using the *Wildlife Act* provision for ministerial agreements to prepare plans dealing with established Conservation Framework priorities.
- Assemble and publish a compendium of other conservation incentive mechanisms now in use in the province and elsewhere, such as the Islands Trust model of tax relief for conservation covenants or the federal eco-gift program, as a comprehensive package of approved incentive options. Refer to the *Review of Species at Risk Stewardship Incentives and Funding Mechanisms* report provided in Appendix 4.

Recommendation P2: Engage stakeholders and partners directly in area-based conservation decision-making.

Action: Implement a systematic involvement process.

- Make provisions for public, private land owner, municipality and industrial education and direct engagement at the provincial, regional and sub-regional levels of the resource management coordination process.
- Develop and deliver a public information campaign to explain why the species and ecosystem conservation measures are necessary.

- Make systematic use of indigenous local knowledge and historical perspective gained by people who are resident on and work and enjoy recreation on the land.
- Recognize that resource industries and other resource users have developed management practices, financial capacity and on-the-ground expertise. This includes their environmental programs, certification, sets of best practices, land restoration programs and negotiated environmental agreements. Engaging this capacity is essential.

Action: Establish a link with municipalities.

- Establish a link between the resource ministries and BC municipalities to coordinate the recommendations of the Task Force with the strategies that the Species at Risk Local Government Working Group has proposed for improving conservation on local government and private lands in BC.

Action: Work with existing conservation partners.

- Work with regional non-government conservation organizations to protect, conserve and rehabilitate land and water habitats of threatened species. Work with them to determine how best to provide government support to their combined efforts and to engage them in provincial ecosystem and species conservation initiatives that are complementary to one another and to those initiated by government.

Recommendation P3: Encourage public trust in the effectiveness of conservation initiatives undertaken to protect ecosystems and species at risk.

Action: Establish an oversight board.

- Establish an independent oversight board, with public reporting authority, to monitor the effectiveness of the provincial species and ecosystem conservation program.
- Given the natural resource practice consolidation in government, consider adapting the existing independent and publicly reporting Forest Practices Board into a Natural Resource Practices Board that would perform the monitoring and auditing functions required for public assurance.
- Alternatives could include inviting the Auditor General or an independent environment commissioner to perform the oversight function.

Action: Improve transparency of decisions.

- Clearly distinguish between the scientific and socio-economic decisions to be made at the political level that deal with the cost-benefit assessments and the potential impacts of conservation actions on the interests of stakeholders.
- Establish a socio-economic decision-making tier with explicit cost-benefit criteria, decision completion timelines and responsibility centres to be used by government to determine in which of the scientific and professionally derived conservation priorities the province is prepared to invest. Decision criteria should at least recognize factors such as the value of ecosystem services, the delay implications of conflict or lost opportunity costs of not taking conservation action.

Recommendation P4: Launch a wider consultation process.

Action: Convene a dialogue with Task Force members.

- Convene a meeting early in 2011 of the Cabinet Committee on Environment and Land Use, the Natural Resource Board and the members of the Task Force to discuss the recommendations proposed and the thinking behind them, recognizing that there is a broad range of perspectives and insights on the Task Force that need to be conveyed.

Action: Launch the wider consultation process.

- Publish the full report of the Task Force to enable ongoing discussion of its ideas and for extended consultation with all interested and potentially affected constituencies: First Nations, the public, communities, industries, other resource users and conservation partners.
- Ensure that these discussions are transparently conducted and effectively communicated to the public and groups of organized stakeholders, following the collaborative model of the Central Coast land use plan.

Action: Review the oversight board proposal.

- Open discussions with the Forest Practices Board to assess the potential of widening its terms of reference to be consistent with the integrated resource management structure and function of the natural resource ministries.

Part 4: Suggested Ecosystem-based Decision Process

The Task Force envisions the following orderly flow of information and decisions as ministries implement an ecosystem-based approach to addressing species at risk. *(Please see schematic on following page.)*

The Conservation Data Centre, with scientific and professional advice and improved data from British Columbia, provides scientific risk assessments that lead to the red and blue lists of species and ecosystems that meet the internationally developed “at risk” criteria provided by NatureServe.

The Ministry of Environment, also with continuing scientific and professional advice, subjects the long list of species at risk to a process of annual priority setting through the Conservation Framework. Species at risk are “bundled” to prepare realistic increments of conservation activity on an area-based landscape and ecosystem level. Scientific and professional criteria used to set these priorities and the resulting conservation action plan are published annually.

