
CITY OF KELOWNA
MEMORANDUM

Date: August 29, 2007
File No.: 5280-12
To: City Manager
From: Environment Division Supervisor
Subject: **Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program**

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council endorse the vision, goals and principles of the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program prospectus through a signed statement of cooperation;

AND THAT Council send a representative to the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program ceremony on September 19th.

BACKGROUND:

The Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program (subsequently referred to as OCCP) was formed in May 2006. The purpose of the program is to coordinate and facilitate conservation efforts, set conservation goals and objectives, and to generate support and resources that are needed to maintain this effort. This will be achieved through effective communication, sharing expertise, mutual project support, and leveraging funding opportunities.

The OCCP and its partners will come together to focus conservation and stewardship efforts on private and public lands in order to have landscapes that:

- Encourage sustainable green economics and social well-being of the people in the Okanagan;
- Sustain biological diversity and ecological process; and
- Support environmental stewardship principles and practices within communities that demonstrate the principles of environmental stewardship.

Recognizing the Kelowna 2020 Official Community Plan and the Regional Growth Strategy, Environment Division Staff support the vision, goals and principles of the OCCP. A signed statement of cooperation with the OCCP would provide the City of Kelowna with an opportunity to:

- build partnerships in the valley;
- leverage additional funding; and
- work towards a more regional consistency for protecting and conserving our natural capital.

The first official meeting of the OCCP is scheduled for Sept 19th, 1pm at the Mission Creek ECCO where organizations will be asked to endorse the vision, goals and principles of the OCCP prospectus through a signed statement of cooperation.

To date, the following organizations have signed the statement of cooperation:

Federal

- Fisheries and Oceans Canada; and
- Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service).

Provincial

- Ministry of Environment.

Municipal

- Regional District of Central Okanagan;
- Regional District of the North Okanagan;
- City of Vernon;
- District of Coldstream; and
- Village of Lumby.

Non-Profit Organizations

- Okanagan Basin Water Board;
- Okanagan Partnership;
- Central Okanagan Naturalists Club;
- Central Okanagan Land Trust;
- Central Okanagan Science Opportunities for Kids;
- Sustainable Environmental Network Society;
- Nature Conservancy of Canada;
- Grasslands Conservation Council of BC;
- Land Conservancy of BC;
- Ducks Unlimited Canada;
- Allan Brooks Nature Centre;
- Lake Country Ecological Society;
- Lake Country Environmental Society;
- North Okanagan Naturalists Club;
- North Okanagan Parks and Natural Areas Trust;
- Outdoor Discoveries; and
- Community Mapping Network.

INTERNAL CIRCULATION TO:

Environment and Solid Waste Manager

EXISTING POLICY:

City of Kelowna Official Community Plan

7.3 Watershed Policies:

- **Co-operation:** Encourage Federal, Provincial and Local Governments, agencies, First Nations, and the public to work co-operatively, through partnerships, for integrated and consistent watershed management.

7.5 Tree Policies

- **Forest Areas:** Pursue further co-operative initiatives with the appropriate agencies regarding planning and management of forested areas within and around the periphery of the City.

7.9 Natural Environment Policies:

- **Public Education:** Encourage public and private interests directed at natural resource protection and watershed stewardship.
- **Donation Towards Environmental Protection:** Encourage the activities of nature trust organizations and corporations for the purposes of receiving donations of funds or land toward protection of natural attributes within the community.
- **Land Donations:** Facilitate the work of groups and individuals willing to donate land for protection of natural attributes or public access.
- **Natural Features Identification:** Continue to identify and assess Natural Environment Areas with the objective of formulating protective strategies and obtaining knowledge to facilitate appropriate land use and servicing decisions.

Regional Growth Strategy

7.1 Regional Growth Strategy Goals for Environmental Protection

- The region protects and respects its natural attributes. Green spaces and water resources are managed to ensure their long-term health and sustainability;
- Cooperation is supported to sustain the health of our water, air and lands;
- Day to day decisions work toward providing for future generations, preventing environmental harm and generally promoting development that sustains and enhances the environment; and
- Protect the scenic quality of the region and preserve significant features and open space.

