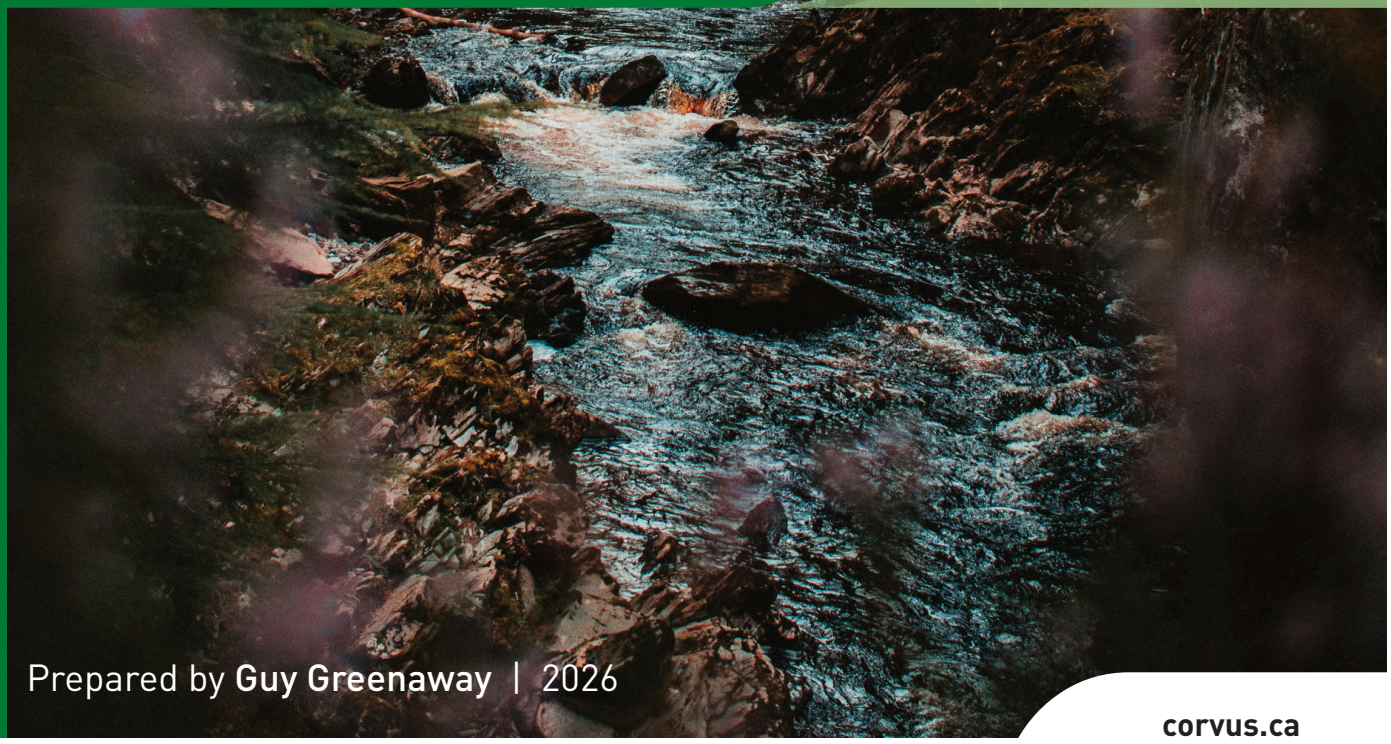


CORVUSCENTRE
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PRIMER

Area-Based Conservation Designations

A Primer for Canadian Land Trusts



Prepared by **Guy Greenaway** | 2026

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Area-Based Conservation Designations

A Primer for Canadian Land Trusts

PREPARED BY

Guy Greenaway

October 2026

Corvus Centre for Conservation Policy
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

corvus.ca

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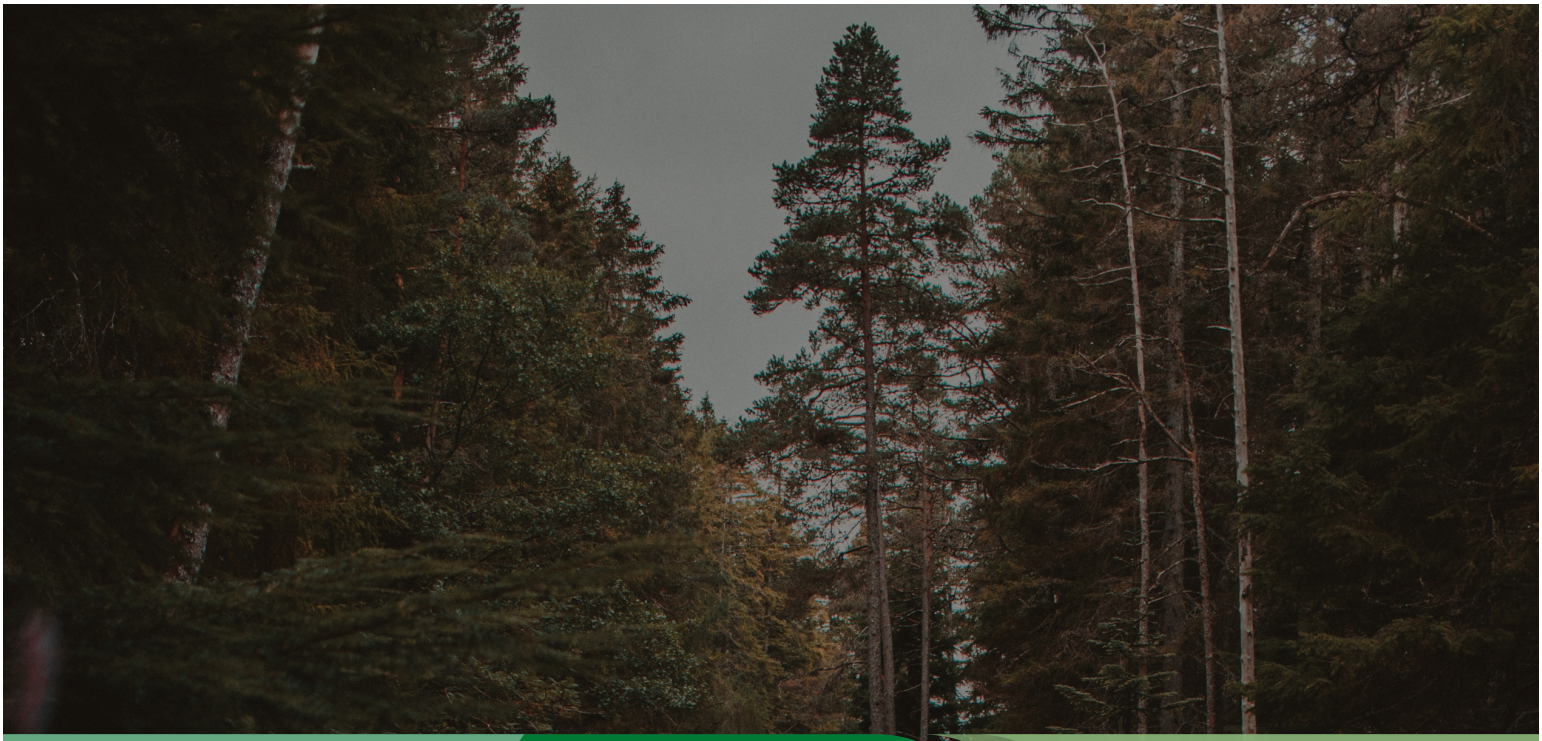
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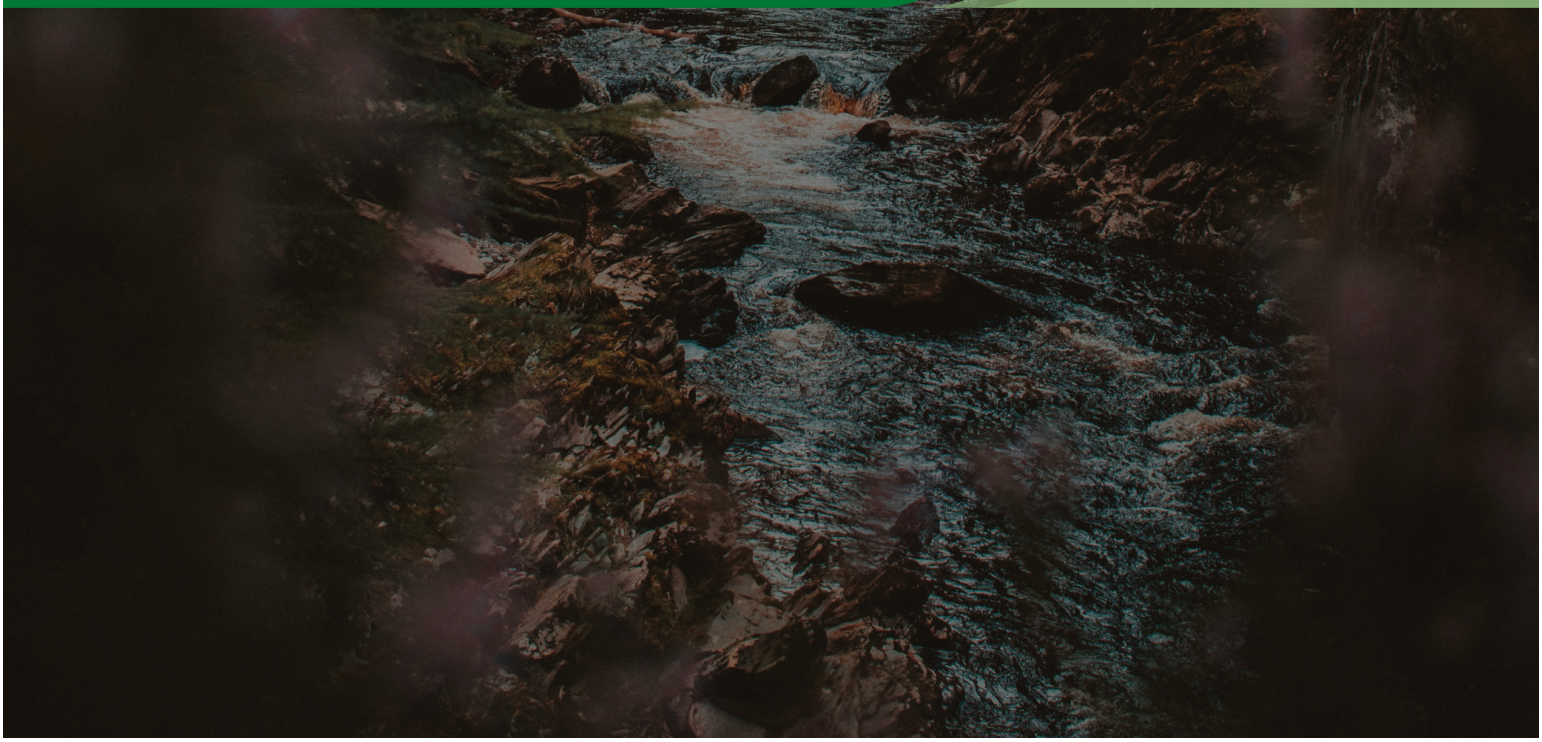
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Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Recognition of the value of land trusts' area-based conservation work (placing land use constraints on properties in favour of nature) is increasing.

Recognition of the value of land trusts' area-based conservation work (placing land use constraints on properties in favour of nature) is increasing within the Protected Areas community, with Privately Protected Areas now a well-recognized moniker. However, debates swirl nationally and internationally as to what exactly constitutes "area-based conservation", and more specifically what are Protected Areas (PAs) versus the vaguely-described Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

Land trusts have not been involved in these discussions, begging the question as to whether they should engage, and whether this dialogue actually relates to private land conservation. While pressure for land trusts to be involved has largely been external, concerns of reputational degradation, increasing requirements to report to the national database, and the need to control the land trust narrative suggest land trusts should take notice, and be informed regarding this discussion. This primer was created to provide the vital background context for the land trust community's involvement in the discussion.

The starting point for understanding the basic terminology is the globally-agreed-to definitions. The International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUCN) defines a Protected Area (PA) as:

> *A clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values*.

... and an Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (OECM) as:

> *A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity,' with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values.*

Both protect in situ biodiversity, but Protected Areas have that as a primary management goal, and OECMs have it as a secondary or unstated goal.

concerns of reputational degradation, increasing requirements to report to the national database, and the need to control the land trust narrative suggest land trusts should take notice, and be informed regarding this discussion

At the international level, the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA) offers a repository of Protected Areas data, but also functions to establish data standards, ensure adherence to the agreed-upon conception of a Protected Area, allow valid comparisons, and help track progress on the variety of goals to which Protected Areas and OECMs contribute.

At the national level, Canadian conservation agencies and organizations can report to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD), data for which are then transmitted to the WDPCA.

Motivations for reporting to the national or international databases vary significantly between the international conservation community, national and sub-national governments, and individual land trusts.

Data for individual area-based conservation projects must be submitted by the owner of the data, but verified by whatever process each database requires. Submitters to the databases can avail themselves of the significant amount of guidance developed and available from the Convention on Biological Diversity, IUCN, and WDPCA managers (for the international database) and from the Pathway to Target 1 / Canada Conservation initiative (for the Canadian database).

Though much work has been done, challenges still exist for land trusts wanting to submit projects, including guidance being inapplicable to the land trust circumstance, confusion between 'jurisdictions' and 'governing authorities', the singular focus on maximizing submitted hectares, and poor integration with the unique privacy and data sharing constraints inherent with working on private land.

While land trusts are increasingly pressed by external forces to submit to these databases, there has been no tailor-made guidance for the land trusts that begins with the tools they use, and references the circumstances within which they exist.



