

# ECCC MIDPOINT SUMMARY REPORT



Canadian Biosphere  
Regions Association

Association canadienne  
des régions de biosphère



## INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

This report presents a comprehensive mid-point review of the project called *Supporting the Effort to Identify and Implement Measures to Count Biosphere Reserves Toward Canada Target 1 by 2025* (now 2026), funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada to the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association (now known as the Canadian Biosphere Regions Association, CBRA) and the 19 Canadian biosphere regions (also known as UNESCO-designated biosphere reserves). This report represents findings up until March 2024.

In **Section A**, we delve into the funding case study, **highlighting how this investment has supported biosphere regions' (BRs) build capacity and catalyze action**. This case study explores how targeted investments and partnerships are driving tangible progress in conservation, while also addressing the need for sustained financial support in our rapidly changing climate landscape.

In **Section B**, we shift our focus to the critical work being done on **Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs)** under the 30x30 Canada Target 1 – now Target 3 under the Canada 2030 Nature Strategy. This section underscores the ongoing efforts to support, implement and scale effective conservation measures outside of traditional protected areas. Through a detailed examination of the work taking place, we provide insights into how biosphere regions are supporting OECM recognition and contributing to biodiversity protection and broader environmental sustainability goals.



## THANK YOU

CBRA and the 19 biosphere regions are extremely grateful for the funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada for this work. The investment has catalyzed additional biodiversity conservation work as well as additional capacity within the 19 Canadian biosphere regions which will leave a lasting legacy within the biosphere regions for years to come.

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## SECTION A

# FUNDING THE CANADIAN BIOSPHERE REGIONS: A CASE STUDY

## General Funding Challenges and Opportunities for Nonprofit Organizations

Imagine Canada's report [Strong Charities. Strong Nonprofits. Strong Communities](#) recommends creating funding systems that recognize the real value nonprofits bring. It also calls for more consolidated and longer-term funding so nonprofits don't have to spend so much time chasing short-term grants and can be more efficient and strategic with longer-term funding in place. Short-term grants can cause a multitude of challenges. As nonprofit organizations, biosphere region organizations are well-aware of these challenges. But it's not all bad news. These challenges can be turned into opportunities.

Challenge	Opportunity
<b>Short-Term, Project-Based Funding</b>	Multi-year funding agreements tied to long-term community, environmental, or social outcomes can enhance impact by supporting sustained program delivery.
<b>Lack of Core Operational Support</b>	Core funding enables effective program implementation, staff retention, and organizational resilience. Strong operations lead to stronger outcomes.
<b>Fragmented Funding Landscape and High Demand for Matching Funds</b>	Leverage partnerships and networks to bundle diverse funding sources (e.g., environmental, economic, equity-focused) into cohesive, place-based or mission-aligned initiatives that serve multiple objectives.
<b>Administrative Burden</b>	Collaborate with funders and national organizations to streamline and standardize reporting requirements, reducing redundancy and freeing up capacity for frontline work.



# The Investment by Environment and Climate Change Canada

Since 2022, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) has invested \$23 million into Canada's 19 biosphere regions. This investment is **enabling these community-based organizations to advance conservation efforts that count toward Canada's Target 3—protecting 30% of land and water by 2030.**

ECCC's support empowers biosphere regions to lead on-the-ground actions to identify and recognize Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs), a critical part of Canada's national conservation strategy. (For specific activities funded, please see section B).

## Why Biosphere Regions are a Good Investment

Funding biosphere regions helps connect local efforts with Canada's national and global goals for nature, climate, and communities.



### Place-based Solutions

Biosphere regions are ideal vehicles for conservation investment. These locally governed, globally recognized areas that serve as innovation hubs for sustainable development. They integrate science, community priorities, and Indigenous knowledge into conservation solutions.



### Local, National & Global Relevance

ECCC's funding model demonstrates how federal investments can align local action with international commitments—like the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework— and nationalization of those commitments – like the Canada 2030 Nature Strategy - while also supporting community resilience and climate goals.



### A Scalable Model

The organizations behind biosphere regions are independent organizations. CBRA's national coordination and community of practice model ensures lessons are shared, knowledge is transferred and scaled across the country.

