



Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy renewal- *what we heard report*

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Background

Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy guides conservation targets and actions across the province. It's intended to be a 'to-do' list for all sectors and people to help prioritize actions and promote change to benefit biodiversity, address climate change, improve human health, make our communities stronger and safer, and support the economy.

The Ontario Biodiversity Council leads the implementation of Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy. We are a group of 40+ conservation, academic, Indigenous and industry organizations and government that work together on common biodiversity goals.

The first Strategy was created in 2005. It was updated in 2011, with time bound targets and an end date of 2020. Building on the progress from these two documents, a renewal committee was established to update the Strategy to 2030. The committee included representatives from Ontario Biodiversity Council member organizations, who worked together to create a draft framework for the renewed Strategy.

Several resources were used to guide updates to the Strategy, including the State of Ontario's Biodiversity 2020 report, the Global Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, priority actions identified during the 2021 Ontario Biodiversity Summit, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and others. Secretariat support was provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, which is a member of Council.

About the engagement

From February 13th to March 27th, 2023 we asked people to share feedback on how to improve and strengthen Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy. A draft framework was published on the Council website and an online workbook was created to engage people across a wide geographic area and demographic audience.

We invited participation in the engagement and shared information through:

- Ontario Biodiversity Council website
- Email newsletters
- Social media
- A free online webinar
- An informational bulletin on the Environmental Registry of Ontario

We gathered input through an online workbook, during an online webinar or information session, and via email.

Individual council member organizations also shared information and collected input from internal and external audiences via newsletters, websites, event calendars, emails, social media platforms, and at virtual and in-person events.

Participants

People from across Ontario shared their ideas to improve the draft Strategy.

- 1,100 comments were collected from 122 respondents via the online workbook.
- 138 participants provided 68 comments during a free online webinar on March 8, 2023.
- 10 individual email submissions were received.

The online workbook included demographic questions about respondents' location, organizations, and identity. Completing this part of the workbook was voluntary.

115 of 122 respondents identified their geographic location:

- Greater Toronto Hamilton area (21%)
- Southwestern Ontario (19%)
- Eastern Ontario (19%)
- Central Ontario (10%)
- Northern Ontario (10%)
- 13% of respondents represented an organization that operates across the province
- 2% of respondents were from outside of Ontario.

Participants represented a variety of different types of organizations. 71 of 122 respondents shared what type of organization they represented:

- Non-governmental or Environmental non-governmental organization (45%)
- Government (23%)
- Academia (22%)
- Private sector (6%)
- Conservation authority (4%)

What we heard

Support for the vision, mission and goals

In general, participants were very supportive of the vision (88% supportive or very supportive), mission (91% supportive or very supportive) and goals (84% supportive or very supportive).

Participants liked the concepts of:

- Living in harmony with nature
- Halting biodiversity loss
- The role of people in protecting the environment
- Urgency of the mission and emphasis on action

Suggestions to improve the mission, vision and goals included:

- Shorten mission and vision to one sentence
- Strengthen links between biodiversity and climate change
- Add context about the need for a whole of society approach to conservation
- Add more emphasis about the need for education, engagement, and mobilization of resources.

Reflect Indigenous perspectives

Many participants shared feedback on better ways to include Indigenous perspectives and representation throughout the Strategy. Some suggestions were to:

- Include an overarching goal about pursuing reconciliation through biodiversity conservation.
- Expand and prioritize partnerships and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, but also include co-leadership and enable Indigenous-led actions.
- Develop plans with Indigenous communities, use wording like co-leadership and Indigenous-led instead of “incorporating” Indigenous knowledge.
- Highlight the need for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).
- Add Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a separate target.
- Add an action to support Indigenous communities to identify, preserve and protect cultural keystone species and their habitats.

Identify implementation opportunities

Many participants had suggestions for how to make actions more feasible and “do-able”, including:

- Encourage collaboration between organizations already doing work and groups just starting out.
- Include more community science and implement biodiversity reporting that engages groups that aren’t currently engaged.
- Engage specific groups such as youth, school boards, farmers, local communities.
- Increase and improve collaboration with universities, environmental groups and municipal governments.
- Incentivize people to take actions immediately and support implementation through rewards programs, financial assistance, tools to reduce ecological footprint.
- Make sure restoration actions use native plants and address the current lack of native plants and seeds.