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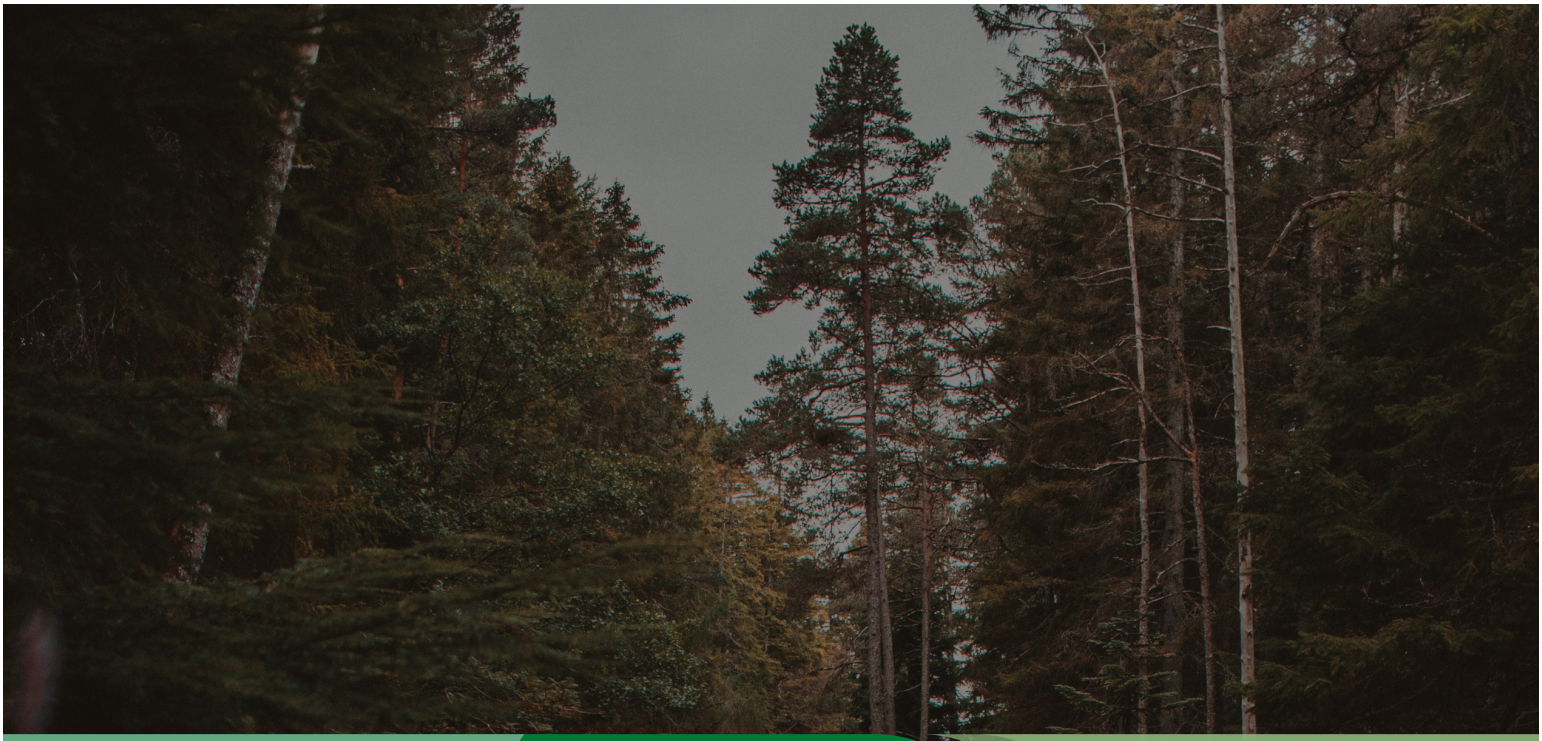
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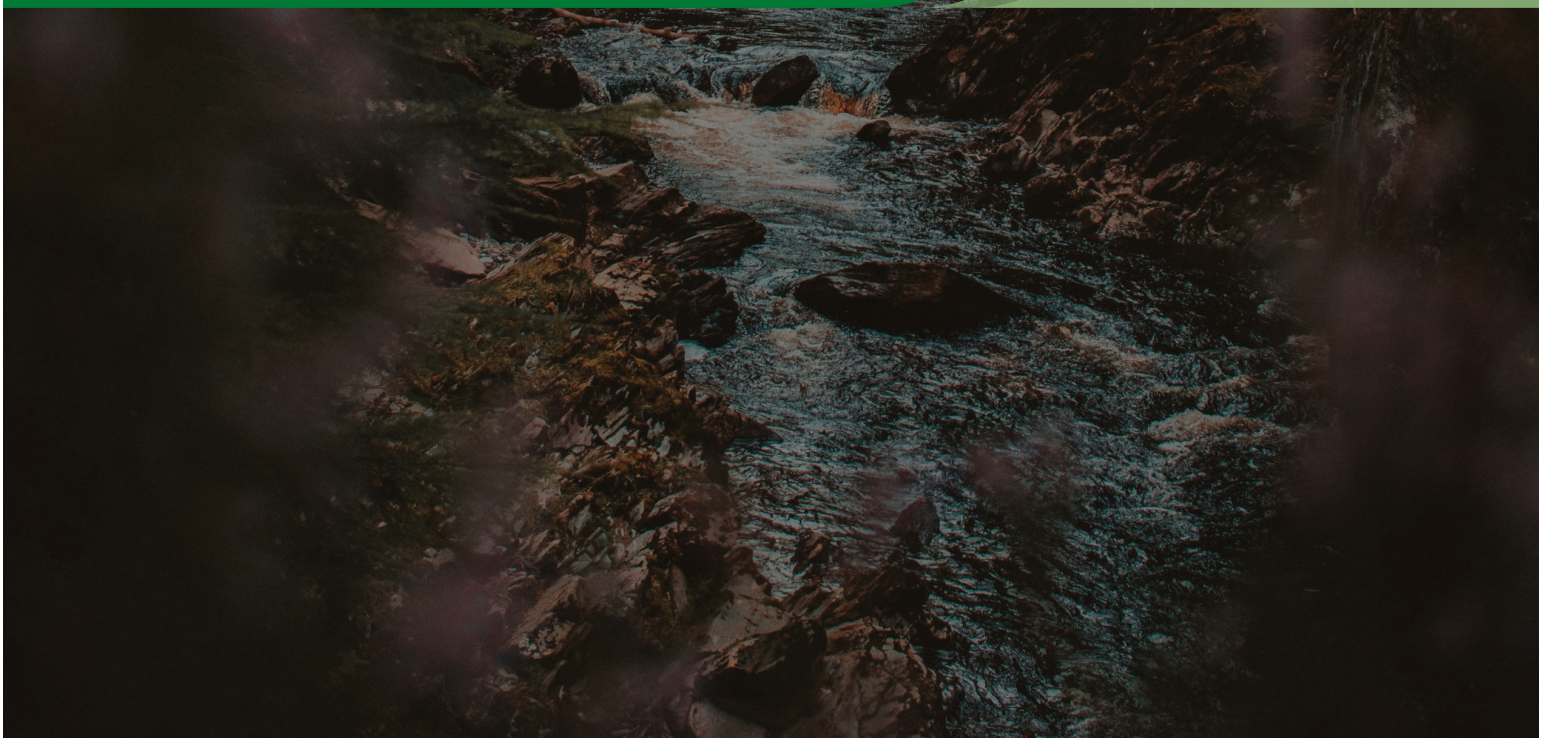
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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction



Introduction

Across Across the country, there is increasing recognition of the value of the area-based biodiversity conservation being undertaken by land trusts[1] and other non-government actors. For nature-conservation land trusts, this is acquiring land in fee simple or acquiring an enduring easement or other servitude for conservation purposes.

'Area-based conservation'[2] differs from other nature stewardship efforts in that it focuses on placing certain land and resource use constraints on a defined area of land, in favour of protecting the natural features and systems present there.

The Global Biodiversity Framework – to which Canada is a signatory – targets many necessary actions to address the biodiversity crisis, such as reducing invasive species, reducing pollution risks, sustainable management of natural resources, biodiversity-inclusive urban planning, government policy, sustainable consumption, etc. However, core to this the effort is the use of "protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures" (CBD 2022).

That statement – "protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures" – has generated considerable heartburn in the protected areas community. The CBD's effort to recognize area-based conservation efforts that do not meet the IUCN[3] definition of "protected area", provoked characterizations from messiah to monster. Despite never being proposed as a designation, this new creature sinned most by not having an acronym; thus the first letter on each word was capitalized, and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) were born. And despite the CBD referring to protected areas as one type of 'conservation' measure, OECMs have come to be called 'Conserved Areas' in some circles – generating fewer letters and more confusion.

1 'Land trust' is a generic term for not-for-profit, registered charities with a mandate to conserve biodiversity (or other values) on privately held lands. These may be local, regional, provincial, or national, and may use the phrase 'land trust' or 'conservancy' or neither in their name. Most land trusts focus on biodiversity conservation, but many focus on agriculture, Indigenous culture, recreation, scenery, etc., or even a mix of these. This document uses the term 'land trust' to refer to all such organizations, and focuses on land trusts with a biodiversity conservation mandate.

2 See *Appendix 1: Terminology* for a guide to the most common jargon in this report.

3 The International Union for the Protection of Nature (IUCN) is the international organization relied on by countries and conservation organizations around the world to articulate what is nature conservation and to measure its progress.

Caught in the crossfire was area-based conservation on private land.

For the most part land trusts have not been involved in these debates nor the subsequent assessment, designation, and reporting battles. But when all your neighbours are battling, passive neutrality is rarely an option.

So what are *Protected Areas*, *Privately Protected Areas*, *Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures / Conserved Areas*? How do they relate to private land conservation[4]? And perhaps first off, why should land trusts care?

This primer was created to answer those questions for the land trust community. It is intended to lay the informational groundwork for those brave souls willing to dive into assessing private area-based conservation projects, and reporting them to the international and national databases.

However, assessment and reporting are dealt with in detail by the two companion documents in this three-part series:

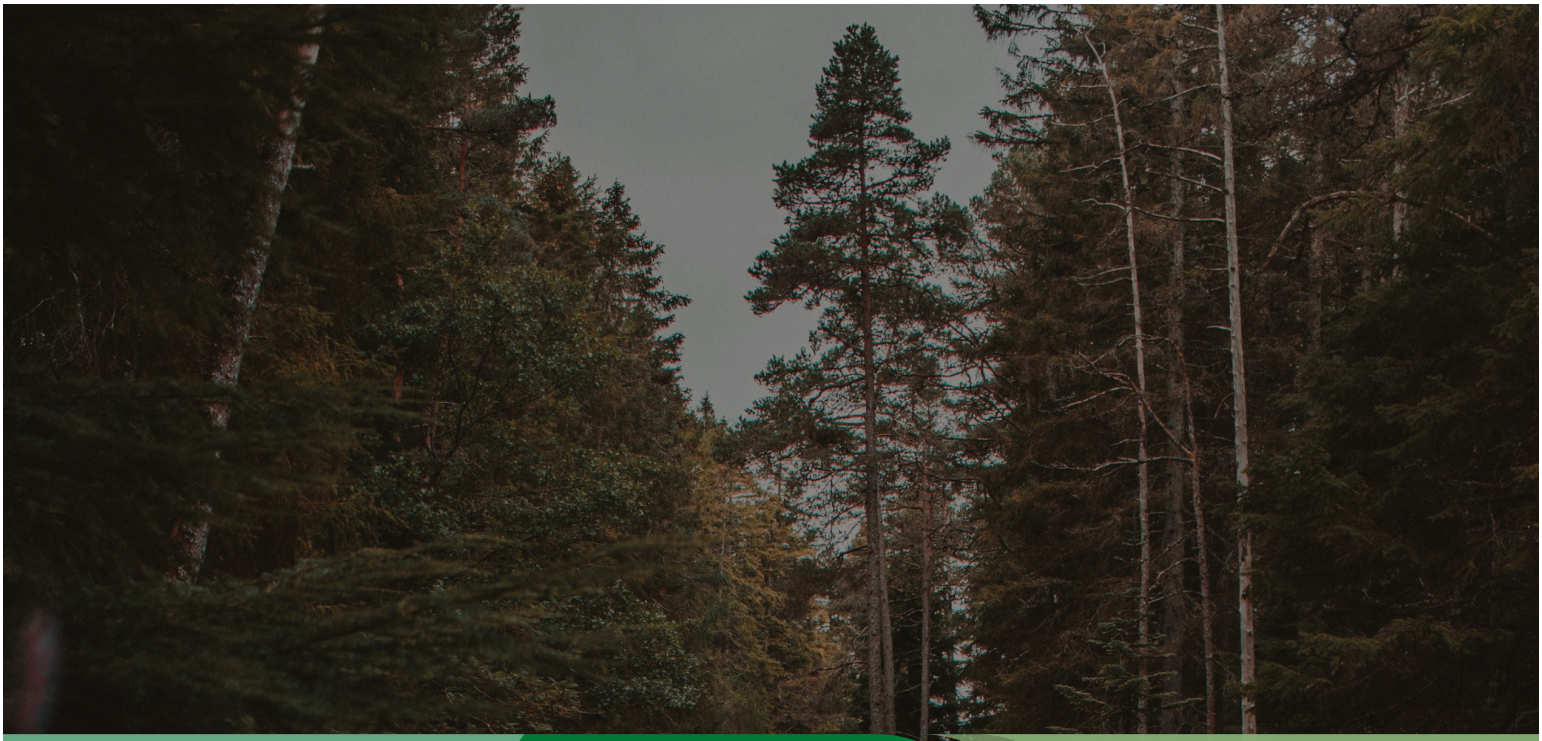
TWO: Designating Private Area-Based Conservation Sites: A Decision-Support Guide for Canadian Land Trusts

- While the Primer lays out the basics of Privately Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, this decision-support tool uses the globally-accepted IUCN definitions for these designations, and provides a detailed basis for assessing private land conservation projects to determine if they constitute area-based conservation (i.e., Protected Areas, OECMs, or neither).