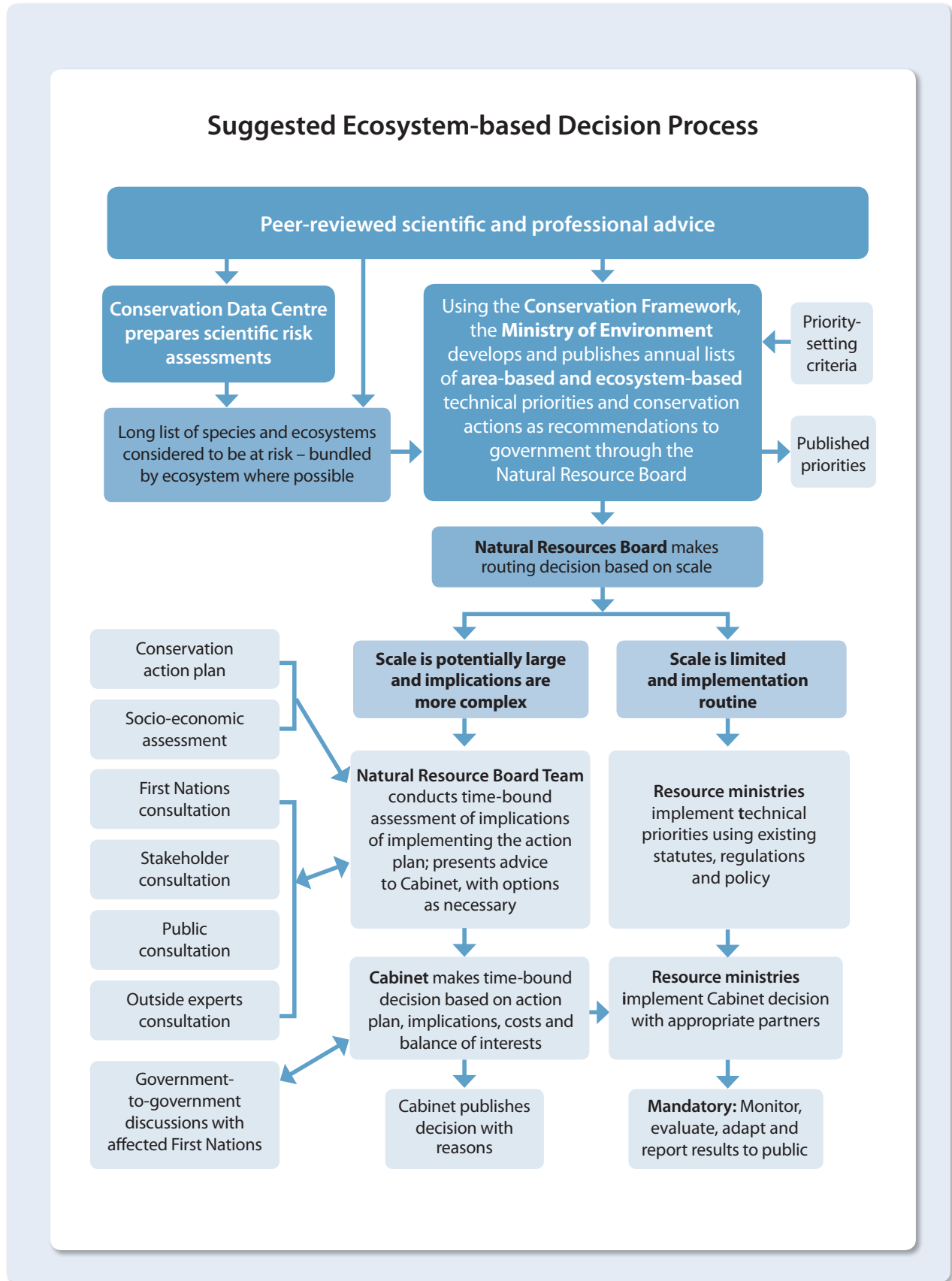
The Natural Resource Board (NRB) takes the annual priority list and makes an implementation routing decision based on the scale and cost of the conservation interventions that are recommended. Where the scale is limited and can be accommodated routinely through existing statutory and administrative or management procedures, implementation is accomplished immediately through the standard multi-agency resource management coordination process at the regional and sub-regional level.