## Financial Return on Investment

In the 2023–2024 fiscal year, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) invested \$5.97 million in Canada's biosphere regions. This federal contribution was matched by an additional \$2.33 million in direct cash contributions and \$6.61 million in in-kind support from other partners and funders—resulting in a total of \$8.94 million in matching resources. Combined, the total investment into the biosphere network reached \$14.9 million for the year. This represents a leverage ratio of 1.5 to 1, meaning that for **every dollar provided by ECCC, biosphere regions and their partners were able to raise \$1.50 in additional support**. This strong return on investment highlights the biosphere model's ability to mobilize new resources, expand impact, and attract diverse partnerships.

## The Multiple Benefits of Funding Biosphere Regions

Funding biosphere regions through a national network helps everyone involved—funders, local organizations, and the national association—work together more effectively and efficiently to support nature, climate, and communities within these 19 regions.

### For Funders

Funders benefit from an efficient process where they can back a unified national vision while supporting measurable, locally-driven outcomes. With the ability to scale investments and tailor them to specific regional needs, funders can maximize their impact, fostering both local action and national progress toward sustainability goals.

The collective of 19 biosphere regions supported by the Canadian Biosphere Regions Association has to date identified 30,000 hectares of potential Other Effective Conservation Measures, with many submitted to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database. (For more information on BR work on OECMs, see section B.) In addition to the financial returns, the collective impact of BR work contributing to Target 3 is far more impressive than by one BR on its own.

And by working with CBRA, the work benefits 2.6 million Canadians (or approximately 1 in 20 Canadians) in over 270 municipalities and 45 First Nations.



## For Biosphere Regions

Participating in the national network of biosphere regions offers valuable access to a wide range of training, tools, and peer learning opportunities. This creates a strong foundation for regional growth and development. Each biosphere region has the flexibility to prioritize local needs and implement solutions that best suit their unique context, all while working within a unified national framework. Sustained funding plays a pivotal role in enhancing the visibility and longevity of biosphere regions, which in turn builds trust with landowners, local communities, and other stakeholders. This support fosters strong partnerships that are essential for effective conservation and sustainable development.

## For the National Association

The streamlined reporting process, supported by the national association, helps reduce the administrative burden on both biosphere regions and funders while improving communication between funders and their grantees. By offering tools, guidance, and shared frameworks for data collection, storytelling, and policy alignment, CBRA helps amplify the collective impact of all biosphere regions. This coordinated approach supports the replication of successful models, enables knowledge-sharing across regions, and ensures alignment with national and global priorities. The national network helps make the work of biosphere regions more cohesive, visible, and effective.



# CONCLUSION

Nonprofit organizations, including those leading Canada's biosphere regions, face persistent funding challenges that limit their ability to plan strategically and scale their impact. However, these challenges also present key opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and long-term investment. As the biosphere model demonstrates, when funders invest in multi-year initiatives, they enable nonprofit organizations to deliver meaningful, measurable outcomes. The national coordination provided by CBRA strengthens these efforts, amplifying local actions into a cohesive national contribution to biodiversity, climate resilience, and community well-being.



Photo : Yves Rouleau



## Biodiversity Conservation in Canada's Biosphere Regions

Biodiversity is the foundation of healthy ecosystems, providing essential services such as clean air and water, food security, climate regulation, and cultural value. Its conservation is vital for the well-being of both nature and people, especially as we face increasing pressures from climate change, habitat loss, and pollution. Canadian biosphere regions (BRs) play a unique role in biodiversity conservation by bridging scientific research, local knowledge, and community action. Through a holistic and place-based approach, they integrate conservation with sustainable development and supports long-term stewardship across diverse landscapes. This model enables collaborative efforts among Indigenous Nations, local governments, landowners, and civil society to protect and restore biodiversity while fostering resilient communities.

Having an area(s) of significant biodiversity is a pre-requisite for becoming an UNESCO biosphere reserve (BR).



BRs support the conservation of both biological and cultural diversity.



## Biodiversity Conservation in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves



To become a biosphere reserve (also known as a biosphere region), a community-led nomination process must first apply to UNESCO for consideration in the global Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. The main focus of the MAB Programme is to bring local solutions to global problems including the loss of biodiversity.