7.2 Regional Action Recommendations for Environmental Protection

- Plan for development by knowing first what to protect, and then developing and using management tools to achieve the desired level of protection;
- Build partnerships to undertake regional inventories (for community planning purposes);
- Enhance level of communication and referral between resource and community agencies; and
- Leverage conservation with capital investments in environmental infrastructure.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

FINANCIAL/BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

ALTERNATE RECOMMENDATIONS

EXTERNAL AGENCY/PUBLIC COMMENTS

LEGAL/STATUTORY AUTHORITY

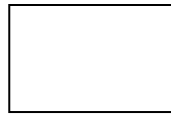
LEGAL/STATUTORY PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENT

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Todd Cashin
Environment Division Supervisor

Attached:
Draft OCCP Prospectus
Draft OCCP Statement of Cooperation

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approval for inclusion
John Vos
Director Works & Utilities

This is an invitation to participate in a partnership dedicated to conserving the rich biological diversity of the Okanagan in south-central British Columbia, while balancing economic and social needs of the community and the people who live here. The low elevations of the Okanagan basin whose dry climate and desert-like habitats are a northern extension of the western American deserts, exhibit one of Canada's greatest concentrations of species diversity. This national treasure of biodiversity is of international importance and is increasingly being threatened by human-created pressures. This area, with some of the greatest concentrations of species at risk in Canada, is recognized as one of the country's three most endangered natural systems.

The challenge is to focus on common conservation priorities. Through effective communication, sharing expertise, mutual project support, and leveraged funding, we can achieve greater success. Over thirty groups and agencies have accepted the challenge to develop and implement a strategy that promotes habitat and ecosystem management for private and public land, while balancing social and economic needs. They have pooled their expertise to take a common approach to land conservation and have established a network through the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program (OCCP). This Collaborative seeks strong community support and involvement to help find a balance between ecosystem requirements and human needs and aspirations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rapid urbanization and development of the Okanagan is creating an emerging crisis as natural habitats are reduced and fragmented in this environmentally critical area. To meet this emerging environmental crisis, over 30 conservation organizations and government agencies have joined to form the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program (OCCP). The OCCP aims to maintain the rich biodiversity of the area, including species at risk, and maintain a viable ecological corridor between the deserts to the south and the grasslands to the north. With this prospectus, the OCCP invites the participation of all organizations and individuals interested in the realization of these goals. The OCCP will expand community involvement, promote ecologically sustainable land use, enhance stewardship on private and Crown land, and negotiate acquisition of key habitats. The OCCP will also seek strong community support and involvement to help find a balance between ecosystem requirements and human needs and aspirations. Four key habitats have been proposed for OCCP activities: wetland and riparian, grassland/shrub-steppe, coniferous forest, and rugged terrain. As progress indicators, area criteria have also been proposed for Crown land conservation, private land acquisition, and stewardship. To help potential participants get involved, organization contacts are listed on the back cover.

The Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program (OCCP) approach is through facilitation, education and provision of information rather than advocacy or regulation.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

Establishing the OCCP partnership and setting goals and targets, are the first steps towards effective and efficient management of conservation issues shared throughout communities in the Okanagan. The next step is to work proactively on the ground by coordinating and facilitating stewardship and securement activities.

“In the urgent and complicated world of ecosystem and species conservation, no one agency can accomplish in twenty years what a focused partnership of conservation NGO’s, governments, communities, industry, First Nations, and caring individuals can do in six months.” - Jan Garnett, Nature Conservancy of Canada

THE OKANAGAN REGION

The Okanagan is a region of nearly unparalleled biological diversity within British Columbia, Canada, and North America. Lying in the rain shadow of the Coast and Cascade Mountains, the Okanagan experiences low precipitation in both winter and summer. In summer, hot dry air moves in from the Columbia Basin to the south, and very hot temperatures are common; however, the presence of Okanagan Lake (a large, glacial-relic lake), moderates these temperatures somewhat by cooling the air in summer and warming it in winter. The complex terrain of the area, combined with a semi-arid climate has resulted in a wide diversity of ecosystems and organisms in relatively close proximity to one another. The Okanagan Valley is a north to south corridor that connects the dry interior valleys of British Columbia to southern grassland ecosystems of the Columbia Basin. This corridor serves as a point of entry for migrating birds and organisms entering into B.C.’s dry interior. The region currently supports about 300 species of birds, 74 species of mammals, 11 reptiles, 9 amphibians, and 10 - 20,000 invertebrate species.