Where the scale of conservation interventions is large and more complex, with extensive implications for cost and impact, the NRB establishes a team to assess the socio-economic impacts in consultation with First Nations, stakeholders and the wider public. Within a specified period, the NRB team makes a report to Cabinet on the costs, benefits and wider implications of the conservation action plan for those that may be affected.

Cabinet is then in a position to consider whether or to what extent to invest in the conservation action plan, to consult directly with affected First Nations at a government-to-government level, and to make the final decision, within a specified time period, which is then published and implemented by the resource ministries in collaboration with any necessary partners.

This process is repeated annually, to enable government to deal incrementally with practicable sets of conservation recommendations, responsive both to priorities set scientifically and to the province’s ability to pay for the investments required. It would be possible to accelerate or decelerate the process according to degree of difficulty of the assessment process or the growth of a backlog of approved conservation action plans.

In order that this process of decision-making and the emerging results on the ground are transparent to the public, it is mandatory that the process and its outcomes are independently monitored, evaluated and publicly reported.



Members of the Species at Risk Task Force

Bruce Fraser (chair) holds a PhD in plant ecology from the University of British Columbia. He has recently served six years as chair of the Forest Practices Board where issues of species at risk were periodically raised. He acted as president of both Selkirk College in the Kootenays and Malaspina College on Vancouver Island. In his 17 years of consulting work in British Columbia he was engaged with over 30 rural communities in land use planning, community economic development and environmental conflict resolution. International consulting has taken him to Africa, the Caribbean, China and Southeast Asia working on forestry, environmental and human resource development planning.

Mel Arnold has been on the B.C. Wildlife Federation (BCWF) board of directors for seven years, just completing a two-year term as president and is currently on the executive as immediate past president. He continues to sit as the Shuswap regional representative on the BCWF provincial wildlife committee and as a member of the South Thompson Wildlife Stewardship committee.

Pierre Gratton is president and CEO of the Mining Association of British Columbia (MABC). The MABC is the predominant voice of mining in the province, representing mineral producers, coal producers and companies involved in exploration, development and smelting of minerals. In 2005-06 he was honoured as a distinguished lecturer for the Canadian Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum.

Judith Guichon is the owner/operator of Gerard Guichon Ranch Limited in the Nicola Valley in the Interior. She currently serves on the Water Use Management Planning Team for the Nicola Watershed Community Round Table and as a member of the Ranching Task Force. She is also a director of the Grassland Conservation Council of British Columbia and the president of the British Columbia Cattlemen's Association.

David Hatler, PhD is the proprietor of Wildeor Wildlife Research and Consulting in the Smithers area, where he undertakes wildlife and habitat impact assessment projects and provides mitigation, reclamation and management advice to clients in mining, forestry, hydro, transportation development, backcountry recreation and trapper education. He is on the board of directors of the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

Daryll Hebert, PhD is the president of Encompass Strategic Resources in Creston, where he has developed system plans and research and management plans for over 20 forest industry and oil and gas companies. As a regional wildlife biologist on Vancouver Island and in the Cariboo region for 19 years, he was involved in research, inventory and management for many species including the Vancouver Island marmot, deer, elk and caribou.

Ben Koop, PhD is a professor and Canada research chair in the department of biology at the University of Victoria. He has served several years as department chair and director of the Centre for Biomedical Research. Major current projects include the salmon genome project and the sea louse genome project. In 2009 he was given the Life Sciences BC Award for Scientific Excellence.

Peter Robinson is the chief executive officer of the David Suzuki Foundation. He is a member of the Province of British Columbia's Climate Action Team and the Ontario Premier's Climate Change Advisory Panel. In addition, he is currently the chair and Chancellor of Royal Roads University in Victoria. Immediately prior to his appointment with the David Suzuki Foundation, he was the CEO of Mountain Equipment Co-op.

Derek Thompson is an associate professor at Royal Roads University where he teaches a masters course in environmental governance and has represented the university as a teaching member of the Canada-China Environmental Sustainability Project. He is also the volunteer chair of the BC Parks Centennial Steering Committee. He retired from the BC government in 2003 as the deputy minister of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

David Walkem is the Chief of the Cooks Ferry Indian Band and vice-chair of the Nicola Similkameen Innovative Forestry Society. He is also the president of Stuwix Resources Joint Venture, which manages a forest licence for eight shareholder Indian bands in the BC interior. He was the Founding President of the First Nations Forestry Council appointed to provide policy direction for First Nations participation in forest resource management in BC.