

## CANADA

### Input on Area of Focus 1: Conservation of Arctic Biodiversity

#### **Home to unique species of flora and fauna**

The Canadian Arctic covers 40% of Canada's landmass and is home to more than 130,000 people representing Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and including varied landscapes, rich wildlife populations and unique habitats. For the Inuit and northern communities, Arctic biodiversity represents the very fabric of their identity; the plants, animals and other species found in the Arctic are significant culturally, spiritually, socially and economically.

The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment, prepared by the Arctic Council working group on the Conservation of Flora and Fauna (CAFF) outlined the status and trends of Arctic biodiversity, and provided key recommendations to address the current stressors of Arctic biodiversity.

Canada recognizes the importance of resilient Arctic aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, and the need to ensure the conservation, protection, restoration and sustainable use of Arctic resources to support resilient ecosystems.

#### ***Adequate monitoring and managing of Arctic wildlife***

To achieve this goal, Canada believes that it is of primary importance to support the long-term sustainability and monitoring of migratory birds, aquatic species and other transboundary species. Understanding the biodiversity found in the Arctic, and assessing the conservation status of those species is the primary step in achieving this goal. A clear picture of the state of Arctic biodiversity requires leveraging all knowledge systems available, including Indigenous knowledge. One such community led effort, co-led by Environment and Climate Change Canada and the communities of Arviat and Coral Harbour, is pairing Inuit knowledge and scientific evaluation to sustainably co-manage abundant Arctic light geese. This project, which is part of the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative under CAFF, is a concrete demonstration of the valuable results obtained when partnering Indigenous knowledge and scientific research and involving communities in designing management strategies.

#### ***Protection of habitat and the value of co-management***

The long-term conservation of Arctic biodiversity also requires the protection of Arctic habitat. Canada has made progress towards achieving its goal of conserving 17% of terrestrial areas and inland waters, and 10% of marine and coastal areas. To achieve the 17% target, Canada initiated the Pathway to

Target 1 program, working with a National Steering Committee from across all levels of government, an Indigenous Circle of Experts, a National Advisory Panel and a Local Government Advisory Group. This initiative will develop guidance for establishing and coordinating a network of terrestrial protected areas, Indigenous protected and conserved areas, and other conservation measures across Canada.

Co-management and Indigenous Protected areas, especially as they could be implemented in the Canadian Arctic Region, have gained traction over the last few years in Canada and elsewhere as a means to reconcile Indigenous cultural and spiritual values with environmental management

requirements. In her report presented in March 2017, Canada's special representative to the Arctic, Mary Simon, explained that Indigenous protected areas are "based on the idea of a protected area explicitly designed to accommodate and support an Indigenous vision of a working landscape. This kind of designation has the potential to usher a broader, more meaningful set of northern benefits and bring definition to the idea of a conservation economy<sup>1</sup>."

In 1975, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement – the first of the modern-day land claim agreements - was signed, marking the beginning of a thirty-year history in the evolving participation and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making and co-management of parks and protected areas in Canada.

Every modern-day land claim agreement signed since has contained similar types of provisions. Collectively, these nationwide agreements have changed the way parks and protected areas are planned, established and managed in Canada. With the spirit and practice of reconciliation, these agreements have greatly contributed to the relationships between Indigenous people and federal, provincial and territorial governments.

An example of co-management is the Torngat Mountains National Park, home to the Torngat Mountains caribou herd, which is currently led by an all-Inuit Cooperative Management Board. The Board advises Parks Canada on the administration of the park where Indigenous knowledge works hand in hand with modern science.

Recently, Canada announced the protection of 110,000 square kilometres of ocean, through the protection of Tallurutiup Imanga, or Lancaster Sound, an arctic marine area of Nunavut, extremely rich in biodiversity and that has been used by Inuit since time immemorial.

An Indigenous protected area could be a model for partnership in the North Water Polynya (Pikialasorsuaq) to protect this fragile ecosystem that is central for Inuit hunting and harvesting, as recommended in the report of the Pikialasorsuaq Commission. Further discussions however need to take place between the Government of Canada and Inuit leaders to determine what mechanism would be the best fit for partnership in future management of the Pikialasorsuaq.

Indigenous protected areas are at the heart of the Statement of Intent signed in September 2017 between the Government of Canada and the Nunatsiavut self-Government which includes the creation and co-management of marine protected areas.

### **Finding common solutions to protect and conserve biological diversity in the Arctic**

The Arctic Council is a unique forum when it comes to collaboration between States and Permanent Participants. Advancing the concept of co-management and Indigenous protected areas across the Arctic region would produce positive results both for communities and for the environment. Having the Arctic Biodiversity Congress and Arctic Environment Ministers' Meeting occur simultaneously provides a unique opportunity to launch such a discussion. Canada would be pleased to share its experience and

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, *A new shared Arctic leadership model: From Mary Simon, Minister's special representative*, Submitted March 2017, p. 19

learnings with co-management and Indigenous protected areas in the Canadian North and Arctic region and hear about experiences from other Arctic States and Permanent Participants.

### ***International partnerships***

Cooperation among Arctic states and with non-Arctic partners is essential for ensuring the long term conservation of shared species. Canada recognized the importance of international cooperation early; over 100 years ago Canada and the United States signed the Migratory Birds Convention, to work together for the conservation of migratory birds, many of whom rely on the Arctic at some point in their lifecycle. Cooperation for migratory birds is also the foundation of the CAFF Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI).

AMBI has been successful at leveraging international cooperation between Arctic Council Members and Observers, as well as non-observer countries. For example, in the Americas Flyway and through funding from the Commission on Environmental Cooperation, AMBI has supported work by communities in Canada and the USA to gather the necessary information to proceed with applying for Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) status. WHSRN status will allow communities to locally contribute to international coordinated efforts for the protection of important shorebird habitat throughout their range. Non-arctic States in the American Flyway will be an important next step.

Similarly, the 1973 International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears has been instrumental in bringing circumpolar countries together to address conservation priorities in a coordinated manner. The agreement has led to the development of a Circumpolar Action Plan, which is informed by science and Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and focuses on opportunities for collaboration across the range of the polar bear. This international coordination mechanism has allowed member countries to leverage their work to address domestic priorities on an international scale, thereby advancing conservation and management of polar bears. As a sentinel species polar bears will continue to play a valuable role in understanding the impacts of pollutants and climate change on the Arctic marine ecosystem.

Continued and strengthened international cooperation towards the long-term conservation of Arctic flora and fauna is needed to assure the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (*Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*) and Goal 15 (*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.*) The successes we've had for the protection of Arctic biodiversity has relied on cooperation and collaboration locally, among Arctic states and with international partners. Canada emphasizes the importance of continued international momentum and cooperation, including on actions to protect shared wildlife and migratory species.