Using a whole of society approach, BR organizations support biodiversity conservation, climate action, sustainable development, and reconciliation actions in their region.



The core zone of a BR has the highest levels of biodiversity and the buffer zone of a BR supports the conservation of the core zone.



## Project Overview

The goal of the Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) investment was to support Canada's biosphere regions in identifying and recognizing Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) that count toward the 30% protection target by 2030. This funding enabled the biosphere regions to carry out essential groundwork to support OECM recognition: stewardship and restoration; land acquisition; planning and engagement; and research, monitoring, documentation, and analysis.

**Stewardship and Restoration:**  
This could include the restoration of riparian, wetland, forest, and prairie habitats will enhance existing and establish new areas of high biodiversity while considering ecosystem needs.

**Land Acquisition**  
This could include the lead or support of the long-term protection of a property with high existing or potential biodiversity.

**Biodiversity Conservation in Canada's Biosphere Regions**

Each **Canadian biosphere reserve/region (BR)** is working to restore, maintain, and enhance biodiversity conservation within their buffer zones. How it is implemented and what aspects are included are dependent on the local context. All work is contributing to helping Canada with its biodiversity conservation goals.

**Planning and Engagement:**  
This could include the co-development of long-term goals and management needs of a property or region as it relates to the conservation of biodiversity.

**Research, Monitoring, Documenting, Analysis:**  
This could include identifying existing and potential areas of high biodiversity to further evaluate, filling in knowledge gaps, and identifying project target areas.

Each biosphere region tailored its approach to fit the local landscape, community needs, and conservation opportunities—demonstrating the power of place-based implementation.



## OECD Criteria and the Role of Biosphere Regions

To be recognized as an OECD, a site must:

- Have defined boundaries
- Deliver long-term, in-situ biodiversity conservation
- Have a governance or management system that ensures protection

Biosphere regions play a vital role in advancing conservation and sustainability by identifying areas of high biodiversity that are essential for protecting species and ecosystem services. They support Indigenous-led conservation priorities, recognizing the deep knowledge and leadership of Indigenous communities in caring for the land and fostering long-term environmental stewardship. The biosphere regions actively engage municipalities and private landowners, building local partnerships that encourage land-use practices aligned with ecological health. By filling critical data gaps, biosphere regions contribute to a more complete understanding of local ecosystems, which informs better decision-making. They also lead and support stewardship and restoration initiatives that enhance the ecological value of landscapes, helping to maintain and recover the health and resilience of natural systems in the face of environmental change.

## Summary of Key Actions by Canadian Biosphere Regions

Category	Examples
<b>OECD Site Identification</b>	30,000 ha identified as of July 2024, with multiple submissions to CPCAD
<b>Data Collection</b>	Inventories, species tracking, ecological mapping
<b>Restoration &amp; Stewardship</b>	Reforestation, wetland rehabilitation, invasive species removal
<b>Land Acquisition</b>	Easements and purchases with conservation organizations
<b>Indigenous Support</b>	Support for IPCAs, integration of Traditional Knowledge
<b>Management Planning</b>	Strategic planning, zoning, restoration mapping
<b>Education &amp; Outreach</b>	Public engagement campaigns, landowner education, youth summits



## Examples of the Work

It is important to point out that this is just a snapshot of only some of the projects happening by some of the Canadian biosphere regions at a moment in time (ending March 31, 2024). This project is on-going until March 31, 2026.

### OECM (Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures)

The goal of this project is to support the recognition of OECMs within biosphere regions, which includes work ranging from supporting landowners in submitting candidate sites to filling in data and planning gaps required for future recognition. By July 2024, biosphere regions had identified 30,000 hectares of potential OECMs, with many submitted to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD).

### What does this look like in the Canadian biosphere regions ?

For example, the **Fundy Biosphere Region (NB)** partnered with local municipalities to identify over 2,000 hectares for potential recognition; of these, with 9 hectares successfully submitted for recognition consideration. The **Manicouagan–Uapishka Biosphere Region (QC)** completed detailed spatial analyses to help assess the current state of biodiversity and identify potential areas for recognition as OECMs and/or protected areas. The **Frontenac Arch Biosphere Region (ON)** achieved recognition for 13 nature reserves and 9 conservation areas, adding 2,471 hectares of previously unreported land to the CPCAD with another 14 candidate areas (2,286 hectares) submitted for recognition consideration in 2024. And the **Mont-Saint-Hilaire Biosphere Region (QC)** worked with the government of Quebec to develop guidelines for the OECMs and once adopted, they submitted 4 OECM proposals for recognition consideration. Two of these proposals were recently officially recognized as OECMs and were among the first in Quebec.