The high biodiversity of the Okanagan includes many vulnerable, rare and endangered species and plant communities. Rare ecosystems range from very old cedar-hemlock forests located in the wettest valley bottoms of the northern part of region, to the very dry desert ecosystems of the Southern Okanagan.

The majority of the endangered species and habitats are associated with the drier valley bottom ecosystems, comprised of grasslands and low elevation open forests, most of which are privately owned. As a result, these species and habitats are increasingly subject to extensive agricultural conversion, intense human settlement pressure, resort and recreational development, noxious weed invasion, uncontrolled motorized recreation, and forest in-growth and encroachment associated with fire exclusion.

http://www.abnc.ca/pdf/commonage_sei_report.pdf. Much of the priority habitat in the Okanagan has been replaced by urban development, resort development¹, agriculture

¹Example: Golf courses, marinas, vineyards

conversion², transportation corridors, or have been impacted by grazing or recreational use.

CONSERVING IMPORTANT HABITATS

Conserving important habitats is essential for healthy ecosystem function. This allows the continued existence of the plants and animals that live here. The Okanagan covers an area of approximately 2.5 million hectares, is 320 kms long and 140 kms wide, and stretches south from Seymour River/Shuswap Lake to the Canada - U.S.A. border and west from the Monashee Mountains to the Okanagan Range.

<http://ilmbwww.gov.bc.ca/ilmb/lup/lrmp/southern/okan/plan/chap2.pdf>. Habitats in the Okanagan include:

- Grassland and semi-arid ecosystems in the south, which are some of the most threatened habitats in the province, including the only true desert habitat in Canada.
- As elevation increases, ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forests give way to lodgepole pine, sub-alpine fir and spruce, which are common in the south and central plateaus.
- Areas of the north Okanagan become much wetter and support cedar and hemlock forests at low elevations, and sub-alpine fir and spruce at upper elevations, before rising to rugged mountains.

In some parts of the valley over 85% of the grasslands are privately owned and almost exclusively occur in the valley bottoms.

Planning on the basis of the current extent of these habitats is essential in providing direction to OCCP partners and setting priorities for stewardship, securement, outreach and funding.

Add a chart with stats on breakdown of land use.

Existing Crown land 70.5% Crown land Protected Current Private land Current Private Conservation Properties 70.5% Crown land 11.4% Private land 1.3% Ecological Reserves, Conservation Properties, Wildlife Management Areas. 8.1% Nat. Parks 8.2% Prov. Parks .5% Indian Reserves

CONSERVATION ISSUES

Private Land Map GCC

Human population and activity are rapidly growing in the Okanagan. Human-caused changes are having a serious impact on habitats, placing species at risk. In the North and Central Okanagan, some species such as the Burrowing Owl have been extirpated (become locally extinct) through loss of habitat, and many others have become endangered. There is also the possibility of severing the north-south link between northern grasslands and southern deserts. Climate change may result in increased temperatures and reduced precipitation throughout the Okanagan. If so, populations of

² Example: Grasslands converted for grazing purposes, forests converted to fields

many plants and animals will decrease as viable habitat becomes scarce. Species that cannot find suitable conditions quickly by moving to higher elevations or moving northward through the corridor, will disappear. Unmodified lands are limited in extent and are almost entirely under private ownership, most being found in valley bottoms. Ensuring that valley bottoms connect to higher elevations is critical to many species and will help mitigate some impacts of human development. We need to know more about the relationship between human settlement, ecological processes, and functioning ecosystems; planning growth and development in a manner that allows for conservation is essential to maintain the social, economic and environmental health of the region.

