

Canadian Biodiversity Index

Robin MacKay and Risa Smith

Knowledge Integration Directorate, Environment Canada, 351 St. Joseph Boul, Gatineau, Quebec.
< Robin.MacKay@ec.gc.ca > , < Risa.Smith@ec.gc.ca > , Phone: 819-953-9272

The Canadian Biodiversity Index (CBI) is a tool being developed by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Biodiversity Working group in response to commitments made under the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy. The purpose of the Index is to clearly communicate the state of biodiversity in Canada in a transparent, easy to understand way to environmental managers, decision- and policy-makers, and the Canadian public, and to assess the success of biodiversity management in Canada. Several attempts have been made in the past to assess biodiversity at a national level, however the answer to the question 'what is the state of biodiversity in Canada' has remained elusive. This tool will incorporate some of the existing work on biodiversity being done across the country such as the status of wild species in Canada, species at risk, and habitat data to create a useful, scientifically credible measure of biodiversity.

The CBI is based on a draft framework that has been developed through an extensive consultation process involving experts in biodiversity inside and outside government. Individual ecosystems will be evaluated in four theme areas; relevant indicators for measuring biodiversity in each ecosystem will populate each theme. Each indicator will be measured against a 'desired future condition' that is informed by a scientific threshold, historical baseline, traditional knowledge and/or management objective, and scored based on how successful it is at attaining the desired future condition. The scores can then be aggregated by indicator, theme area, ecosystem type, province, or rolled up to a national level, depending on the user's needs.

The draft framework is based on a set of principles which include maximum flexibility on the choice of indicators, while still maintaining consistency across the country. The long term vision is to develop a scientifically credible index, with methodologies and supporting data accessible through a distributed database system, such as the proposed Canadian Information System for the Environment (CISE).

"Proof of Concept Testing" of the draft framework is currently underway and the results will be discussed.