THREE: Reporting Private Area-Based Conservation Sites: A Guide to the Databases for Canadian Land Trusts

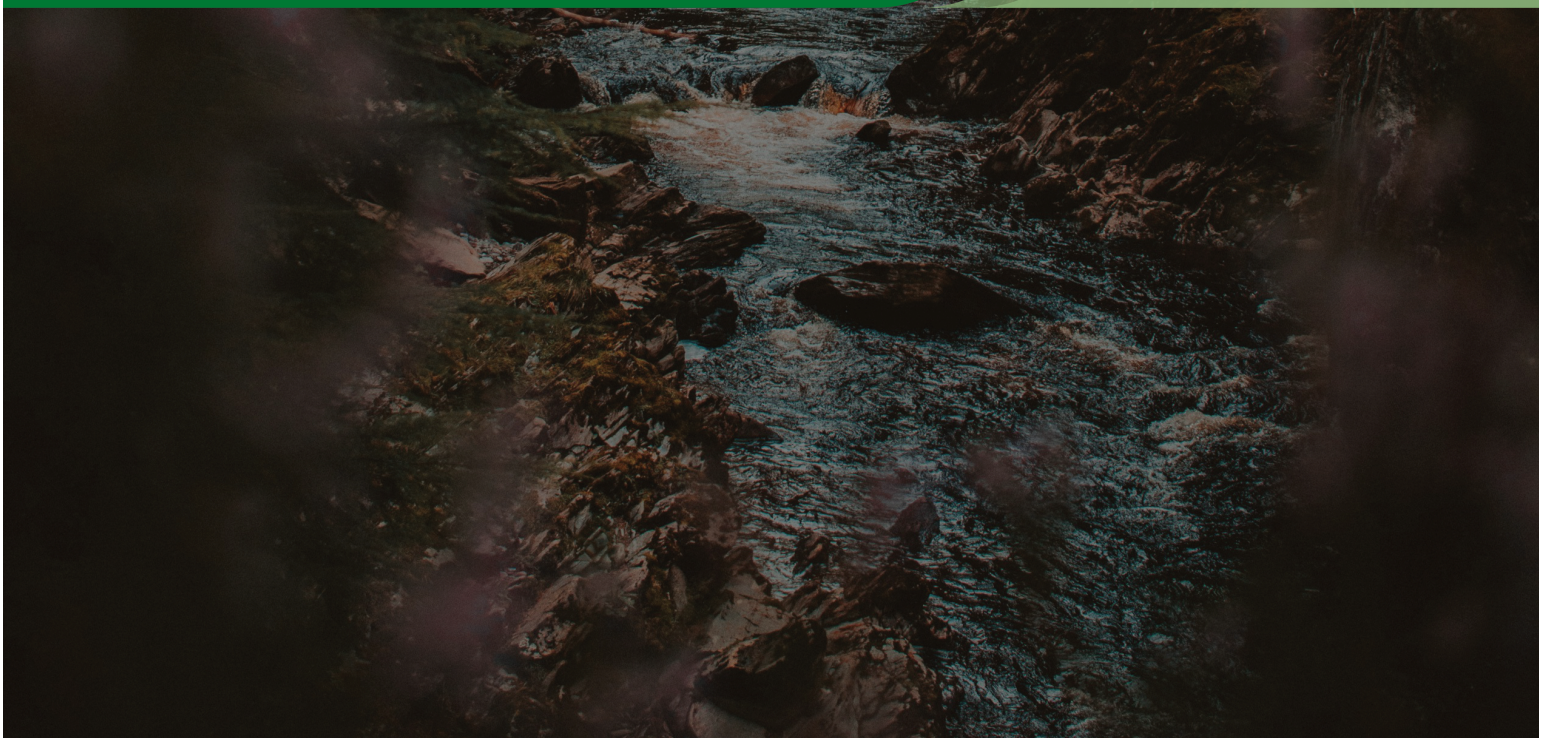
- The guide to the databases takes the next step. Once a land trust has a basis for their assessment of a private land conservation project, and determined it meets the IUCN criteria for area-based conservation, this step-by-step guide shows land trusts how to translate that into the fields of the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (WDPCA) and the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD).

4 'Private land conservation' is broader than just land trust work, and encompasses projects by for-profit companies, religious entities, and even local governments who work with private landowners. This document, however, will be limited to the private land conservation work of land trusts.



CHAPTER 2:

Why the Private Land Conservation Sector Should Care



Why the Private Land Conservation Sector Should Care

Perhaps the most important question is one that receives very little attention: Why should land trusts even care about this grand labelling debate?

While this seemingly-academic question suggests little practical consequence to the sector, the issue is increasingly seeping into the funding, promotional, and partnership dynamics of Canada's private land conservation sector. Therefore, this debate is important for land trusts – both as individual organizations and for the sector as a whole – for at least three fundamental reasons:

1. Reputational degradation
2. Reporting to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD)
3. Information and story-sharing

Reputational Degradation

Increasingly, the land trust narrative is being written without the involvement of the land trust sector. These extra-sector conversations have unfortunately resulted (largely out of ignorance rather than malice) in an emerging narrative that private land conservation produces few 'real' Protected Areas, and results mostly in 'Conserved Areas', which are (erroneously) perceived as second rate. That Protected Area v Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures debate created an unfortunate one-two punch, where OECMs were first derided as 'lesser' (not true), and then private land conservation was deemed to produce only OECMs (again, not true).

Reporting to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD)

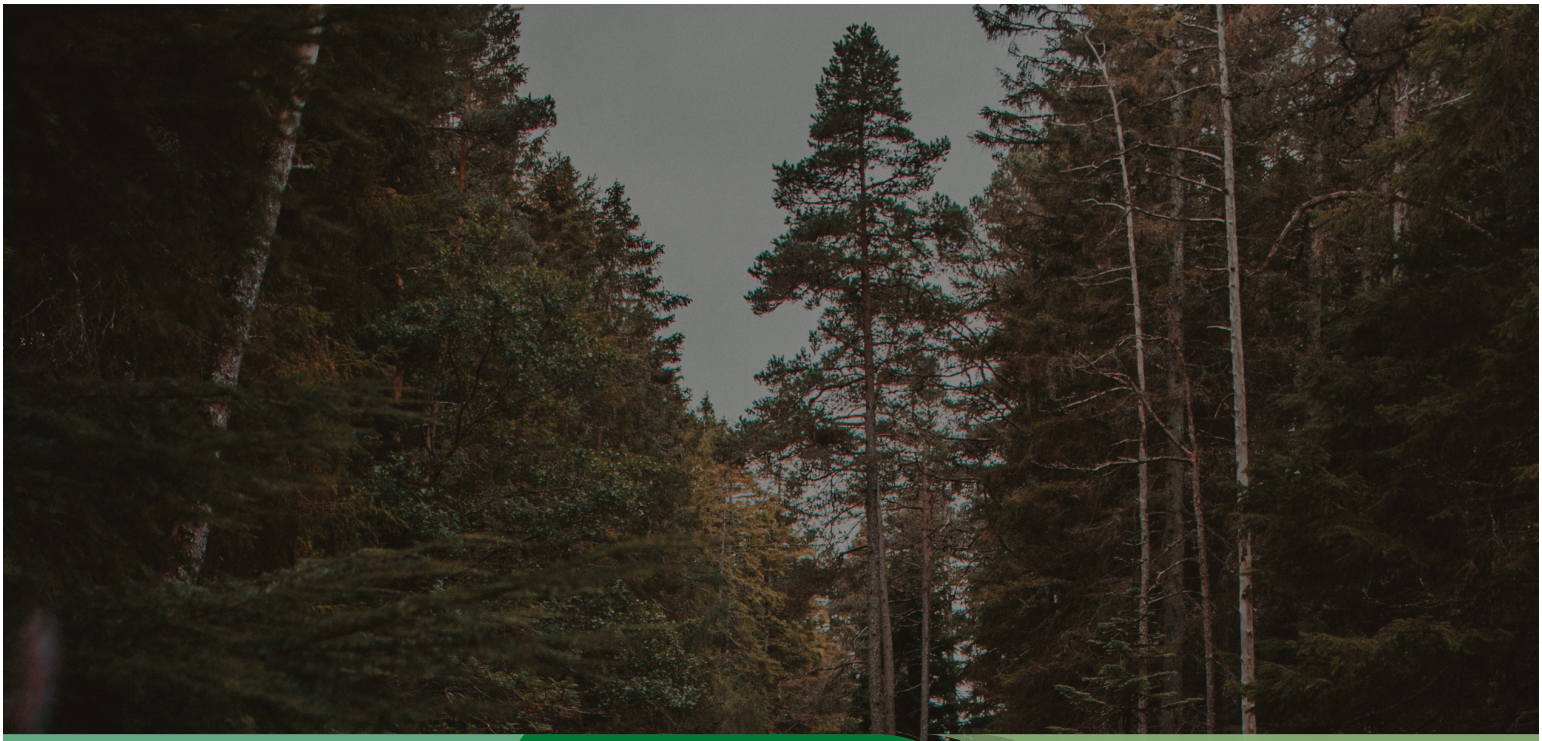
Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial (FPT) governments came together to create the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD), which is currently managed by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Originally designed by managers of publicly-protected areas, it has from its origins represented a challenge for municipally-protected areas, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, and Privately Protected Areas in terms of reporting their unique style of area-based conservation projects. The OECM v PA debate then added a new layer of confusion. While land trusts initially had little interest or incentive to participate in these database battles, they are increasingly on the radar due to funding and reporting expectations that their projects be included in CPCAD.

Information and Story-sharing

In the mid 1990s, when Canada's provinces and territories were adopting enabling conservation easement[5] legislation, public perception of private land conservation was very positive, based on its efficiency, ability to help private landowners achieve their conservation goals, and enduring conservation capacity. Now, that positive view is facing erosion. Telling the story of land trusts has never been more critical, nor perhaps as hard. The sector needs to take control of their narrative, and the 'Protected Area vs OECM' realm is a critical one for that.

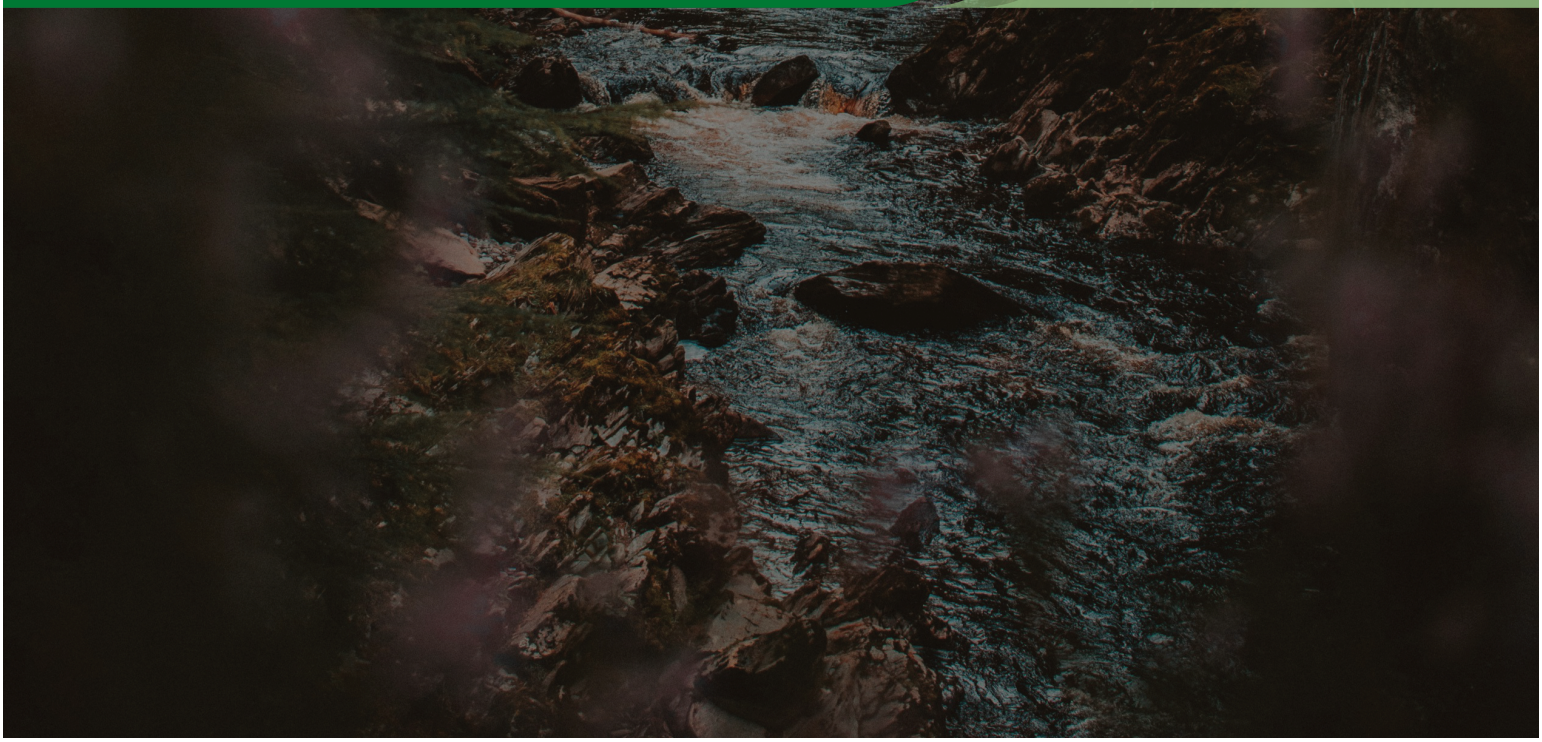
Now, that positive view is facing erosion. Telling the story of land trusts has never been more critical, nor perhaps as hard. The sector needs to take control of their narrative, and the 'Protected Area vs OECM' realm is a critical one for that

5 In this report, the term Conservation Easement is used to refer to legislatively-enabled private-property easements and covenants that apply positive and/or negative requirements on the owner of a property in favour of protecting the identified conservation values of a property. Canadian provincial and territorial law enabling this tool may refer to these as Conservation Easements, Conservation Covenants, and/or Conservation Agreements.



CHAPTER 3:

Area-Based Conservation Designations Explained



Area-Based Conservation Designations Explained

Protected Areas

For several decades now, the exercise of defining what is a 'Protected Area' has been ongoing, international, robust, and challenging (Phillips 2007). The competing paradigms are: **general perception** (what the public assumes), **bureaucratic** (dogmatic, singular, and definitional), and **ecological** (does nature actually persist and thrive). Added to this is the extreme variation in national approaches, and the need to endure beyond current-day fads.

Since the 1960s (Dudley 2008, Stolton et al 2013), the IUCN has been working on this problem, and during that time has developed and refined two invaluable references for Protected Areas:

- A definition of a Protected Area, and
- A management-based categorization schema for Protected Areas

'Protected Area' Defined

The IUCN defines a Protected Area (PA) as:

> *"A clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values"*. (Stolton et al 2013)

Honed and tested over many years and many countries, this definition provides a solid basis for answering the case-by-case question 'is this a Protected Area?' It does so by assessing the component elements of dedication, governance, management, and intent.

The limits of the definition are of course in the details. What constitutes an adequate 'dedication'? What are the other 'effective means' and how do we know they are effective? What constitutes 'long-term? Et cetera. But with the elements laid out, a framework now existed for exactly this exercise.

Protected Area Management Categories

Another pervasive challenge with defining Protected Areas was the wide international and organizational scope. With such a variety of governance types and management approaches, reconciling such apparently different creatures and gathering them under one umbrella term was daunting. And necessary.

To address this, the *International Union for the Protection of Nature* (IUCN) created a set of six (6) all-encompassing management categories that ran the spectrum from a 'strict protection' approach to 'sustainable use.' All categories meet the definition of a Protected Area, but the system recognizes there are different paths to that outcome, which result in different looks and implies different needs (IUCN/WCMC. 1994, Dudley 2008, Stolton et al 2013).

The categories are, of course, not perfect. There is an (understandable) inherent bias in these management categories towards government-protected areas, especially those dedicated at the national level. And extensive human activity (such as recreation) is generally – and curiously – deemed ecologically benign.