Conservation efforts that focus on the following issues will have the greatest chance of ensuring the functionality of the ecosystems in the Okanagan. • Species at Risk and their priority habitats • Invasive Species • Private land issues • Water quality/quantity •

INVASIVE SPECIES

Increasing human mobility has resulted in the introduction of non-native species to the area. Invasive species such as Scotch Thistle, disrupt ecological processes since there are no natural agents present to keep them in check. They impact wildlife habitat and the agriculture industry as well as increase soil erosion, thereby adversely affecting fish habitat and water quality. OCCP partners will work together proactively to coordinate programs to address invasive species.

PRIVATE LAND ISSUES

Private land makes up the majority of the valley bottoms and is essential to many species at risk. Private land stewardship is key for the survival of these species; however, there are many issues that affect the management of private land, particularly as urban growth and resort development continues to demand greater amounts of land for development. OCCP partners can work together to explore solutions that balance the conservation and economic needs of private landowners.

WATER QUALITY/QUANTITY

A clean and dependable water supply is essential for all life. The streams, rivers, and lakes of the Okanagan all combine to provide the area with a wealth of this life sustaining resource. Increased demand for the quantity and variety of water uses such as hydropower, industrial, agricultural, domestic, and recreation is straining the finite water resources of the region. Balancing properly functioning aquatic systems and the needs of the people of the Okanagan is critical.

HABITAT BASED APPROACH

The unique situation and habitats of the Okanagan support many species of plants and animals. A number of Canada's identified species at risk have been found in the area.³ On a provincial scale, 31 per cent of wildlife species and 35 per cent of plant species that are red-listed depend on habitat found in the Okanagan.

Additional species new to science continue to be discovered in this special natural system. Ensuring that habitats are connected and that wildlife can move freely amongst them is critical, particularly in a landscape that is becoming increasingly fragmented. Key habitats in the Okanagan have been identified as wetland/riparian (including foreshores), grassland/shrub-steppe, coniferous forest, and rugged terrain.

Wetland/Riparian

The wetland and riparian (waterside) habitats are the most naturally productive of the four habitat types and they have suffered the greatest loss and have reached a critical point. For example, in the Vernon area 55% of Cattail Marshes have been lost (Ted Lea, BC Ministry of Environment). Most of the wetlands that remain are located in the valley bottom. These provide important habitat for a great number of species at risk, with many species depending on such areas for part or all of the year (ex. Salamander and Spadefoot Toad). Wetland/riparian habitats also play a crucial role in the water cycle, including filtering out sediments and pollutants.

Grasslands/Shrub-steppe

Grasslands and shrub-steppe habitats in the Okanagan have been dramatically altered by human settlement. More than half of the species at risk in the area depend on this desert-like habitat. In addition, all of the vertebrate species that have disappeared from the area in the last century were grassland/shrub-steppe species. This habitat must be maintained in large tracts to support the many dependent species and maintain the north-south ecological corridor through the Okanagan.

Coniferous Forest

Only a few patches of old-growth Ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and Western Larch forest remain and these forests support diverse communities of plants and animals. Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir woodlands support a number of species found in no other habitat type, especially if they are in an old-growth and fire maintained state, with large trees widely interspersed with grasses.

Rugged Terrain

Rugged terrain, mainly magnificent cliffs and rocky talus, is a crucial habitat element for many species of birds, mammals, and reptiles. Although less damaged than other habitat types, it is being threatened by urbanization and recreation activities.

The Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program

- ³ Confirmed - Long-billed curlews, flammulated owls, skinks, gopher snakes, rattlesnakes, screech-owls, spadefoots, badgers, grizzly bears, racers, short-eared owl, rubber boas, spotted bat, western toads (SC). Unconfirmed – nightsnakes, tiger salamanders, white-headed woodpecker, Lewis's woodpecker, Townsend's big-eared bat, Swainson's hawk, painted turtle, grasshopper sparrows.

The Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program (OCCP) was initiated through the combined efforts of over 30 organizations and individuals who began meeting in May 2006 to discuss sharing resources, time and energy on conservation issues throughout the North and Central Okanagan region.