### Monitoring and Data Collection

Biosphere regions have led efforts to build and refine biodiversity baseline data through data compilation, inventories, species assessments, and mapping. This knowledge supports habitat restoration prioritization and site identification for OECM recognition. Monitoring activities include tracking species at risk and areas of high biodiversity value, and building long-term data systems.

As examples, the **Redberry Lake Biosphere Region (SK)** monitored bird and bat species and evaluate plant communities. The **Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region (BC)** supported Coho Salmon (cuwit) monitoring within 77,000 hectares of newly designated conservancies. The **Charlevoix Biosphere Region (QC)** undertook spatial analyses to map ecological networks, assess ecosystem services, and prioritize conservation zones. And the **Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Biosphere Region (BC)** renewed monitoring of Rockfish Conservation Areas.



## Stewardship and Restoration

Stewardship and restoration activities enhance ecosystem health, biodiversity, and the long-term viability of potential OECMs. They also support ecologically responsible land use by improving degraded areas and maintaining ecological functions. And they provide enhancements to areas that wouldn't qualify as areas of high biodiversity value.

Examples of this work include from the **Southwest Nova Biosphere Region (NS)** where they restored the Big Meadow Bog by installing water management infrastructure to address eutrophication. The **Fundy Biosphere Region (NB)** planted over 25,000 native trees of 12 native Wabanaki (Acadian) forest species. The **Beaver Hills Biosphere Region (AB)** introduced an incentive program, focused on supporting rural residential property owners wishing to improve the condition of natural assets on their properties. And the **Mont-Saint-Hilaire Biosphere Region (QC)** restored a natural areas which were invaded by invasive exotic plants which can now be reviewed as a potential OECM.

## Land Acquisition

Permanent legal protection of ecologically valuable sites helps meet biodiversity targets and support OECM recognition. Biosphere regions can play a direct or supporting role in acquiring lands or securing conservation easements for their protection in perpetuity.

For example, the **Southwest Nova Biosphere Region (NS)** supported the legal protection of 551 hectares. The **Mont-Saint-Hilaire Biosphere Region (QC)** directly secured 82.61 hectares for perpetual protection since the start of the project. And the **Waterton Biosphere Region (AB)** supported conservation easements on 1,134 hectares through collaboration with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Southern Alberta Land Trust Society.

## Supporting Indigenous-led Conservation

Biosphere regions collaborate with Indigenous Nations to support Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, aligning biosphere regions and land management with Indigenous knowledge, priorities, and governance.

In the **Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region (BC)**, the biosphere region and their partners have helped strengthen capacity within the Ahousaht and Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations to achieve the conservancy designation of 77,000 hectares. The **Redberry Lake Biosphere Region (SK)** has engaged six Nations with Treaty Land Entitlement parcels in the area, including Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation.



The **Waterton Biosphere Region (AB)** supports the Kainai Ecosystem Protection Association (KEPA) through capacity-building initiatives. The **Mont-Saint-Hilaire Biosphere Region (QC)** worked with the W8banaki Nation to integrate their priorities in regard to land protection and compatible traditional activities for the biosphere region territory. And the **Frontenac Arch Biosphere Region (ON)** has collaborated with members of local First Nations to monitor and restore culturally important species such as Wild rice and Lake Sturgeon.

## Management Planning

Management planning enables landowners and partners to structure their conservation goals and actions over time, helping ensure ecosystems are protected and managed for long-term resilience and potential OECM recognition.

