

Establishing Key Biodiversity Areas in Canada

The Need for Key Biodiversity Areas

One of the most effective ways to safeguard wildlife and wild places is through the improved management and protection of specific sites with important biodiversity. But many earlier efforts to establish protected areas focused on places with strong scenic value or where there would be fewer conflicts with economic interests. Accordingly, most protected areas in Canada are not considered high value sites in terms of protecting and restoring biodiversity.

In recognition of the growing biodiversity crisis sweeping the world, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) led a global consultative process to develop a scientific standard for identifying sites with important

biodiversity values. Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) contain rare or threatened species or ecosystems, or have features that attract large gatherings of animals to feed, reproduce or seek shelter. KBAs can also be unique natural areas that are undisturbed by industrial development. This new KBA approach brings all natural values (birds, plants, mammals, ecosystems, etc.) together under one roof for the first time, creating a robust and quantitative tool to identify areas of high biodiversity and for preventing further loss of wildlife and wild places.



Canada is leading the way and has one of the first national programs in the world to move forward with identifying KBAs with the help of a comprehensive partnership among governments, Indigenous and conservation organisations, and scientists. Indeed, our pioneering approaches and methods are being shared with other countries embarking on similar efforts.

Using KBAs, we are informing protected area establishment under the federal “Pathway to Canada Target 1” process, which aims to meet national protected area targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). KBAs can also be used by Indigenous agencies to inform the development of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, which will play a critical role in Canada achieving its CBD commitments and moving forward with reconciliation. KBAs can guide stewardship planning at all scales, from land use planning at the regional scale to guiding local conservation investments. Identifying KBAs gives us important knowledge about areas that must be protected and stewarded with enhanced management, formal protected areas or other conservation measures.

Who is behind the initiative

The Canadian KBA Coalition brings together experts, stakeholders and data in a bottom-up and participatory way that transcends jurisdictional boundaries. The involvement of local and national organisations and experts is vital to secure buy-in and ownership of the process, and to ensure both the coordinated collection of Canada's rich biodiversity information and expertise as well as the widespread use of KBAs in future conservation planning. Coalition members currently include WCS Canada, Bird Studies Canada, NatureServe Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, WWF Canada, Nature Canada, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas, the Québec Centre for Biodiversity Science, and CPAWS. A number of other organisations are in the processing of joining. These organisations, as well as other affiliated groups such as COSEWIC, are providing in-kind support and expertise to assist in identifying KBAs and are important partners helping to gather information, communicate the importance of KBAs and promoting appropriate measures to conserve them.

WCS Canada hosts the KBA Canada Secretariat, which coordinates KBA identification and outreach. The Secretariat relies on the involvement of a number of key players to lead on specific aspects of the technical work, all of whom are members of the KBA Management Committee:

- NatureServe Canada is responsible for gathering data from biodiversity institutions and experts for species of interest and developing range maps for these species.
- Bird Studies Canada is responsible for assessing Important Bird Areas against the new KBA criteria, and for developing and maintaining the database and interactive website of Canadian KBAs. In this role, they will be a key player in continuing to manage the initiative and support stewardship within KBAs far beyond the technical implementation stage of this work.
- WWF Canada provides data and analysis, as well as regional and thematic advice through their role on the management committee.
- Nature Conservancy of Canada is a member of the management committee and provides advice based on experience with site-scale conservation across all Canadian jurisdictions.
- The KBA Management Committee provides overall support and guidance to the project. Participating on the Management Committee as observers are Environment & Climate Change Canada as well as a representative of the Pathways National Steering Committee that comprises all the provincial and territorial jurisdictions responsible for protected areas establishment and management and national Indigenous organizations.

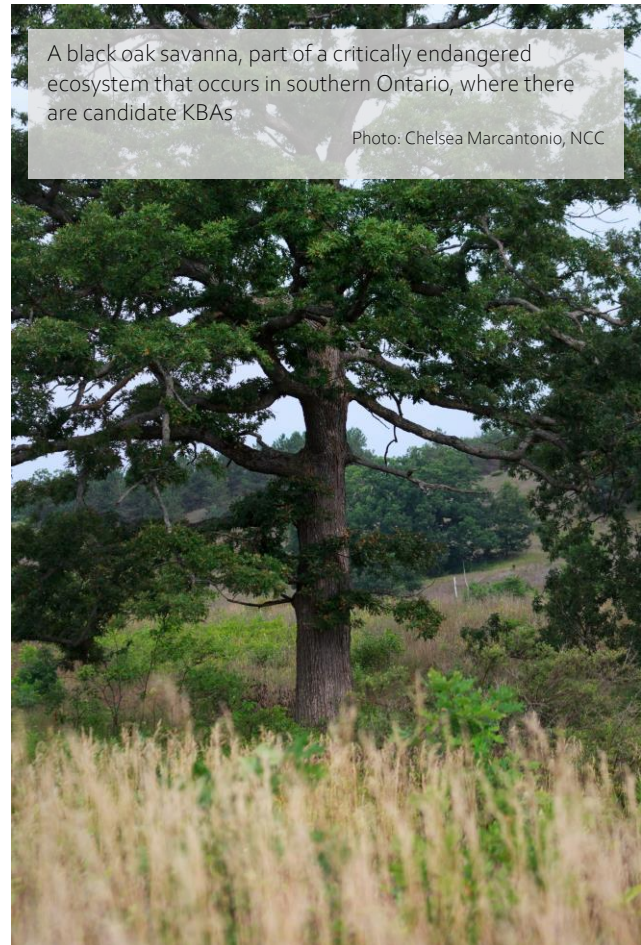
Next steps

Over the next two years, we will further develop the following:

- 1) **Identifying KBAs.** We'll identify Key Biodiversity Areas using approved national and global criteria that relate to species and ecosystems at risk, geographically-restricted species and ecosystems, species aggregations and unique ecosystems with the highest level of ecological integrity. We are well into the scoping process to identify potential KBA sites and are integrating spatial data on species, ecosystems, land tenure and existing conservation sites with expert knowledge to develop priority areas for KBA identification. This requires recruiting and involving diverse subject

matter experts from the Canadian KBA Coalition. To delineate effective and feasible KBAs we will need to work with local knowledge holders, landowners, rights holders and stakeholders.

- 2) **Expanding the uptake of KBAs.** The success of the KBA initiative will rely on the extent to which KBAs are used to shape decision-making – to prioritize the creation of new protected areas and to guide management actions to conserve the attributes that make a particular area important for biodiversity. Effective outreach and engagement with decision-makers is essential so they will know how to integrate KBAs in their work.
- 3) **Communications and outreach.** It is also critical to engage the public whose support is needed to spur government action. Our website (<http://www.kbacanada.org/>) will include information about KBAs as they are identified, and KBA Coalition members will assume an increasingly important role in using this information to help Canadians visualize why and how these spaces are so important for Canada’s biodiversity, so they can become champions for the protection of these sites. WCS Canada’s role, as the home of the KBA Secretariat, will be to coordinate and amplify these communications.



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