The overall conservation aims for the OCCP are to maintain the rich biodiversity of the area, including species at risk, and maintain a viable ecological corridor between the deserts to the south and the grasslands to the north.

The OCCP will build on previous efforts in the South Okanagan-Similkameen and East Kootenays, where partnered conservation programs have already been established. These initiatives have resulted in protection of significant portions of the landscape, successful stewardship projects, informative research, and an array of excellent publications. The OCCP will also draw heavily from resources such as the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Okanagan, Sensitive Ecosystem Inventories for several sections of the region and diverse mapping resources to identify priorities, set goals and targets, and monitor progress. The challenge will be to achieve the aims against the backdrop of an ever-expanding human population.

The Conservation Program's strategies will expand community involvement in conservation, encourage community level planning that will support land use decisions, enhance stewardship on private and public land, and negotiate acquisition and protection of key habitats, with attention to species at risk found in the area and towards ensuring that additional species do not become threatened. Effective stewardship of the landscape will conserve important habitats and the key ecological values that have always attracted people to this area.

PRINCIPLES

Development and implementation of the Conservation Program should be guided by the following principles:

- Support and involvement of the community and the development of partnerships, are vital to the success of the Program;
- Coordination of the existing conservation initiatives of various organizations and individuals will form the basis for new projects;
- Adaptive management - Decision-making will be guided and adjusted by ongoing scientific research, monitoring, and evaluation;
- Precautionary principle - Lack of scientific certainty will not unduly restrict conservation activities;
- Land Use Planning – A vision for land and resource use be established and steps outlined for achieving this vision.
- Working landscape - Land secured for conservation may be used for compatible commercial purposes, including ecologically sensitive forestry and ranching; private land

stewardship programs will support best management practices for ecologically sensitive forestry and agriculture; and

- Priorities for action will be based on the experience of land and resource managers, information generated by researchers, the interests and concerns of the community, and traditional knowledge of First Nations, and other long-established residents.

PROPOSED STRATEGIES

Four strategies are proposed for achieving the Program's aims:

- Expand community involvement in conservation;
- Promote/support/encourage ecologically sustainable land-use decisions;
- Enhance stewardship on private and public land;
- Acquire key habitats, focusing on species at risk found in the area and associated species guilds.

Expand Community Involvement

The OCCP recognizes the conservation achievements of local residents. The founding partners of the collaboration look forward to working with community members to realize common goals and explore opportunities to learn about and encourage conservation.

The OCCP will work with the tourism industry to ensure that the many visitors to this area will become more knowledgeable and appreciative of their surroundings.

The OCCP will support local educational institutions to develop conservation activities for students in the Okanagan.

Promote/Support/Encourage Ecologically Sustainable Land Use Decisions

The Okanagan is expected to continue to experience significant growth over the next several years. Another strategy of the OCCP is therefore to support future land-use decisions, policies, and practices that recognize conservation values, and promote ecologically sustainable land-use. For this to happen, decision-makers, planners, and developers require new tools, more support, different techniques, and additional knowledge.

Enhance Stewardship on Public and Private Land

The OCCP will promote stewardship activities to encourage landowners and land managers to protect the diversity of native plants and wildlife while allowing for economic opportunity. This includes identifying the information and tools necessary for habitat maintenance and enhancement. It also includes the development and sharing of integrative approaches to land management through conservation incentives, demonstration projects, and cooperative education programs.

Acquisition of Key Habitats

In some cases, it will be necessary to acquire key pieces of habitat. For private land, this will involve purchase, covenants, or donations. For Crown land, conservation will be achieved primarily through existing administrative tools. These conservation lands will require ongoing care and management and in some cases active restoration. Provided

they are compatible with the conservation values of the properties, other uses may be accommodated.

THE OCCP VISION

The Okanagan landscape sustains biological diversity and ecological processes, supports a sustainable⁴ economy and social well being, and have communities that demonstrate the principles of environmental stewardship for many generations.

