

Strengthening Biodiversity Conservation in New Brunswick

Purpose

To provide an overview of the current state of biodiversity conservation in New Brunswick, highlight the associated challenges, and present recommendations to enhance provincial efforts to protect ecosystems and species at risk.

Issue Summary

New Brunswick's biodiversity is threatened by habitat loss, climate change, pollution, invasive species, and inadequate legal protections (Government of New Brunswick, 2009; Betts et al. 2024; East Coast Environmental Law, 2024; Oregon State University, 2024). These challenges undermine ecological resilience, jeopardize the province's natural heritage, and affect economic activities reliant on healthy ecosystems, such as forestry, fisheries, and tourism. Current frameworks fail to adequately address the species-at-risk recovery process (East Coast Environmental Law, 2024), ecosystem connectivity, and the provincial commitment to national biodiversity targets, such as protecting 30% of land and water by 2030 (30 by 30). Immediate action is required to ensure sustainable biodiversity conservation and align with global standards.

Background and Challenges

- **Biodiversity Status:** Over 96 species are listed under the New Brunswick Species at Risk Act. However, only nine species have met all legal recovery obligations, highlighting significant implementation gaps. Many species lack updated feasibility assessments, recovery strategies, and protection plans (East Coast Environmental Law, 2024).
- **Global and National Targets:** The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and Canada's 30 by 30 target emphasize protecting 30% of land, waters, and seas by 2030 (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024). Achieving this goal requires prioritizing the conservation of critical habitats such as wetlands, forests, and marine ecosystems.

- **Provincial Challenges:** Clearcutting, habitat fragmentation, climate change, pollution, and invasive species are significant threats, compounded by weak regulatory enforcement (Government of New Brunswick, 2009; Betts et al., 2024; East Coast Environmental Law, 2024; Oregon State University, 2022). Strong provincial laws to complement federal protections are critical, given the limited jurisdiction of the federal Species at Risk Act.
 - **Indigenous Engagement:** Indigenous communities in New Brunswick have a profound connection to the land and play a vital role in conservation. Collaborative efforts to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and governance are essential to the success of biodiversity initiatives.
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Recommendations

1. Fully Implement and Strengthen the Species at Risk Act (NB SARA)

- Appoint additional members to the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk (COSSAR).
- Complete overdue recovery plans for species at risk.
- Update the Species at Risk Registry.
- Enforce habitat protection measures.
- Allocate adequate resources to support these actions.

2. Develop and Enforce a Renewed Biodiversity Strategy

- Develop and enforce a strategy with clear, measurable targets, including the 30 by 30 goal (protecting 30% of land and water by 2030).
- Identify priority conservation areas and establish interim protection tools.
- Set milestones to track progress.
- Designate ecological corridors to enhance habitat connectivity.

3. Integrate Indigenous Knowledge and Co-Management Principles Into Biodiversity Policies and Practices

- Collaborate with Indigenous communities to co-develop conservation strategies.
- Ensure Indigenous rights and traditional knowledge are respected in biodiversity policies.
- Support Indigenous-led conservation initiatives as models for sustainable stewardship.

4. Promote Sustainable Forest Management

- Revise the Crown Forest Strategy to prioritize ecological forestry practices that enhance biodiversity and carbon storage.

- Implement sustainable forest management practices, including longer rotation periods, reduced clearcutting, and protection for primary and older forests.
 - Establish a provincial forest carbon inventory to monitor forest carbon stocks and biodiversity co-benefits.
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Significance and Impact

- New Brunswick's ecosystems provide essential services, including clean water, flood mitigation, and carbon storage. However, habitat loss and climate change threaten these ecosystems.
 - Forest degradation in New Brunswick has led to significant declines in above-ground carbon and habitats for old-forest bird species, emphasizing the need for integrated biodiversity and climate strategies.
 - Protecting biodiversity aligns with federal commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and Canada's 30 by 30 conservation targets.
 - The Species at Risk Act lacks mandatory timelines and comprehensive protection mechanisms for habitat and recovery actions, leaving many species vulnerable.
 - Investment in conservation initiatives supports local economies through eco-tourism, sustainable resource management, and job creation.
 - Enhanced public engagement, education, and funding mechanisms are critical to the success of biodiversity initiatives.
 - Indigenous-led conservation efforts are essential for incorporating traditional knowledge, respecting Indigenous rights, and achieving long-term conservation success.
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Analysis

Impact on Stakeholders and Rightsholders: Conservation measures benefit all residents by enhancing ecosystem services such as clean air and water, mitigating climate impacts, and preserving cultural and economic values tied to biodiversity. Indigenous communities' participation is critical for ensuring culturally sensitive and effective conservation strategies.

Risks and Opportunities

Risks:

- Failing to act risks further biodiversity decline and reputational damage.

Opportunities:

- Robust conservation strategies present opportunities for New Brunswick to emerge as a biodiversity and climate action leader and align with potential funding opportunities under federal and international biodiversity frameworks.
- Environmental policies that take advantage of the overlap between carbon storage and biodiversity conservation benefit climate goals and ecosystem health.
- Land-use planning partnerships with universities, environmental organizations, and private landowners can improve conservation outcomes while addressing community and economic needs.
- Investing in job-creating industries like ecological restoration, reforestation, and habitat enhancement can revitalize rural economies while improving biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Current Status

Environment and Climate Change Canada released a national strategy for halting and reversing biodiversity loss in 2024 (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024). A new biodiversity strategy for New Brunswick is set to be published in 2025. The government of New Brunswick has committed to increasing conservation lands and waters to 15% and to developing a plan to reach 30%. New Brunswick's public species-at-risk registry and recovery actions have shown some progress but remain inadequate in addressing the scale of the crisis. Habitat connectivity, essential for species migration and resilience, remains poorly addressed.

While New Brunswick has taken steps to address biodiversity conservation through strategies, regulations, and protected areas, significant gaps remain in achieving robust and measurable outcomes. Strengthening biodiversity policies, ensuring their enforcement, and aligning them with climate action and land-use planning are critical to safeguarding the province's rich natural heritage for future generations.

Key Contacts

Beverly Gingras, Executive Director, Conservation Council of New Brunswick |
beverly.gingras@conservationcouncil.ca | 506-458-8747