Use plain language

A common theme in participant responses was to use strong, clear, and concise language.

Suggestions included:

- Make targets and actions specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.
- Use the active voice to make content easier to understand.

Participants also recommended that stronger language be used to highlight the importance of biodiversity, including more emphasis on: intrinsic value of nature, connectivity, climate change, urban environments, ecosystem services, protection and restoration, and the rights of nature.

There were also many recommendations to define less-common words, including: Key Biodiversity Areas, ecosystem services, mainstreaming, natural heritage systems, natural infrastructure, nature-based solutions, priority areas, biocapacity, ecosystem diversity, rewilding, climate refugia, nature positive, financial disclosures, green bonds, and accounting and disclosure principles.

Next steps

Council would like to thank everyone who participated in the engagement on the renewal of Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy. Each comment was considered, and significant improvements were made to the Strategy as a result.

The updated Strategy will be released to the public in May 2023 and everyone is encouraged to get involved, take on the targets and actions, and work with committed groups and individuals from across the province and beyond to protect what sustains us.

APPENDIX: workbook responses

Demographics: 122 participants submitted their suggestions via an online workbook. Filling out the demographic information was voluntary and helped Council to ensure that a broad range of perspectives were represented in the Strategy.

113 respondents identified if they belonged to an under-represented demographic group:

- Not part of an under-represented group - 52%
- Senior citizen (over the age of 65) – 21%
- Youth (between ages of 15 and 24) – 13%
- Another under-represented group (such as peoples with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and people of colour) – 9%
- Francophone – 4%

120 respondents identified if they were First Nations, Metis or Inuk (Inuit):

- No – 93%
- Don't know / prefer not to answer – 3%
- First Nations – 3%
- Inuk – 1%

Responses by theme: The online workbook included the opportunity to comment on each of the draft targets, which were sorted by strategic direction theme.

Strategic direction	Comments
Empower people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • add language about “prioritizing” equal partnerships with Indigenous peoples rather than “supporting” them • develop plans with Indigenous communities, use wording like co-leadership and Indigenous-led instead of “incorporating” Indigenous knowledge • broaden education to include all formal levels and also adult- and workplace education • highlight the importance of communicating Ontario’s Biodiversity Strategy widely in the province and the involvement of youth and community science • include and make use of existing biodiversity action plans of organizations in the province and to include non-renewable sectors, private landowners and farmers • strengthen wording like ‘enhance’ and ‘encourage’, by using more concrete verbs and an active voice • define the word ‘sector’ • targets should be measurable • concern about the availability of adequate funding, feasibility of the timelines and lack of political support
Reduce threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain Key Biodiversity Areas and natural infrastructure • emphasize prevention of invasive species, and the importance of partnerships with neighbouring US states and Canadian provinces, and to document and celebrate successes in elimination

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include smaller scale actions that help reduce threats to biodiversity, for the general public, private landowners and farmers, actions that they could see themselves in, for example on the use of native plants, maintaining hedgerows • explain how for different chemicals, different levels are dangerous • add actions related to reducing water pollution • add an action on increasing the ability to report and monitor pollution • strengthen information about the link between climate change and biodiversity • add information about biodiversity’s mitigation capacity, like carbon storage in forests and wetlands • increase or improve collaboration with universities, environmental groups and municipalities • add an action on reducing resource consumption and promoting behavior change
Enhance resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support native seed banks and native plant nurseries • create an action on seeding prescriptions for big land managers (provincial ministries and municipalities) • like the Indigenous-led conservation, inclusion of crown land and climate refugia • define climate refugia • identify how priority areas are selected and what the 30% by 2030 target exactly means • add action related maintaining and increasing ecosystem connectivity • refer to natural areas instead of terrestrial and aquatic systems (as per UN target) • add an action on recovery of Endangered Species Act listed species
Improve knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement reporting that engages groups that are currently not engaged • ensure safekeeping of sensitive biodiversity data • promote research beyond Ontario • include smaller conservation programs • consider intellectual property rights • concern and consideration for Indigenous communities • include community science • add Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a separate target
Transform investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concern about the dangers of greenwashing and offsetting • include considerations of harmful subsidies • add information on economic loss when we lose ecosystem services • include the voluntary/3rd sector contribution • add penalties for harming biodiversity