For example, the **Átl'ka7tsem /Howe Sound Biosphere Region (BC)** compiled environmental and jurisdictional data into an online platform for use in land use decision-making. To advance biodiversity conservation, the **Georgian Bay Mnidoo Gamii Biosphere (ON)** launched the Natural Asset Management Planning project as an information-gathering and mapping initiative to support local partners identify and integrate ecological values into local decision-making, stewardship, and ecosystem services assessments. The **Beaver Hills Biosphere Region (AB)** created a "State of the Biosphere" digital story map showcasing regional ecological and governance data and is developing a Management Implementation Plan which to support municipalities in program development. And the **Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (BC)** participated in the development of a 10-year management plan for the French Creek Estuary Nature Preserve, now recognized as a Protected Area.

## Education and Awareness

Outreach and education are key to fostering public understanding of conservation issues, increasing support for protected areas, and enabling community-led biodiversity actions.


For example, the **Georgian Bay Mnidoo Gamii Biosphere (ON)** coordinated events with cottage associations and delivered community bioblitzes, including initiatives like "Kids in the Biosphere" and biodiversity education programs in Provincial Parks. The **Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Biosphere Region (BC)** developed a Biosphere 101 course with learning modules for the tourism and outdoor recreation sectors. The **Mont-Saint-Hilaire Biosphere Region (QC)** worked with the W8banaki Nation to integrate their priorities in regard to land protection and compatible traditional activities for the Biosphere Region territory.



# Canadian Biosphere Regions Association Accomplishments


The Canadian Biosphere Regions Association (CBRA) plays a different role than local biosphere regions—but it's a really important one. CBRA helps make big, national projects possible by connecting all the biosphere regions while building capacity and support they need to succeed.

Here's how :




### Sharing Biodiversity Knowledge

CBRA helps biosphere regions stay up to date on nature, science, and environmental policy. They do this by hosting regular meetings, sending out newsletters, sharing helpful tools, and keeping an online library of resources. This helps regions learn from each other, use what works, and build stronger local projects. CBRA also hosts a National Gathering every year so people can share ideas, get training, and connect in person.




### Supporting Reconciliation Work

CBRA brings biosphere regions together through online calls and in-person events to support local reconciliation efforts with Indigenous Nations. These spaces let people learn from each other and build relationships based on respect, especially when regions have similar land, cultures, or local priorities.



### Promoting the Big Picture

CBRA collects stories and data from biosphere regions to show their impact to funders, government, and partners—like in this report! They help raise the profile of biosphere regions across Canada and provide tools to help regions tell their own stories too.



### Growing Skills and Teamwork

Through convening communities of practice focused on operations, communication, and fundraising, CBRA helps biosphere regions learn new skills and share what works. This builds a stronger network where regions learn from each other, support each other and grow together.

## Lessons Learned

### 1 **Place-based collaboration yields measurable conservation outcomes**

Biosphere regions have identified over 30,000 hectares for OECM recognition by leveraging partnerships with municipalities, landowners, and Indigenous Nations, demonstrating the power of local collaboration for national goals

### 2 **Monitoring and data systems are essential foundations for conservation planning**

From species tracking to ecological mapping, biosphere regions are investing in long-term data collection that informs restoration efforts, management planning, and site recognition.

### 3 **Restoration projects support ecological integrity and community stewardship**

Activities like wetland rehabilitation, native tree planting, and invasive species removal not only enhance biodiversity but also build local engagement and create future opportunities for OECM designation.

### 4 **Supporting Indigenous-led conservation strengthens outcomes and relationships**

Integration of Traditional Knowledge and partnership with Indigenous Nations—such as supporting IPCAs and culturally significant species restoration—enhances both ecological and cultural resilience.

### 5 **Strategic management planning builds long-term capacity**

Tools like digital story maps, online decision-making platforms, and natural asset inventories equip communities and municipalities with the information needed to integrate conservation into land-use decisions.

### 6 **Education and outreach empower lasting public engagement**

Education initiatives broaden awareness, help to mainstream biodiversity and foster community-driven conservation action.





## CONCLUSION

The collective efforts of Canadian biosphere regions reveal the power of community-led conservation grounded in place-based knowledge, partnerships, and reconciliation. These lessons underscore how biosphere regions are not only advancing national biodiversity goals, but also serving as living laboratories for inclusive, scalable solutions. With continued support from the Canadian Biosphere Regions Association (CBRA), this network is growing stronger, more connected, and better equipped to lead transformative environmental action across Canada.