This is also where public perception clashes with bureaucratic dogma. Very few areas in the world with the words 'national park' in their name, for example, would likely constitute a *Category II: National Park* under the IUCN management categorization scheme. In fact, many 'national parks' might not even satisfy the definition of a 'Protected Area.' This illustrates both the inherent challenge with this approach as well as why it is desperately needed.

The IUCN is adamant that these six types are not *rankings*. Dudley (2008) goes to lengths to emphasize:

> *"The categories do not imply a simple hierarchy, either in terms of quality and importance or in other ways*."

Nonetheless, our predictable human tendency is to view them as such. Still, these are simply 'management categories,' meaning the ecological value of a 'Strict Nature Reserve' established on rock and ice may have less benefit for nature than a 'Protected Landscape' established around a biodiversity hotspot.

The intent of this categorization is in fact to encompass the different protected area management approaches, and to provide protected area managers (and those responsible for the initial dedication) guidance as to how best to manage these areas given their unique circumstances and contributions.

Privately Protected Areas

'Privately Protected Area' Defined

Notably, the IUCN definition of a Protected Area is not restricted to government-owned/managed areas, nor to legally-gazetted (i.e., enabled in legislation) approaches to protection. Neither the IUCN definition nor the management categories speak in detail to governance type or protective mechanism, meaning neither explicitly considers 'Privately Protected Areas' (PPAs).

More recently, the IUCN has adopted the definition of a Privately Protected Area (PPA) as quite simply:

> "*a protected area under private governance*." (Bingham et al 2020).

Governance Types

The distinction of a *Privately* Protected Area therefore lies in the identified 'Governance Types' used to differentiate the entities that are actually responsible for designation and protection of the Protected Area. These potential types are:

- Governance by government
- Shared governance
- Private governance, and
- Governance by indigenous peoples and local communities.

The IUCN goes on to elaborate that private governance means

> "*individuals and groups of individuals; non-governmental organisations; corporations – both existing commercial companies and sometimes corporations set up by groups of private owners to manage groups of PPAs; for-profit owners; research entities or religious entities*" (Bingham et al 2020).

Despite this explicit typology, the idea that private entities (such as nature conservation NGOs) could identify, designate, protect, and manage Protected Areas – all outside of the auspices of government – has been difficult for many in the protected areas community to fully embrace.

For some time, this stymied international and national-level discussions about Privately Protected Areas. As with other specific protected-area approaches (e.g., Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas or ICCNs), *Privately Protected Areas* have only recently been added to the IUCN discussions. Helpfully, there is now an IUCN specialist group for PPAs (IUCN WCPA 2020).

Protected Area Management Categories and Privately Protected Areas

As noted above, the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories were for the most part developed with regard to publicly-protected areas designated at the national level. However, since Privately Protected Areas are simply a reference to the *governance* type, many of the *management* categories do apply. Categorization of PPAs has tended to default to *Category IV: Habitat/ Species Management Area*, mostly out of expedience. A more thoughtful application is warranted.

That expedience can be based on the assumption that all IUCN categories of protected area management incline towards areas with little or no human activity; this is in fact not the case. Several of the category descriptions do encompass the kinds of scenarios and management approaches predominant in private land conservation, meaning they are relevant for the hard-to-conserve areas where human activity is predominant and the land use matrix complex, but where biodiversity still thrives, and natural systems need protection (i.e., the wheelhouse of land trusts).

For a more detailed consideration of how Privately Protected Areas could be aligned with the IUCN management categories, see the companion document, *Designating Private Area-Based Conservation Sites: A Decision-Support Guide for Canadian Land Trusts*.

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures

As noted above, *Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures* (OECMs) is the designation that was never meant to be a designation.

OECMs started out as a thoughtful and elaborate description by the Convention on Biological Diversity in their 2010 Strategic Plan:

> "*By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected* ***systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures****, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes*." (CBD 2010)

The initial intent was to broaden consideration of area-

based conservation to be more practical, recognizing that there were many effective approaches across the globe that were conserving biodiversity but were not Protected Areas per se. The language was intended to replace the vague "other means" used to that point[6].

This reference to a variety of other tools suddenly came to be viewed as a tool in and of itself. The term acquired capital letters and took on the form of a 'designation', launching it into a hot mess of bureaucracy, misconception and turf wars (and assigning it a name only a policy wonk could love).

Eventually, the IUCN and *World Database on Protected Areas* began to use the term '**conserved areas**' as a stand-in for what the CBD had been referring to as Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures. This created new challenges, as the CBD descriptions had already been referring to Protected Areas as one type of area-based conservation. However, the term has more or less come to replace OECMs in the international Protected Areas community dialogue.

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) Defined

Eventually, a definition for OECMs was adopted by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

> "*Other effective area-based conservation measure" means "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity,' with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values*." (CBD 2018)

6 "The definition of "other means" in the technical rationale of target 11 should be replaced with a definition of 'other effective area-based conservation measures'". (CBD 2010)

The key elements of this definition, from a typology perspective, were:

- If a geographic area meets the definition of a Protected Area, it is not an OECM, and
- An OECM provides long-term, in-situ conservation of biodiversity.

Guidance for Identifying OECMs

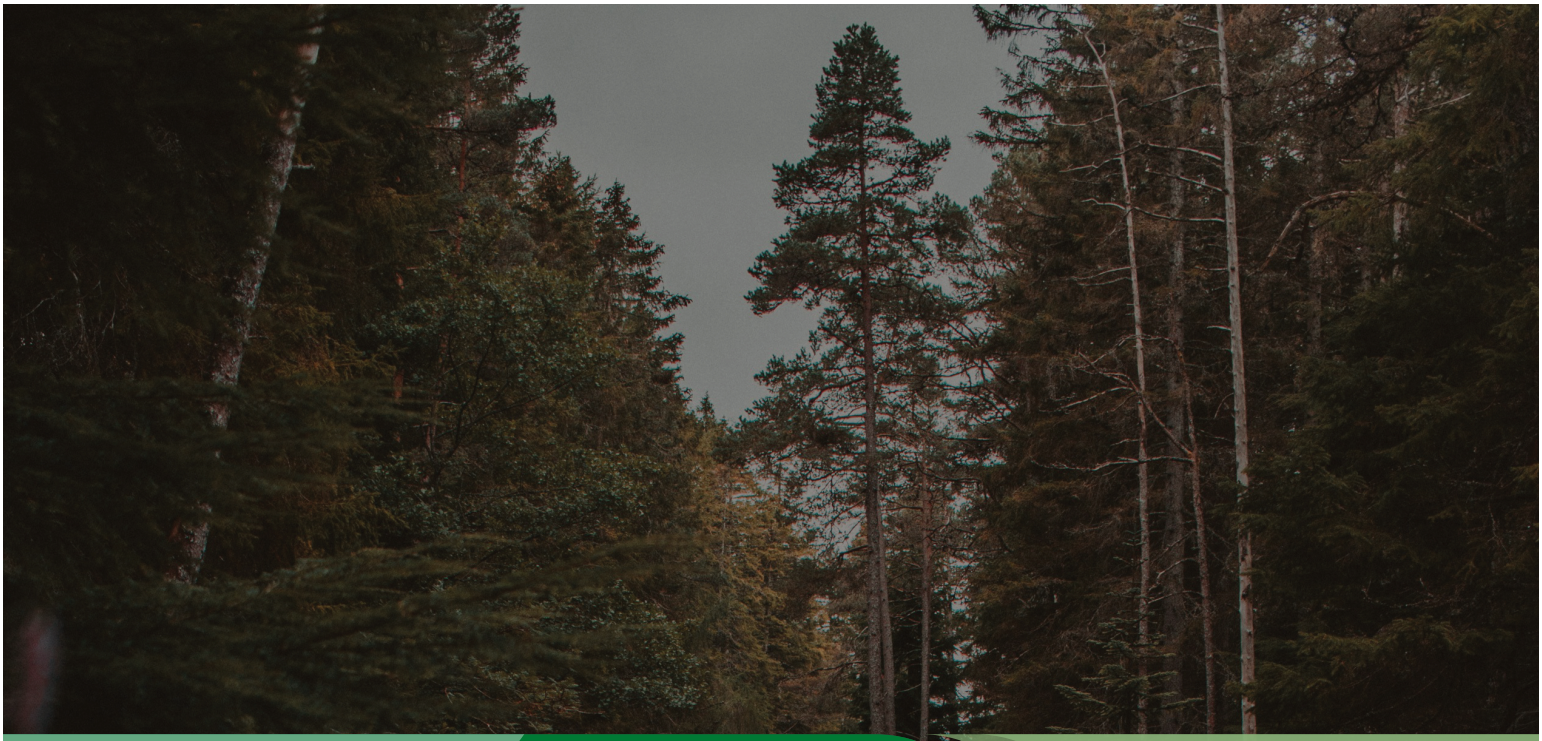
While the definition was robust and comprehensive, further clarification and direction was required, and was provided by the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas in, *Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures* (IUCN WCPA 2019).

This provided three critically important elements. First, it broke down the definition into discrete assessable pieces. Second, it made clear that the conservation device was of less importance than the outcome:

> "*While protected areas must have a primary conservation objective, this is not necessary for OECMs. OECMs may be managed for many different objectives but they must deliver effective conservation*." (IUCN WCPA 2019)

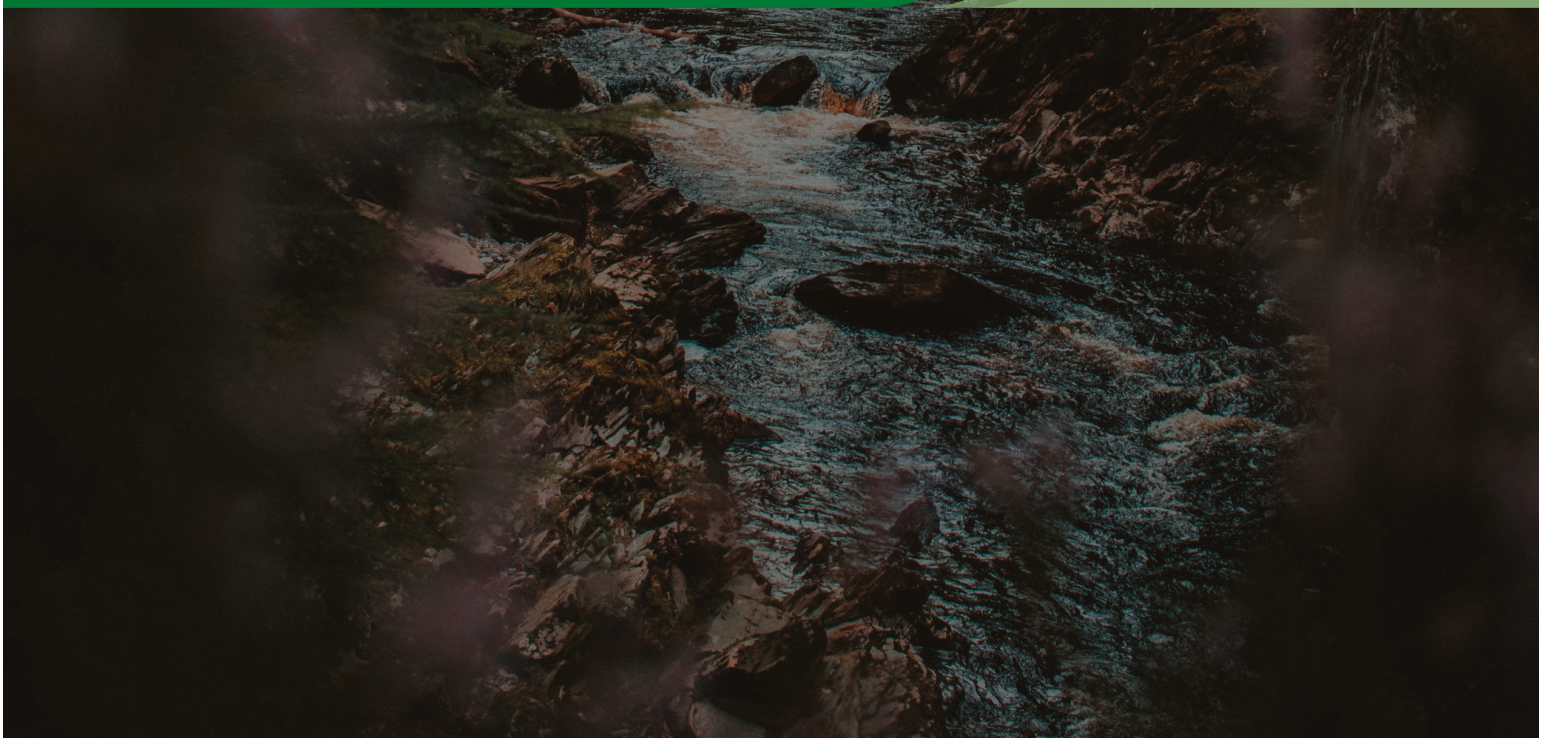
And third, it emphasized the important management distinction that a Protected Area must have a "primary conservation objective."





CHAPTER 4:

The Databases



The Databases

World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas

Since 1981, countries around the world have been contributing data related to protected areas under their jurisdiction to the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA). This database is a joint effort of the *United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre* (UNEP-WCMC) and the *International Union for Conservation of Nature's* (IUCN's) *World Commission on Protected Areas* (WCPA). The *Protected Areas Programme* of UNEP-WCMC manages the database on behalf of the partners (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2024, 2025a, 2025b).

The database was created to be a repository of Protected Areas data, but also to establish data standards, ensure adherence to the IUCN's conception of a protected area, allow data users around the world to compare "apples to apples", and help track progress on the variety of goals to which Protected Area designations contribute.

Since 2010, users have been able to interact with the data via the Protected Planet portal. Every two years, UNEP-WCMC publishes the *Protected Planet Report*, as a comprehensive 'state of' report on the world's protected areas (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2025b).

Inclusion of OECMs

Part of the confusion that arose when Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) appeared on the scene, was how to track them. International efforts to achieve the Kunming-Montreal target of 30% of land and terrestrial water by 2030 see OECMs as a vital new approach; however, many protected areas practitioners feared OECMs would taint the world of Protected Areas.[7]

The initial response was to create the *World Database on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures* (UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2026). This was part of a global effort to assuage protected area practitioner concerns, by creating a new term to functionally replace OECMs – the 'conserved area.' Subsequently, in October of 2025, UNEP-WCMC announced the development of the blended *World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas* (WDPCA). The collective term was now 'Protected and Conserved Areas' or PCAs. The modified database will now house Protected Areas and OECMs under one digital roof (UNEP-WCMC 2025).