THE OCCP MANDATE

To coordinate and facilitate conservation efforts, set conservation goals and objectives, and generate the support and resources needed to maintain this effort. The OCCP and its partners have come together to focus conservation and stewardship efforts on private and public lands in order to have landscapes that:

1. Sustain biological diversity and ecological process;
2. Encourage sustainable green economics and social well-being of the people in the Okanagan.
3. Support environmental stewardship principles and practices within communities that demonstrate the principles of environmental stewardship.

OCCP GOALS

These four goals will provide focus to deliver the vision and mandate.

1. Set conservation targets for habitat on private and public lands;
2. Improve access to financial and technical resources necessary for project implementation.
3. Create mechanisms to:
 - Improve communication and accountability within the partnership;
4. Coordinate conservation efforts on private land (and water) and integrate with municipal, provincial and federal crown land using five strategies (list);

⁴ **A sustainable community** uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for many generations. It seeks a better quality of life for all its residents while maintaining nature's ability to function over time by minimizing waste, preventing pollution, promoting efficiency and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy. Decision-making in a sustainable community stems from a rich civic life and shared information among community members. A sustainable community resembles a living system in which human, natural and economic elements are interdependent and draw strength from each other. Rather than being a fixed thing, a sustainable community is continually adjusting to meet the social and economic needs of its residents while preserving the environment's ability to support it.

- Engage community
- Support ecologically sustainable land use
- Promote landowner stewardship
- Acquire land.
- Landscape level ecological planning

COOPERATION

The willingness of the partners to work cooperatively in an atmosphere of collaboration and trust is a pre-requisite for success. A Statement of Cooperation and What it Means to be a Partner have been developed in order to provide greater clarity to partners on interaction.

Focus, strategic thinking and shared priorities are required to keep the Okanagan as a special place. Setting conservation priorities for private land enables the partners to work collectively on the larger task at hand, and to become more efficient with their resources and time, knowing that their collective energy is achieving more for conservation.

OCCP MAIN ACTIVITIES • Stewardship • Securement (acquisitions / covenants) • Outreach • Funding coordination • Support and coordination for partners Conservation efforts that focus on these activities will have the greatest positive affect on the biodiversity in this beautiful region.

MEASURING PROGRESS

To ensure accountability, measures of effectiveness will be incorporated into the responsibility of the OCCP. Conservation analysis has been performed for the majority of the Central and North Okanagan near populated areas, identifying conservation priorities for much of the region. Resources such as Sensitive Ecosystem Inventories (SEI), Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping (TEM) and Wildlife Habitat Mapping help to demonstrate a landscape scale scenario of urban development and conservation, identifying how sensitive ecological areas can be protected by directing urban development towards less sensitive areas. This base information will guide the OCCP in measuring the success of collaborative efforts at ecosystem conservation and native species protection. Habitat targets for voluntary stewardship, purchase and donated covenants and acquisitions be established to serve as a measure of effectiveness. Achieving these targets will indicate that the partnership is succeeding in its effort. Yearly reporting will provide guidance to adapt to changing conditions.

The targets for the four key habitats need to be considered appropriate by OCCP partners. As partners work towards these targets aimed exclusively at private land, many factors need to be considered to ensure conservation values, landscape integrity and economics are taken into consideration. Factors include:

- Priority habitat associations (eg. grassland/dry forest);
- Species, plant communities and aquatic systems at risk (provincial, national, global);

Comment: have to be established

- Connectivity and corridors;
- Expansion of core area of conservation lands;
- Imminent risk of conversion to an inappropriate land use;
- High biodiversity (broad range of species and/or habitat types);
- Critical seasonal requirements (e.g. winter range for ungulates);
- Unique features (e.g. wetlands, heron rookery, mineral lick, spawning site);
- Archaeological and cultural values; and
- Cost of conservation.

Habitat Target in Hectares for OCCP – draft sketch/graph to be added

YOUR NEXT STEP

Conservation is everyone's responsibility and we need to work together to be effective. By founding this partnership and setting goals and targets we have taken the first steps. The next steps require action on the ground.

