
Report 3—Conserving Biodiversity

At a Glance

Biological diversity (or biodiversity) refers to the variety of species, ecosystems, and ecological processes found on Earth. Canada is home to approximately 80,000 species of plants and animals. Canadian biodiversity is spread across a wide range of landscapes and ecosystems, but the greatest biodiversity is found in the southern areas where most Canadians live.

Canada's biodiversity is under pressure from urbanization, economic growth, climate change, and our reliance on natural resources. A key challenge for all stakeholders is to balance conserving biodiversity with economic development.

In 2015, Canada announced 19 national biodiversity targets, under four overarching goals.

This audit focused on whether Environment and Climate Change Canada provided national leadership and coordination to conserve Canada's biodiversity. It also examined whether responsible federal departments and agencies were working to meet selected biodiversity conservation targets.

This audit is important because biodiversity underpins the functioning of the ecosystems on which we depend for food and fresh water, health and recreation, and protection from natural disasters. Biodiversity is at risk nationally and globally. In recognition of the urgent need for action to support biodiversity, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2011–2020 as the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity.

We concluded that Environment and Climate Change Canada did not provide effective national leadership and coordination of actions required to meet the 2020 targets to conserve Canada's biodiversity.

We also concluded that the five audited departments and agencies made uneven progress in their efforts to meet the six 2020 biodiversity targets we examined.

Overall, we found that Environment and Climate Change Canada did not provide effective leadership and did not effectively coordinate the actions required to achieve Canada's 2020 biodiversity targets. The Department focused its leadership efforts on broad administrative activities, such as representing Canada at international meetings, creating national committees, and coordinating national reports. The Department worked with federal, provincial, and territorial partners to identify specific actions and initiatives that could support Canada's biodiversity targets but did not analyze whether these actions and initiatives would be sufficient to achieve the targets. Furthermore, the Department did not compile comprehensive information to report on performance and progress toward the 2020 biodiversity targets.

These findings matter because without strong national leadership, Canada's actions may not be effective in meeting the country's targets by 2020. An integrated national approach ensures that actions to conserve biodiversity are coordinated across the country, that progress is tracked, and that any required corrections or improvements can be identified and implemented in time to achieve the biodiversity targets by 2020.

- **Environment and Climate Change Canada did not provide effective leadership and did not effectively coordinate the actions required to achieve Canada's 2020 biodiversity targets**

Recommendation. Environment and Climate Change Canada should work with other responsible federal departments and agencies to establish the federal government’s priorities, actions, and milestones to achieve Canada’s national biodiversity targets.

- **Environment and Climate Change Canada did not compile comprehensive information to report on performance and progress toward the 2020 biodiversity targets**

Recommendation. Environment and Climate Change Canada should regularly compile current and comprehensive information on Canada’s performance and progress toward the 2020 biodiversity targets and make that information publicly available in one accessible location.

Overall, we found uneven progress by the five audited federal departments and agencies in their efforts to meet the six 2020 biodiversity targets we examined. We found that the federal organizations met, or would meet by 2020, the two targets on collecting adequate and relevant information about biodiversity and ecosystem services. We also found that the federal organizations made progress toward two targets pertaining to planning and managing lands and waters, but they were unlikely to fully meet these targets by the 2020 deadline. Lastly, we found that the federal organizations were not working to meet the targets intended to reduce pressures and cumulative effects on biodiversity and promote sustainability in the production and consumption of Canada’s biological resources.

These findings matter because much of Canada’s biodiversity is in decline and needs urgent attention. In our view, the work and efforts of the federal organizations we audited will not be sufficient to reverse this decline.

- **The five audited federal departments and agencies made uneven progress in their efforts to meet the six 2020 biodiversity targets we examined**

Recommendation. Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Parks Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada should identify the improvements and adjustments needed to achieve the 2020 biodiversity targets for which they are responsible.

- **There were limitations with the performance indicators used to track progress toward Canada’s biodiversity targets**

Recommendation. Environment and Climate Change Canada, in collaboration with other responsible federal departments and agencies, should review the indicators used to measure performance and progress toward Canada’s 2020 biodiversity targets to determine whether they are effective. It should also implement improvements where necessary.

The audited entities agree with our recommendations, and have responded (see List of Recommendations).

	Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development
	Performance audit
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity • Climate Change • Environment • Public Administration

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada • Environment and Climate Change Canada • Fisheries and Oceans Canada • Parks Canada • Statistics Canada
	31 December 2017
	24 April 2018
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 6 – Recovery Planning for Species at Risk – 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development • Chapter 1 – Backgrounder on Biological Diversity – 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development • Chapter 5 – Funding Programs for Species at Risk – 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development • Chapter 4 – Protected Areas for Wildlife – 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development • Chapter 2 – Meeting the Goals of the International Convention on Biological Diversity – 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development • Chapter 7 – Ecological Integrity in National Parks – 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development

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