Having said this, guidance for the assessment and inclusion of Protected Areas versus Conserved Areas generally still floats between the use of the terms 'OECM' and 'conserved area'.

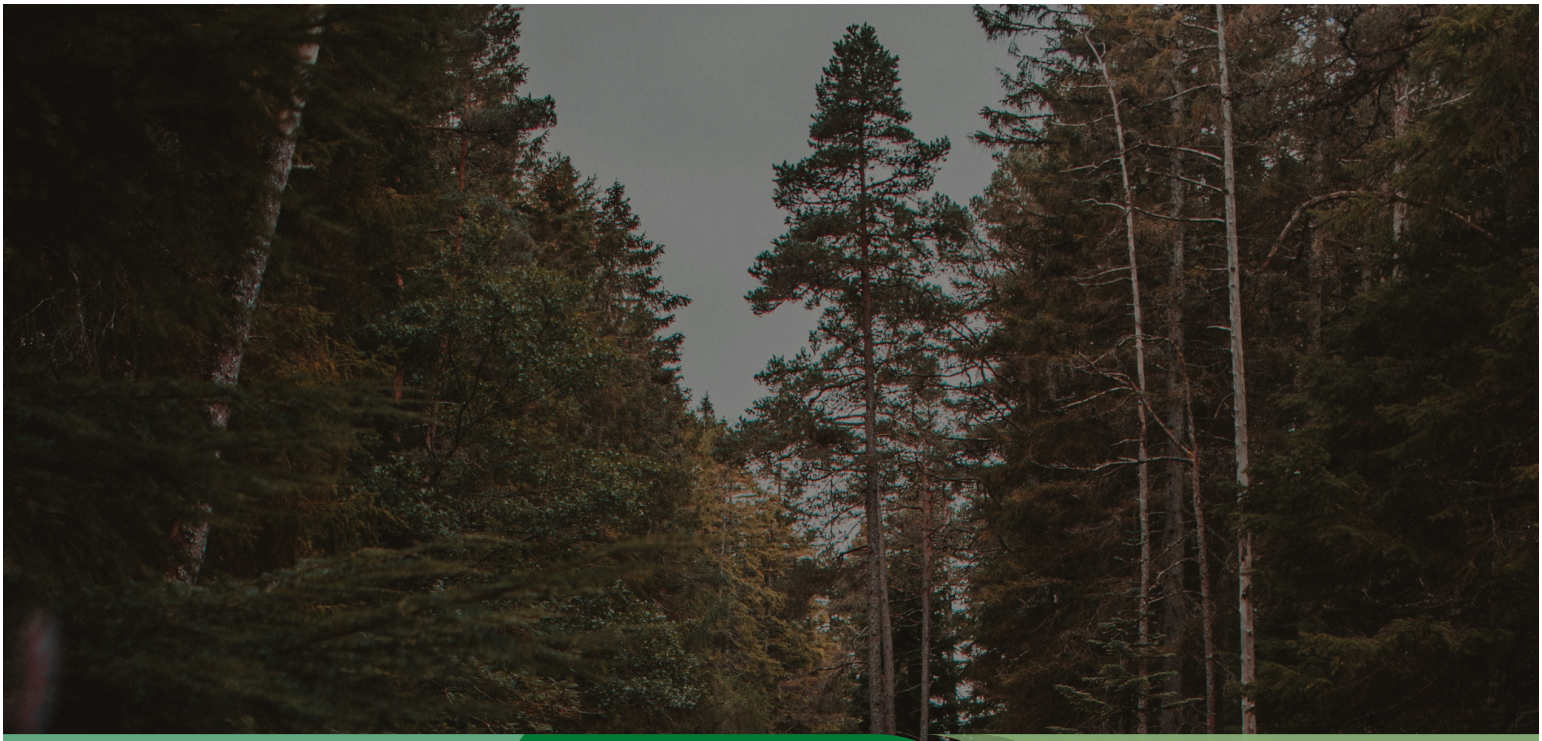
Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database

Canada has committed to reporting all of its Protected Areas (PAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) (or 'Conserved Areas') to the *World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas* (WDPCA). These international bodies leave it to each country to design their own procedures for collecting, assessing, and reporting, but do offer some fundamental standards that must be respected (Stolton et al 2014, Mitchell et al 2018).

Previously, a group of volunteer public protected area professionals (the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas) had developed and maintained a national database for protected areas in Canada – the *Conserved Areas Reporting and Tracking System* (CARTS). Despite the name, CARTS was unsurprisingly created to track government-designated Protected Areas, as that was the perspective and expertise of its creators.

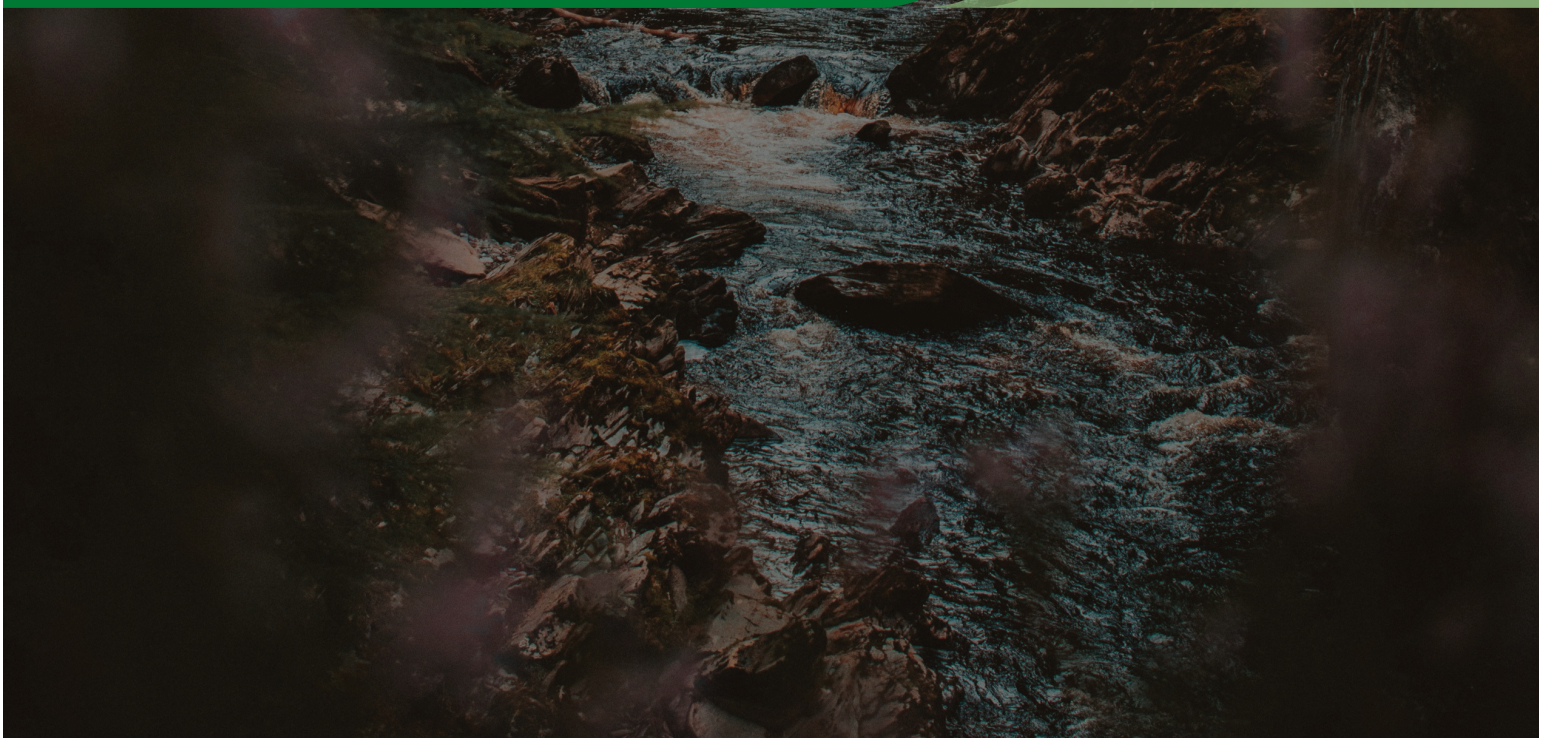
When the Canadian government committed to the 2010 Achai targets – and the promise to conserve 17% of land and terrestrial water by 2017 – the "Pathway to Target 1" initiative was created, composed of federal / provincial / territorial jurisdictional representatives (PT1 2018). A new national data repository was created, based largely on the CARTS database, but now managed on behalf of the provinces and territories by Environment and Climate Change Canada. The new database was titled *Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database* (CPCAD).

7 To be clear, this fear is not unwarranted. Government agencies have been cutting protected area budgets, and feverishly applying privatization approaches to all manner of government services aimed at reducing costs but not necessarily increasing service-delivery outcomes.



CHAPTER 5:

Assigning and Reporting Designations



Assigning and Reporting Designations

With regard to assigning these area-based conservation designations to privately-conserved land projects – and the direction and process for reporting on those – there are essentially three key players:

- The **international conservation community**, who (via the IUCN) develop the global guidance;
- The **national government**, who interprets the guidance for their jurisdiction, and reports on their behalf; and
- The **private land conservation governance authority**, the owner of the data for an individual privately-conserved are, who interprets the guidance for their project, and reports on its behalf.

It is important to understand how the motivations, responsibilities, and available guidance differ for each, as well as some of the high-level challenges that have arisen from interpretation (and misinterpretation) of the dividing lines.

Characterizing each of these in a few paragraphs is, of course, an exercise in over-simplification, but understanding even the main points can clear much of the confusion.

Motivation

The International Community

Dudley (2008) summarizes the international motivation well:

> "*The original intent of the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories system was to create a common understanding of protected areas, both within and between countries*."

P.H.C. (Bing) Lucas, quoted in IUCN/ WCMC (1994) went further, saying:

> "*These guidelines have a special significance as they are intended for everyone involved in protected areas, providing a common language by which managers, planners, researchers, politicians and citizens groups in all countries can exchange information and views.*"

And Phillips (2007) probably explained this in the most comprehensive (but still succinct way):

> "*to reduce the confusion around the use of many different terms to describe protected areas; provide international standards for global and regional accounting and comparisons between countries, using a common framework for the collection, handling and dissemination of protected areas data; and generally to improve communication and understanding between all those engaged in conservation*."

Dudley (2008) also noted that the IUCN discussed extensively whether the term, Protected Area, should be 'inclusive' or 'exclusive', or more specifically whether 'Protected Area':

> "*should be a general term that can embrace a very wide range of land and water management types that incidentally have some value for biodiversity and landscape conservation, or instead be a more precise term that describes a particular form of management system especially aimed at conservation*."

The IUCN chose the latter (exclusive), but Dudley takes pains to explain that this is not an attempt to establish a 'ranking' system where one approach is fundamentally better than another:

> "*It is not our intention to belittle or undermine such wider efforts at sustainable management. We recognise that these management approaches are valuable for conservation, but they fall outside IUCN's definition of a protected area as set out in these guidelines*."

It was more than a decade later that the Convention on Biological Diversity and the IUCN took steps to elucidate what were these efforts that fell outside the IUCN definition of a protected area – i.e., Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures.

The National Government

At the federal government level in Canada, the main driver for reporting to the *Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database* is international commitments to conserving a certain percentages of the land and waters of the country by certain, internationally-agreed-upon timelines. There have been several, increasingly-strident targets, based on the strategic plan of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD 2010, 2022), and identified by the desired

percentage and the target year (e.g., 17% by 2020, or 30% by 2030). These obligations are supported by Canadians' commitment to both nature and protected areas (EKOS Politics 2025).

Meeting these targets is challenging given the complex land use matrix and competition for uses. This led to a significant focus on seeking out already-conserved areas, which had not yet been accounted for. Historically, private land conservation has not been included in the national accounting of conserved areas, making them a key opportunity for improving Canada's international reporting on its 'X by X' targets.

The Individual Land Trust

Individual land trusts have very little intrinsic motivation to report to the national or international database of protected and conserved areas. The organizational mandates and operations – even for large land trusts – are not directly tied to these international commitments and accounting exercises.

However, as noted above, they are very much indirectly affected by them. Funding and other types of support are limited, meaning those entities providing that support seek ways to prioritize the 'best' investments. Such prioritization generally takes one of two forms: 1) which projects align with the funder's other goals, and/or 2) which projects have some sort of third-party validation.

Because many land trusts are dependent in some measure on funding from the federal government, and because reporting to a third-party database involves some measure of external review, the role that reporting projects to CPCAD plays in assessments of a land trust's work is indirectly very important.

Process and Responsibility

The process and responsibility(s) for reporting Protected Areas and OECMs into the World Database for Protected and Conserved Areas involves three key roles (Bingham et al 2019):

The data owner

- In the case of a publicly-owned and managed area, the data owner is the government.
- In the case of a property owned in fee-simple by a land trust, the owner of the data would be land trust; in the case of a conservation easement, it would be the holder of the conservation easement, subject to any agreements they have with the landowner.

The data provider

- The data provider performs the technical job of providing and maintaining the data (and access to it), and must have been authorized to do so by the data owner.

The data verifier

- In the case of a publicly-owned and managed area, a government agency is automatically authorized to verify its own data ("state verified").
- Privately-protected areas and OECMs must have their data verified by one of two third-party entities: 1) the state government, or 2) a non-government expert verifier ("expert verified").

While the IUCN-WDPCA has established this third-party option for private land conservation projects, it has yet to develop comprehensive guidance on who is eligible to do non-government expert verification, nor what an acceptable methodology might be. For Privately Protected Areas, some further guidance has been provided (Bingham et al 2020):

- Non-government entities can request verification by the national government, leading to the data being tagged "state verified";
- If the national government chooses not to recognize a privately-protected area or OECM, it will still be included in the database, provided it is "expert verified"; and
- IUCN and UNEP-WCMC encourage governments to report with the agreement of the relevant governance authority, i.e. the individual or organisation responsible for the PPA or OECM.

Bigham et al (2020) also identify what is likely the most appropriate approach:

- "Alternatively, governments can appoint another competent authority to report. Such data is also considered 'state verified' if the authority has been officially appointed in writing by the government."

This approach helps address the issue that government personnel may have familiarity with private land conservation, but rarely expertise. A third-party expert with knowledge of ecological conservation, private land conservation, and international standards is needed in these cases.

Assessment and Reporting Guidance

A land trust wishing to determine if their private land conservation project satisfies the criterion for area-based conservation, and further, wishes to report the project as such to a database, has four primary sources of guidance they can turn to.