YOU can help by:

- Joining the OCCP
- Contributing funding or volunteering
- Getting informed
- Supporting and promoting sustainability

As part of this collaborative effort, you can help maintain and, in some cases, restore the rich biological, economic, and social heritage of the Okanagan.

STATEMENT OF COOPERATION FOR THE OKANAGAN COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION PROGRAM (OCCP)

between the Ministry of Environment, The Land Conservancy of British Columbia TLC, Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Allan Brooks Nature Centre, the Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia, Central Okanagan Regional Parks, Lake Country Ecological Society, North Okanagan Naturalists Club, Sustainable Environmental Network Society, City of Vernon, Central Okanagan Regional District, Okanagan Basin Water Board, Nature Conservancy of Canada, North Okanagan Parks and Natural Areas Trust, Lake Country Environmental Society, the Regional District of the North Okanagan and Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

***We see a special place
where***

***... the future of
biodiversity is secure and
the ecological integrity of
the unique landscape is
protected.***

***... species can continue to
migrate between the
interior of BC and the
desert areas of the
western***

United States.

***... people of all ages can
enjoy the natural beauty
the area has to offer.***

***... the traditional values
and knowledge of the
Aboriginal people of the
Okanagan - are honoured
and applied to new
challenges.***

***...our common goal of
sustainability addresses
the use of resources to
meet current needs
(environmentally, socially
and economically) while
ensuring resources are
available for many future
generations.***

We believe that ...

...biodiversity is a key component of Canada's national heritage.

Both Canada and British Columbia have made international and national commitments to conserve biological diversity. Canadians from all walks of life are committed to preserving this rich component of our national heritage for the enjoyment and education of future generations.

Biodiversity has inherent and ecosystem services values as well as economic consequences that justify its conservation. These values must be preserved for many future generations of Canadians.

... the Okanagan Valley natural system is a unique and special place.

The Okanagan Valley is an area of uncommon richness of biodiversity. The mixture of large lake/riparian habitats, undeveloped grasslands and dry forest habitats host species that do not occur elsewhere in Canada, making the Okanagan one of Canada's three most endangered ecosystems with international importance.

The area also forms a biological corridor that connects the shrub-steppe habitats of the Columbia Basin with the grasslands of the Thompson Valley and Coniferous forests to the north. The corridor is crucial for many species of birds that migrate through it annually between summer and winter ranges. It is also key to the long-term movement of species as they adapt to changing environmental conditions, including climate change. As the climate warmed after the last ice age, the corridor was the principal portal of entry of southern plants and animals into the dry grasslands of central British Columbia.

The area is home to an increasing number of people drawn by the superb quality of life -- the beauty of the landscape, the mild climate, and a richness of resources. It supports a wide range of agricultural, forestry, manufacturing, recreational and tourism activities.

... the future of the Okanagan natural system is threatened.

We cannot take the future health of the Okanagan natural system for granted. The area's economic wealth has long been based on its abundant natural resources. Today, however, population growth and associated human activities threaten the natural environment that has made it so special and attractive. Climate change and its effects such as Beetle infestations are having an impact the Okanagan environment.

We intend to ...

***... work together to meet
common challenges for the
future of the Okanagan
natural system.***

The Statement of Cooperation serves as a statement of our shared principles, goals and challenges. We have established common priorities, a means of better coordinating many of the initiatives already underway and have provided a framework for collaboration on future initiatives in the area through the Okanagan Conservation Program Prospectus.

***... translate our commitments
into annual Action Plans.***

To put into practice this Statement of Cooperation, we intend to establish a working group of senior-level representatives of the conservation partners. The goals of this group will be to develop annual Action Plans to secure habitat and manage key habitats, support and encourage sustainable land use practices and decisions, jointly consider long term planning issues including recovery plans for species at risk, and share scientific information on the

Several species¹ residing in the Okanagan are listed as nationally threatened, endangered or vulnerable, Okanagan Chinook Salmon and Okanagan Sockeye Salmon have COSEWIC status. Over a third of all provincially red-listed species are found in the Okanagan.

... it is not too late to save the natural system for our children and for their children.