These are:

- Convention on Biological Diversity
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas
- Pathway to Target 1 / Canada Conservation

(see *Appendix 2: Sources of Guidance for the Assessment and Reporting of Area-based Conservation*, for titles and links for the specific documents each has produced)

Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention was created in 1992, and has 150 signatories ("parties"). It is the CBD that meets regularly, creates the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity ˆ Global Biodiversity Framework*, and – by extension – sets the 30x30 target[8].

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

The IUCN is an international network of NGOs and governments focused on nature conservation. They are the recognized international authority on protected areas through their Programme on Protected Areas and its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). Amongst their Specialist Groups is one focused on Privately Protected Areas and Nature Stewardship.

World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas

The World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (formerly the World Database on Protected Areas) is a joint initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and the IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas .

Pathway to Target 1 / Canada Conservation

Originally established by federal, provincial and territorial governments in Canada to plot a collective strategy to achieve the commitment to conserving 17% of land and freshwater by 2020, the "Pathway to Target 1" group morphed after 2020 into the Pan-Canadian Pathway Initiative. The Government of Canada (through Environment and Climate Change Canada) hosts and manages the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database on behalf of the Initiative.

Challenges

Inapplicable guidance

An immediate dilemma arose for land trusts in that the process was designed for protected public lands designated and managed by the governments. Not understanding private land conservation, the Pathway to Target 1 reporting guidance veered heavily to assessing how much the privately-conserved lands looked like publicly-protected areas. The tools and approaches used in private land conservation were not explicitly considered, leaving non-government data submitters to make assumptions about data requirements and omit data relevant to their sector.

'Jurisdictions' Versus Governing Authorities

The Pathway to Target 1 initiative determined that each provincial / territorial government (the "jurisdictions") should be responsible for vetting and reporting private land conservation data in their geographic, but over which they had no protective jurisdiction and no ownership of the data. Eventually, the *Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database* managers acceded to the direction from the WDPCA that the owner of the data was responsible for reporting it, but the damage was done.

Each provincial/territorial government had developed a

8 "Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories." (CBD 2022)

different process for reporting private land conservation data, different criteria for vetting, and – most importantly – very different interests in addressing the issue. As land trusts were uninvolved in the process, only a select few even knew what was happening, and simply took direction (such as it was) from their provincial government.

The Press for Hectares

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (CBD 2022) has four overarching goals and 23 identified targets, one of which – Target 3 – relates to area-based conservation metrics ("Conserve 30% of Land, Water, and Seas"). That target, with its media-genic number, has eclipsed all other activity. Funders of private land conservation (both government and philanthropic) have shifted focus away from the work land trusts do with regard to the other 22 targets, and zeroed in on 30x30.

As noted above, there is little intrinsic motivation for land trusts to categorize their area-based conservation projects as Protected Areas or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures, and no guidance for the sector, so accordingly little attention was paid to the matter. However, funder requirements that conservation projects be added to CPCAD led some land trusts to just 'throw' data in, with little or no understanding (or interest in) these distinctions. Thus, the Canadian database (and by extension world database) became littered with mislabelled private land conservation projects (e.g., parcels with perpetual conservation easements being submitted as OECMs rather than Protected Areas).

Data Sharing and Privacy

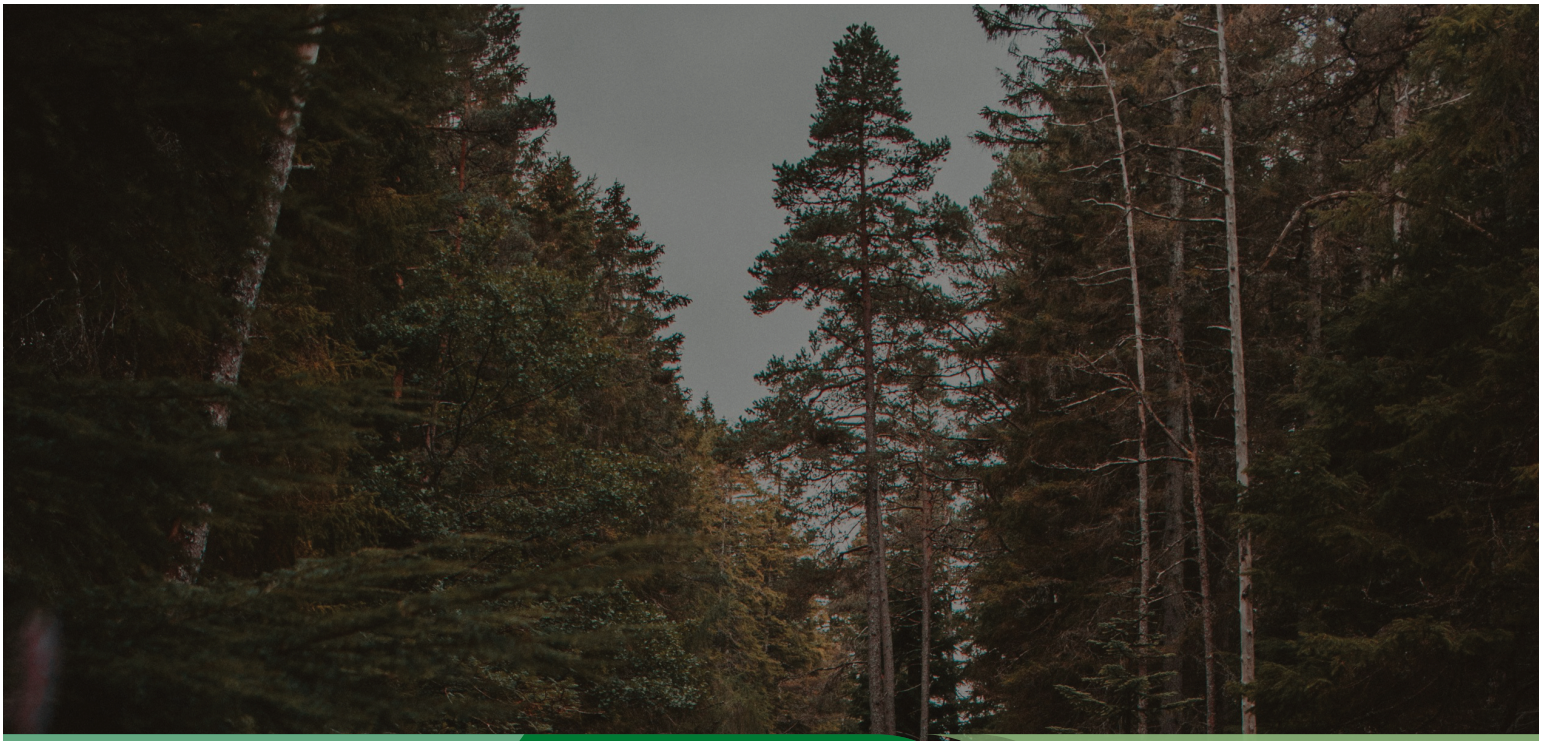
Area-based conservation that relates to private land has specific needs when considering data sharing and privacy. That is exacerbated by these dynamics varying significantly across the country. This is especially true with conservation easements, as the land trust holding (and reporting) the easement must consider the fee-simple landowner.

The two primary challenges are personal data and spatially-explicit depictions of the properties. The first is relatively easily dealt with, provided the land trust is attuned to the issue, and simply holds back on including name, address, contact information, etc. for the landowner.

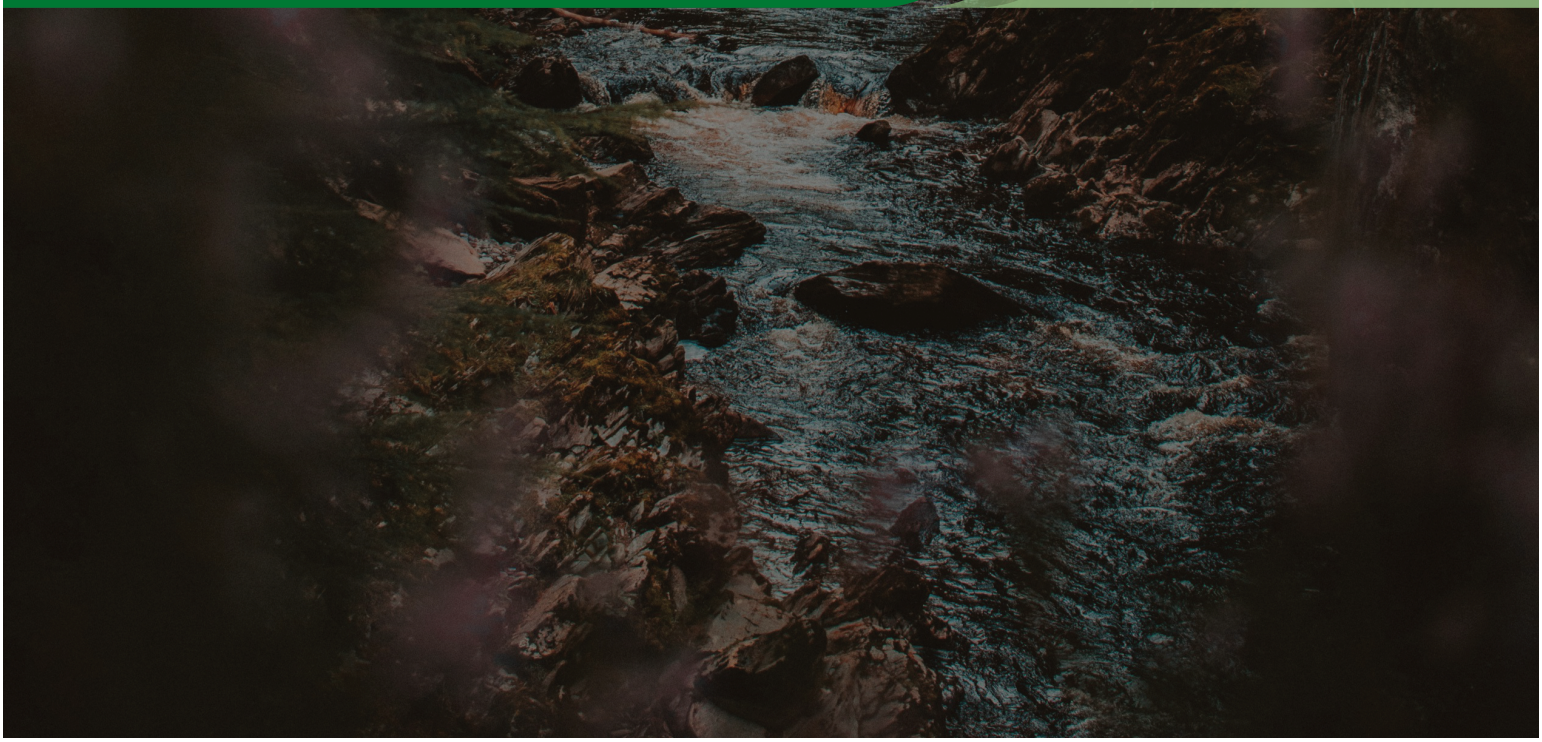
Sharing of spatially-explicit data (i.e., map files of the property) is more complex. In some provinces, this data is readily available, others it is not; some provincial land ownership systems require a query for each property, others accept requests for all properties of a certain type; some maintain the data in a spatial form, some do not; some funders require sharing of spatial data, some do not.

The debates around whether this information should be shared, whether it can be shared privately or selectively, whether public funding should result in public data, what consents are required, etc. abound. However, guidance on this matter was never correlated, and never dialed in to the differences between provinces/territories.





Conclusion



Conclusion

The clash of area-based conservation and private land conservation has led to land trusts being tossed into an alphabet soup of bureaucratic chaos – PAs, PPAs, OECMs, CAs, CPCAD, WDPCA, IUCN, CBD, PDQ, ASAP, LOL.

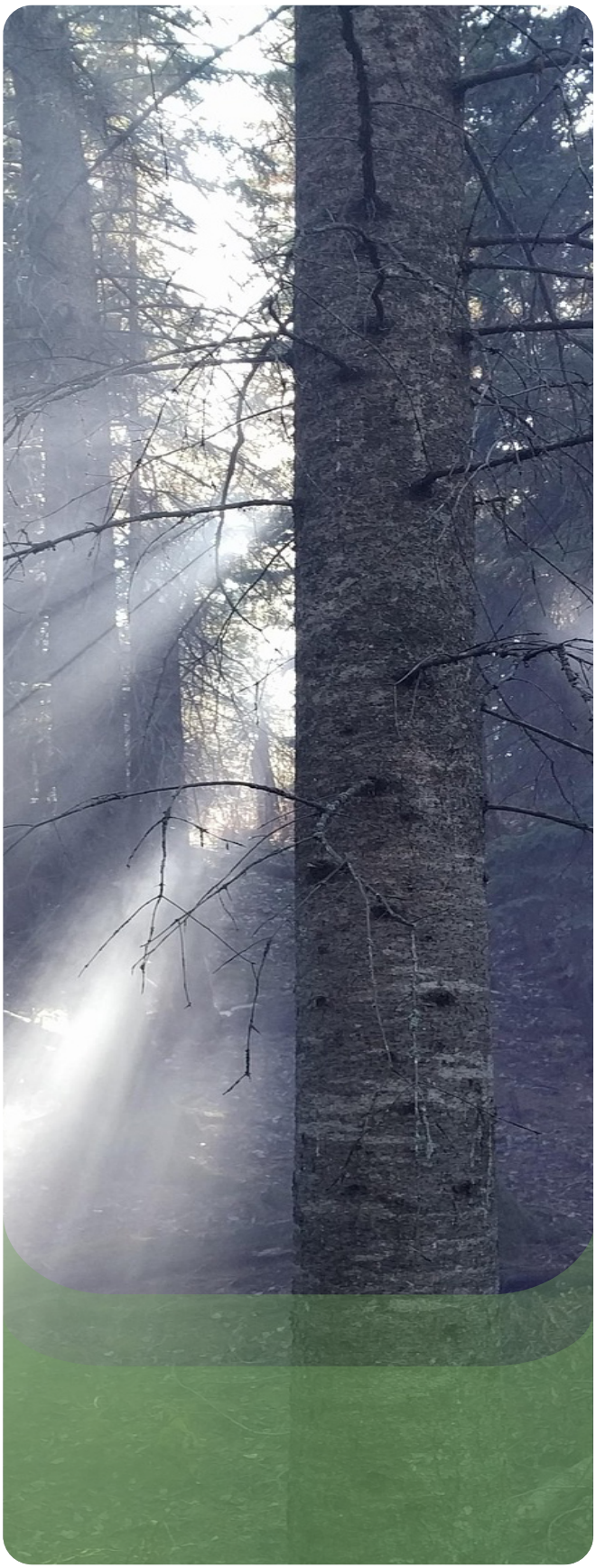
The external pressures to consider this definitional debate make it all the harder to perceive it as something important to the land trust sector. But it is. From a pragmatic perspective, it means addressing reputational degradation, facilitating reporting to CPCAD, and controlling the sector's narrative.

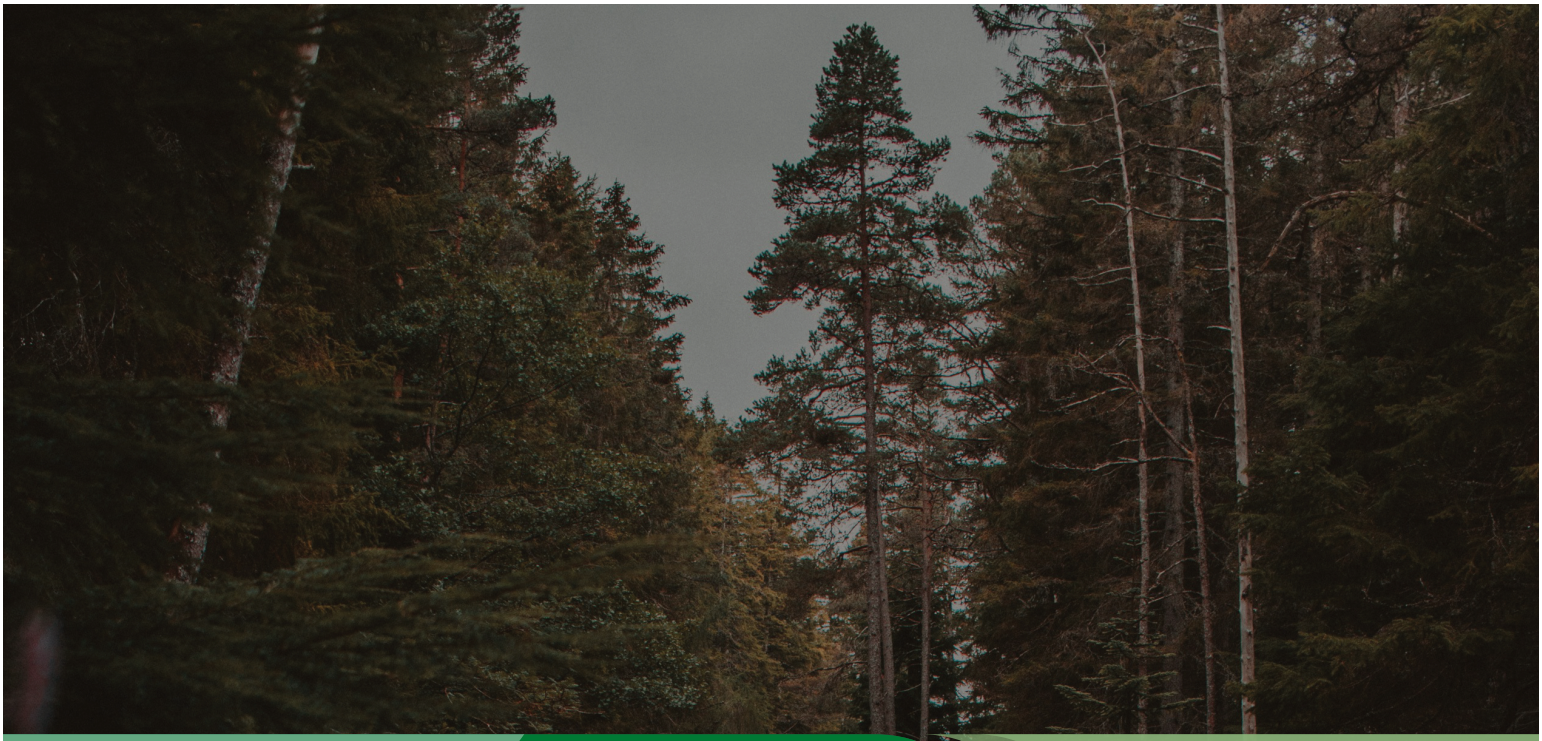
But more than that, the land trust sector is where the protected areas sector was back in the 1960s, when numerous definitions, interpretations, and terminologies were making it hard for that sector to answer basic questions (What have we done? How effective has it been? What is needed next?), and hard to make that case to funders, landowners, and local communities.

The challenge has been that the value and impetus to engage in this definitional exercise has all been external. The sector has not been engaged. No guidance tailored to their unique work has been created. And numerous entities (including the Corvus Centre!) have been more than willing to speak on their behalf.

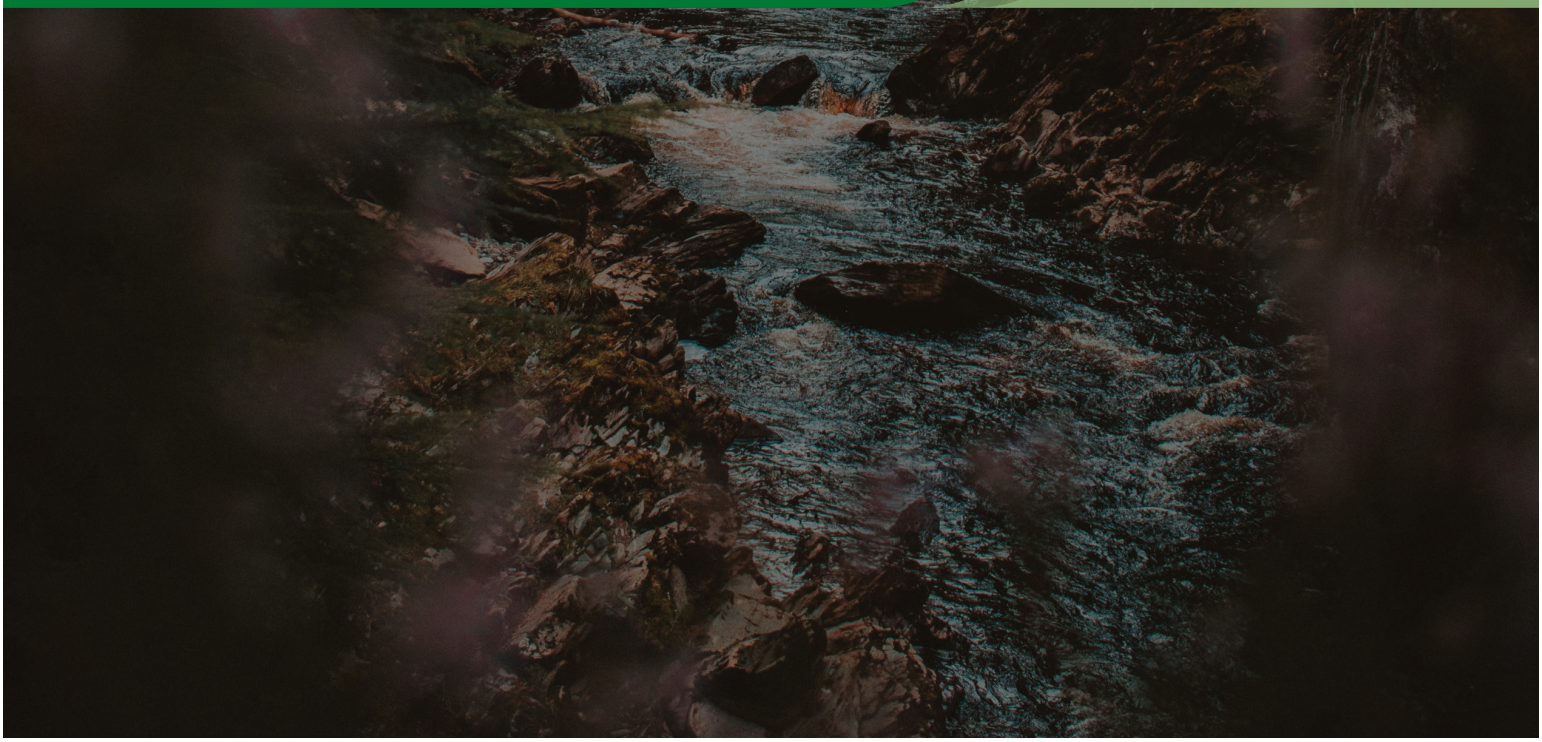
The Corvus Centre is adding to that sin. We have created guidance for the land trust sector to assess and report on the area-based conservation projects they have undertaken. This guidance is voluntary, not obligatory. It begins with the tools that land trusts use (rather than the publicly-conserved area model), and hopefully provides a more practical, applicable vision of how the critical area-based conservation work on private land can be accounted for, and better celebrated.

(see *Designating Private Area-Based Conservation Sites: A Decision-Support Guide for Canadian Land Trusts* and *Reporting Private Area-Based Conservation Sites: A Guide to the Databases for Canadian Land Trusts*)





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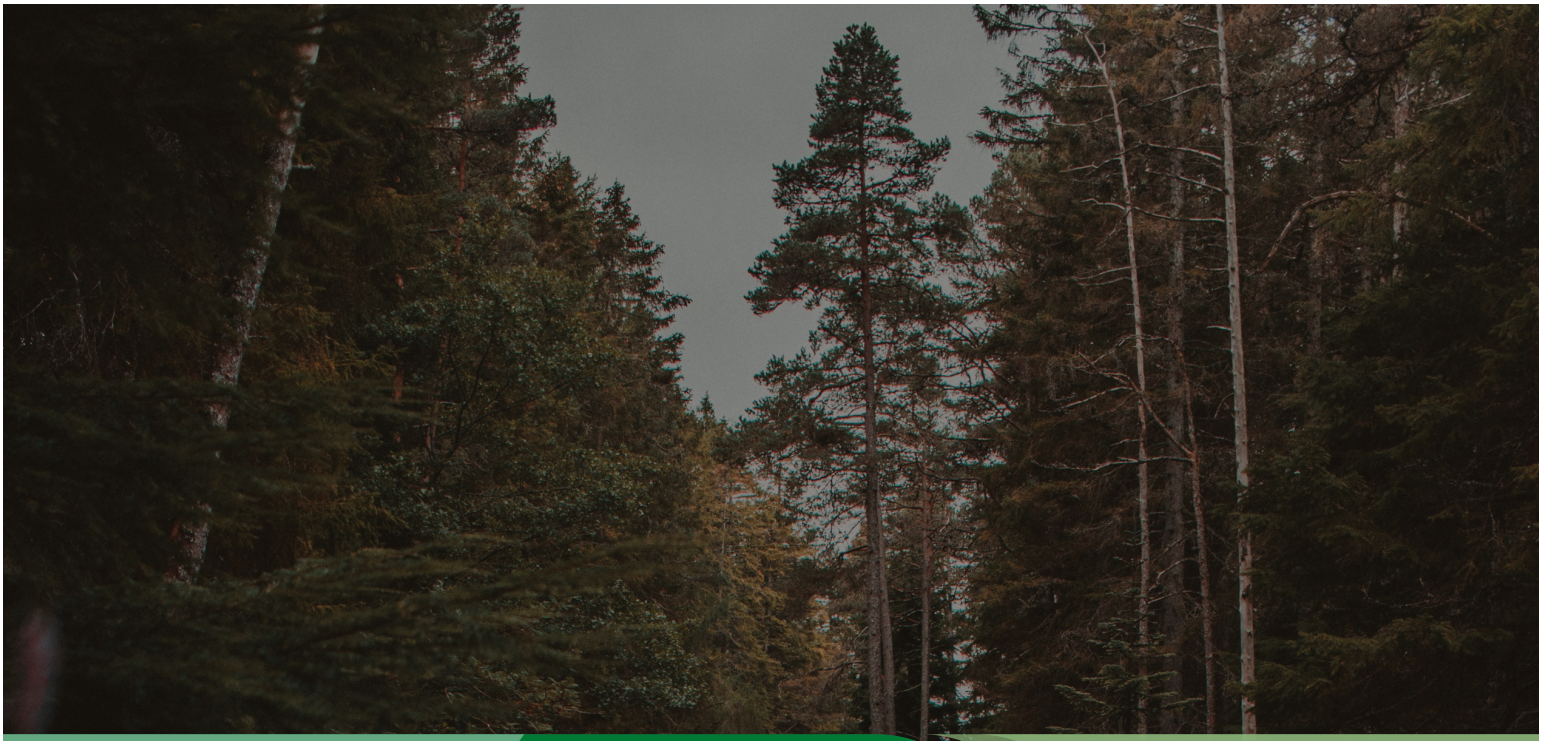
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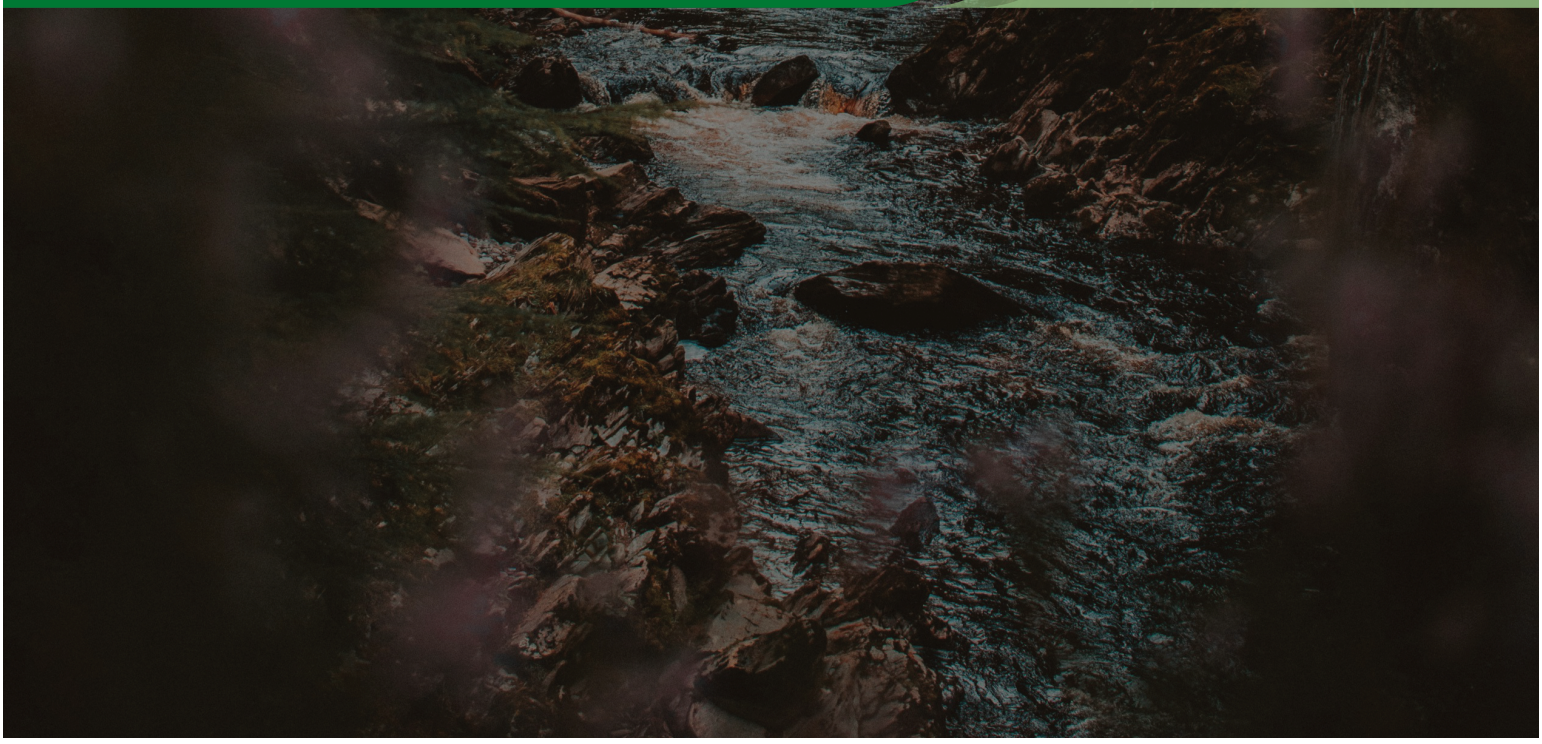
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APPENDIX 1

Terminology



Terminology

Area-based Conservation

Amongst the various approaches that can help ensure the planet's natural systems thrive and persist, is 'Area-based Conservation' where a geographic area is identified and specific enduring measures put in place to safeguard the area's natural features and systems. The Convention on Biological Diversity has identified two categories of 'area-based conservation', first in their 2010-2020 strategic plan (CBD 2010), and again in their 2020-2030 plan (CBD 2022):

> "*... are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures ....*" (CBD 2010)

Area-based Conservation Projects

'Area-based Conservation Projects' refer to specific area-based conservation efforts which may be Protected Areas (PAs) or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (OECMs). For private land conservation charities (i.e., land trusts), these would largely be fee-simple acquisitions or securement of conservation easements.