We have today an opportunity for action as unique as the natural system itself. All the necessary factors for a successful conservation program are in place. Governments (including First Nations), non-government organizations, community groups and individuals are aware of the many challenges to the natural system. We have the desire to preserve this special place. The sound science we need to make informed policy choices is at hand. The commitment to cooperation and partnerships is stronger than ever.

... protecting this special place is our shared responsibility.

With this Statement of Cooperation we are focusing the energies and efforts of the conservation partners so that each can make a distinctive yet coordinated contribution toward addressing the environmental challenges facing the natural system. We will engage the considerable skills, energy and resources of governments, community groups, educators, youth, workers, industry and business.

We intend to work through the many cooperative mechanisms currently in place to inform and involve local governments, community groups, educators, youth, workers, industry and business. This will help ensure an open and transparent process of establishing priorities, identifying opportunities for effective cooperative action, and measuring progress.

We will work with and be guided by community supported; broad based planning initiatives that affect the Okanagan natural system. The Growth Management Strategies and Official Community Plans of Regional Districts in the Okanagan will be key planning tools that will help to focus our efforts in the Okanagan natural system.

... the Syilx² people of the Okanagan have special responsibilities to their ancestors and to future generations on their territories.

Through long historical relationships, the Syilx along with neighbouring nations have acquired unique spiritual and cultural connections to their lands. The Syilx will continue their traditional role as caretakers on their territory. Syilx will work closely with communities within traditional Syilx territory to ensure that their traditional ecological knowledge and unique perspective sets a high standard for all in efforts to conserve and protect their homeland.

natural system.

... continually monitor our progress and address emerging challenges.

In seeking to preserve and enhance the Okanagan natural system, we intend to work together in an open and accountable manner, monitor our progress and consider new priorities for action. We recognize that research, monitoring and evaluation activities will provide new information and may indicate the need to pursue new and different strategies. We are committed to changing our approaches, priorities and management as new information becomes available.

We intend to meet on an annual basis to review progress under this Statement of Cooperation and provide direction on future priorities.

¹ Confirmed - Long-billed curlews, flammulated owls, skinks, gopher snakes, painted turtles, grasshopper sparrows, swainson's hawks, rattlesnakes, screech-owls, spadefoots, badgers, grizzly bears, racers, short-eared owl, rubber boas, spotted bat, townsend's big-eared bat, western toads (SC). Unconfirmed – nightsnakes, tiger salamanders, white-headed woodpecker, Lewis's woodpecker.

² The **Syilx** speaking people's lands lie on both sides of the Okanagan River, east to the Selkirk range, west to the Cascades summit, south into Washington bounded by the Columbia River and Lake Chelan and north up to Salmon River. (<http://www.syilx.org/history-origin.php>)

... we will build on the progress made to date.

In our efforts to work closely together for the future of the Okanagan natural system, we will build on the many worthwhile conservation activities and excellent working relationships that have been established in the area. Many programs and initiatives have resulted in protection of significant portions of the landscape, successful stewardship projects, informative research, and an array of excellent publications.

In working together towards the goals set out in this Statement of Cooperation, we need and welcome the ideas and efforts of all residents and organizations concerned about the future of their special place, the Okanagan natural system. It is our intention to add new signatures to the Statement of Cooperation as new partners embrace the vision outlined in this document.

the Ministry of Environment

The Land Conservancy of British Columbia TLC

Ducks Unlimited Canada

Allan Brooks Nature Centre

Grasslands Conservation Council of BC

Central Okanagan Regional Parks

Lake Country Ecological Society

North Okanagan Naturalists Club

Sustainable Environmental Network Society

City of Vernon

Central Okanagan Regional District

Okanagan Basin Water Board

Nature Conservancy of Canada

North Okanagan Parks and Natural Areas Trust

Lake Country Environmental Society

District of Coldstream

the Regional District of the North Okanagan

Department of Fisheries and Oceans

Okanagan Partnership

Central Okanagan Naturalist Club

Central Okanagan Land Trust

Outdoor Discoveries

Community Mapping Network

Central Okanagan Science Opportunities for Kids

Village of Lumby