Conservation Easement

In this report, the term Conservation Easement is used to refer to legislatively-enabled private-property easements and covenants that apply positive and/or negative requirements on a the owner of a property in favour of protecting the identified conservation values of a property. Canadian provincial and territorial law enabling this tool may refer to these as Conservation Easements, Conservation Covenants, and/or Conservation Agreements.

Conserved Area

'Conserved Area' is an increasingly-common colloquial shorthand for an Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (OECM).

Governance Authority

The term 'governance authority' refers to the entity responsible for decision-making at the level of the Protected Area or OECM. In the case of PPAs and privately governed OECMs, this may be an individual landowner, non-profit organisation or for-profit organisation (Bingham et al 2020).

In Situ Biodiversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity defines 'in situ conservation' as:

> *"The conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats and the maintenance and recovery of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties."* (CBD2011)

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure

An Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure is an area-based conservation project that meets the IUCN definition of an OECM.

> "*Other effective area-based conservation measure" means "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity,' with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values*." (CBD 2018)

Private OECM (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure)

A Private Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure (P-OECM) is an area-based conservation project that meets the IUCN definition of an OECM, AND whose governance type is Private Governance.

Privately Protected Area

A Privately Protected Area is an area-based conservation project that meets the IUCN definition of a Protected Area, AND whose governance type is Private Governance. Private Governance is defined by the IUCN as:

> "*individuals and groups of individuals; non-governmental organisations; corporations – both existing commercial companies and sometimes corporations set up by groups of private owners to manage groups of PPAs; for-profit owners; research entities or religious entities*." (WCC 2016)

Protected Area

A Protected Area is an area-based conservation project that meets the IUCN definition of a Protected Area:

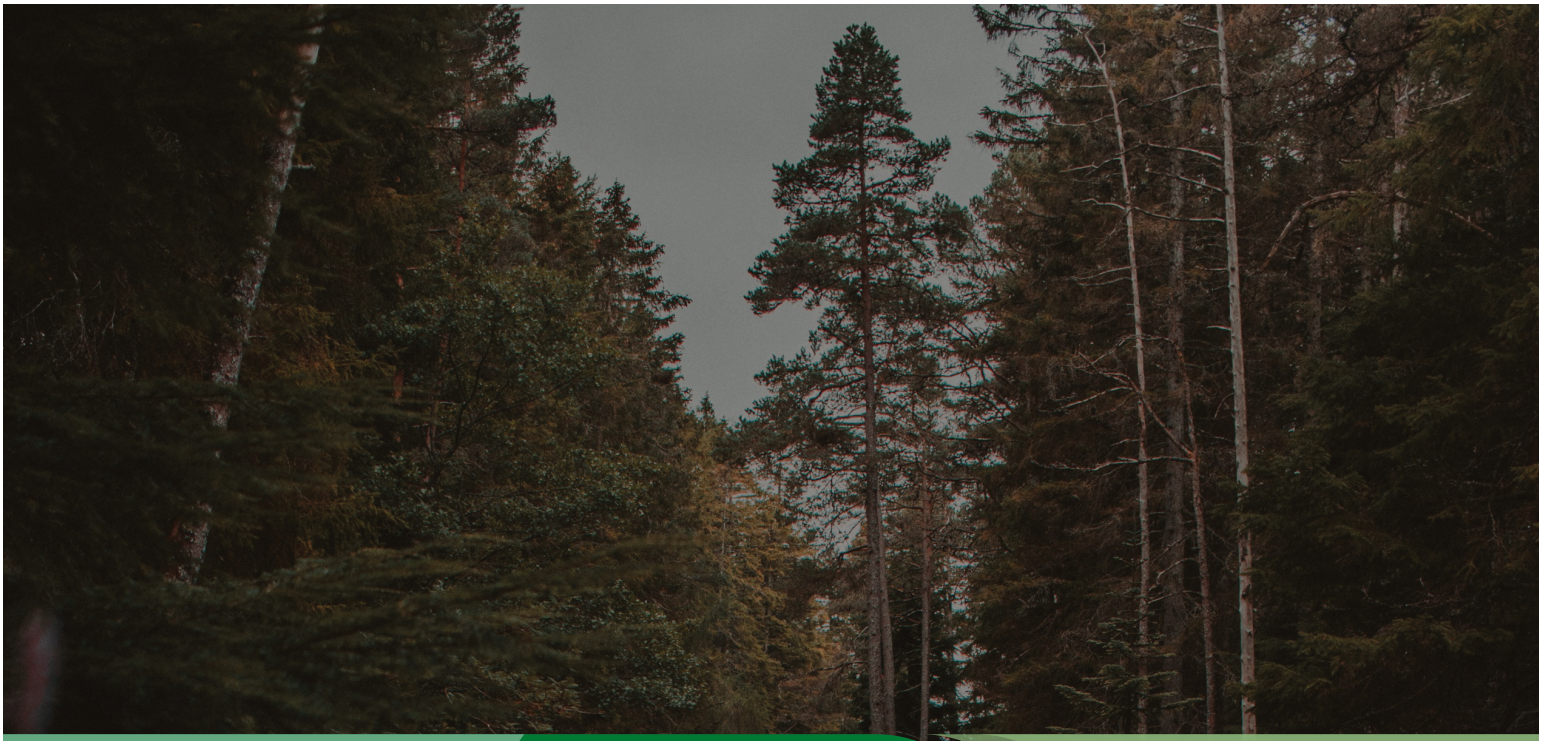
> "*A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural value*." (Dudley 2008)

Reporting Authority / Data Provider

'Reporting Authority' is a term/concept carried over from the original form of the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) process, where all submissions had to go through a provincial/territorial government or one of a few specifically-authorized entities. This is no longer the case, as any Governance Authority can now report directly into the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database.

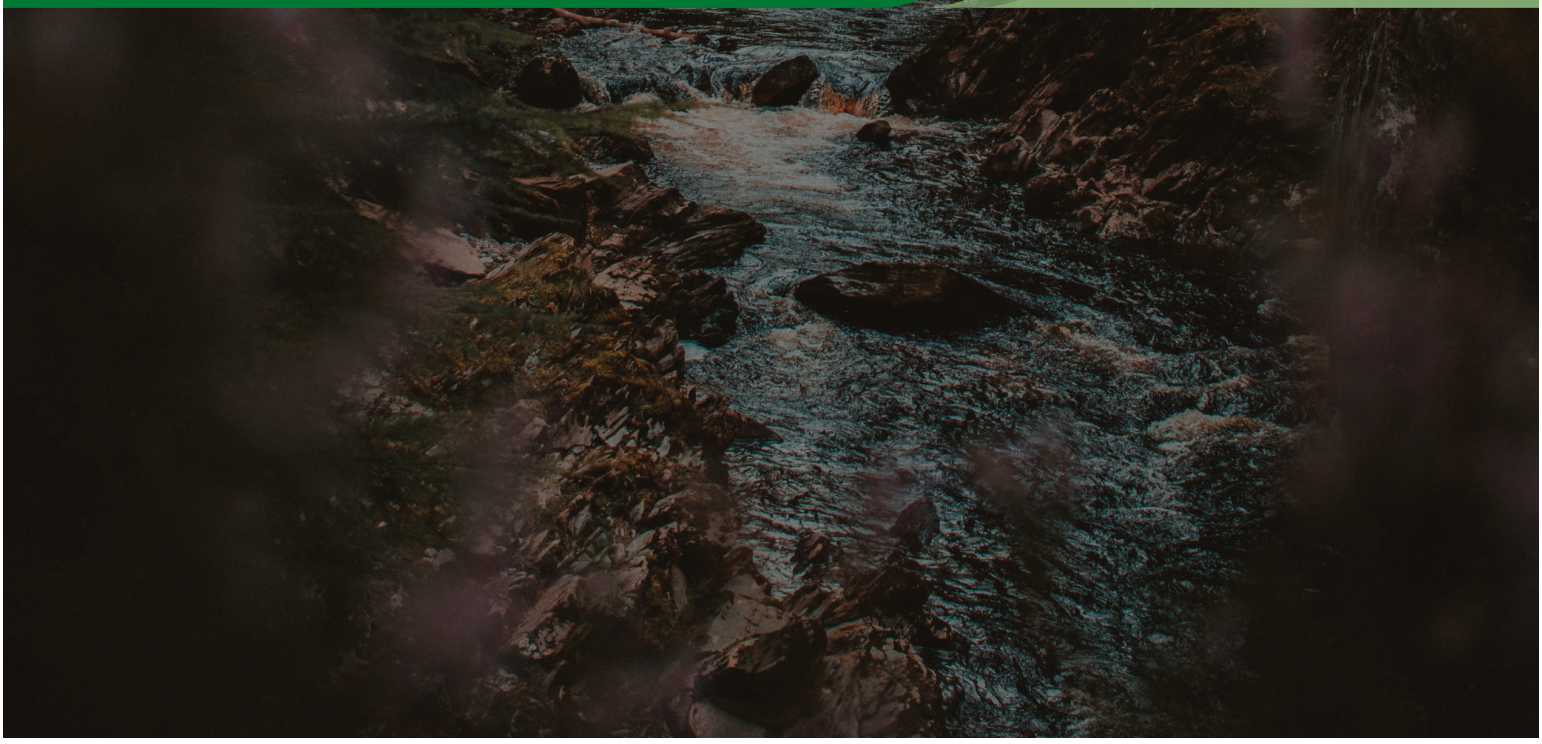
'Data Provider' is the actual field in the database referring to the entity providing the data. The Data Provider must be, or be authorized by, the Governance Authority.





APPENDIX 2

Sources of Guidance for the Assessment and Reporting of Area-based Conservation



Sources of Guidance for the Assessment and Reporting of Area-based Conservation

Convention on Biological Diversity

- **Decision Adopted by the Conference of The Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its Tenth Meeting; X/2. The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets** (2010) https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/default.shtml?id=12268
- **Decision Adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, 14/8, Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures** (2018) https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf
- **Decision Adopted by the Conference of The Parties to the Convention 15/4 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** (2022) https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

- **Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories** (1994) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/pag-021.pdf
- **Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories** (2008) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/pag-021.pdf
- **Best Practice Guidance on Recognising Protected Areas and Assigning Management Categories and Governance Types** (2013) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PAG-021.pdf
- **The Futures of Privately Protected Areas** (2014) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PATRS-001.pdf
- **Supporting privately protected areas. Resolution WCC-2016-Res-036-EN** (2016) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_RES_036_EN.pdf
- **Guidelines for privately protected areas. Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines** (2018) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/pag-029-en.pdf
- **Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures** (2019) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PATRS-003-En.pdf
- **Privately protected areas: international reporting and their relationship with OECMs** (2020) https://iucn.org/resources/other-brief/iucn-wcpa-technical-note-1-privately-protected-areas-international-reporting
- **Guidance on other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)** (2024) https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/GPG-036-En.pdf
- **Guidance on the reporting of privately governed protected and conserved areas** (2025) https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/resources/guidance-on-the-reporting-of-privately-governed-protected-and-conserved-areas
- **Defining 'long-term' for protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)** (2024) https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/iucn-wcpa-technical-note-14.pdf

World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas

- **User Manual for the World Database on Protected Areas and world database on other effective area-based conservation measures: 1.6** (2019) http://wcmc.io/WDPA_Manual
- **How to submit data for sites under private governance: Guidance for private actors** http://wcmc.io/WDPA_Manual

Pathway to Target 1 / Conservation Canada

- **Decision Support Tool: For Assessing Areas Against Pan-Canadian Standards for Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMS) for Terrestrial and Inland Waters** (2021) https://canadaconservation.ca/wp-content/uploads/DST_03-2021-EN.pdf
- **2025 Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) User Manual** (2025) https://data-donnees.az.ec.gc.ca/api/file?

path=%2Fspecies%2Fprotectrestore%2Fcanadian-protected-conserved-areas-data-base%2FUserManuals%2FProtectedConservedArea_UserManual_2025.pdf

- **Reporting Protected and Conserved Areas for Inclusion in CPCAD** [nd]. https://canadaconservation.ca/wp-content/uploads/ReportingForInclusionInCPCAD_EN.pdf



CORVUS CENTRE
for Conservation Policy
Applying Research for Conservation Solutions

The Corvus Centre for Conservation Policy is a not-for-profit, charitable organization based in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

Our mission is to ensure nature conservation is advanced through evidence-based land use, resource management, and financial decision making.

We pursue our mission through applied research and program facilitation, and by catalyzing critical dialogues.

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