

Completing the Decision Support Tool: A Checklist of Key Information for Municipal Natural Areas

This checklist guides users through the process of collecting key information required to assess and submit municipally owned and/or managed natural areas to count toward Canada’s commitment to protect and conserve 30% of lands and waters by 2030 – the 30×30 target. It is structured according to the Decision Support Tool (DST), the tool used to assess whether identified natural areas meet the pan-Canadian criteria to contribute to the 30×30 target. For each section of the DST, this checklist provides a list documents and information that could be used as evidence that the criterion is satisfied. Once the information is collected, it can be used to complete the DST – available with a detailed guidance document in both [English](#) and [French](#) on the Accounting page of the Pathway to Canada Target 1 website – to determine if the proposed sites meet the criteria to count toward the 30×30 target.

Due to its national scale and municipal focus, the checklist may contain language or examples of evidence that are not applicable to all municipal or other local governments. Users can substitute their own language or evidence provided that the information satisfies each of the criteria.

Basic information

Section	Information Needed
Name of Site	<input type="checkbox"/> List of site names for the area(s) being assessed. <u>Note:</u> Multiple sites can be assessed and submitted using a single DST through a “batch assessment” approach. All sites included in a batch assessment must be owned, managed, and protected in a similar manner. For example, a municipality that owns several properties protected by the same designation type and managed according to the same or similar overarching policies and plans could be submitted together.
Designation	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide the legal or common term used to refer to the site(s) being assessed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examples of designations that may be commonly applicable for municipalities include city park, municipal natural area, special management area, or ecologically significant area.
Year of Establishment /	<input type="checkbox"/> List the year(s) that the site(s) being assessed were secured or established by the municipality (or

Securement	other governing authority) that currently owns them.
Area (ha)	<input type="checkbox"/> Area (in hectares) of the site(s) being assessed.
Governing Authorities	<input type="checkbox"/> List the governing body with authority to determine how the site(s) being assessed is used and managed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For municipally owned and/or managed natural areas, this will be the municipality. If the site(s) is co-owned and/or co-managed, all relevant authorities must be listed.
Governance Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Select the appropriate governance type from the drop-down list in the DST. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For municipally owned and/or managed natural areas, this will most likely be Sub-national Government. If the site(s) is co-owned or co-managed, it may be more appropriate to select Collaborative Governance or Joint Governance.
Legal Basis / mechanisms	<input type="checkbox"/> List the primary pieces of legislation providing the legal mechanism(s) to protect and conserve the site(s) being assessed.

Table 1: Standards common to Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)

Criteria	Information Needed
GEOGRAPHICAL SPACE The location and boundary of the site(s) must be demarcated to facilitate the in-situ conservation of biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the site(s) fee simple property owned by the municipality? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Please specify any other arrangement(s) that exist, including any leases applicable to the site(s). • Are the site(s) boundaries demarcated in GIS? <p><u>Note:</u> A GIS file demarcating site boundaries is necessary to complete the assessment as site boundaries are submitted to the target through the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any publicly accessible maps of the site(s) (e.g., digital interactive or PDF maps of natural

	<p>areas on the organization’s website or in publicly available policy or management plan documents)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What (if any) on-the-ground boundary markers are present (e.g., signage, fencing, trail markings, roads, public maps at property entrances)? • <u>Optional</u>: Has the site(s) been surveyed (metes and bounds)? <p><i>If the site(s) does not have clearly defined and agreed-upon boundaries and/or the boundaries are not demarcated in GIS, the site(s) may not be eligible to contribute to the 30×30 target.</i></p>
<p>EFFECTIVE MEANS 1</p> <p>The governing authority or authorities is able to control and prevent activities that negatively impact biodiversity at the site(s).</p>	<p>This section must demonstrate how applicable policies and legislation protect biodiversity at the site(s) and afford the governing authority or authorities the rights to manage how the site is used.</p> <p>Information relevant for this section may commonly be found in the following types of documents and legislation, as applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Legislation granting land use planning authority to the municipality. <input type="checkbox"/> Service level agreements about division of responsibilities, if a site(s) is jointly owned and/or managed. <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal official plan or other land use planning policies, including natural area or biodiversity policies. <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal zoning by-laws and/or other by-laws regulating use of the site(s). <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation easements or other land use agreements. <input type="checkbox"/> Whole-environment-system management plans (e.g., environment strategy, natural heritage system management plan, parks plan, county or urban forest management plan, natural asset management plan, feature-specific management plans). <input type="checkbox"/> Strategies or plans guiding the management of biodiversity. <input type="checkbox"/> Harvesting or forestry operations plans. <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation or trail plans. <input type="checkbox"/> Site-specific management plans. <p>Please provide the following details, as applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the permitted and prohibited uses of the site(s), and how are permitted uses managed to prevent negative impacts on biodiversity conservation at the site(s)?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the site(s) contain any species or habitat features protected under the <i>Species at Risk Act, 2002</i> or other species- or feature-specific legislation? • When and how, if ever, would the governing authority approve a policy or activity that would negatively impact biodiversity conservation on the site(s)? • If tree harvesting or other extractive activities (e.g., hunting, fishing) occur on the property, how are they limited to prevent negative impacts on biodiversity conservation at the site(s)? • If recreational uses are allowed, how are these activities managed to prevent negative impacts on biodiversity conservation (e.g., what is allowed/not allowed, and how are the rules enforced)? <p><i>If the legal mechanisms and/or long-term management plans for the site(s) allow for any activities that could negatively affect biodiversity conservation, the site(s) may not be eligible to contribute to the 30×30 target.</i></p>
<p>EFFECTIVE MEANS 2</p> <p>The governing authority is compelled or required to ensure protective mechanisms are enforced.</p>	<p>This section must outline the official mandates, mechanisms, and goals that guide how the governing authority or authorities enforces how the site is used, as outlined for Effective Means 1, and must identify the staff and/or department(s) responsible for enforcement.</p> <p>Information relevant for this section may commonly be found in the following types of documents and legislation, as applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal official plan or other land use planning policies, including natural area or biodiversity policies. <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal zoning by-laws and/or other by-laws regulating use of the site(s). <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation easements or other land use agreements. <input type="checkbox"/> Service level agreements about division of responsibilities, if a site(s) is jointly owned and/or managed. <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic plan, organization mandate. <input type="checkbox"/> Whole-environment-system management plans (e.g., environment strategy, natural heritage system management plan, parks plan, county or urban forest management plan, natural asset management plan, feature-specific management plans). <input type="checkbox"/> Strategies or plans guiding the management of biodiversity. <input type="checkbox"/> Harvesting or forestry operations plans. <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation or trail plans.

	<p>❑ Site-specific management plans.</p> <p>Please provide the following details, as applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What mechanisms compel or require the governing authority or authorities to abide by the limitations and management directions outlined in Effective Means 1 (e.g., legal requirements, public expectation)? • How often is the site(s) monitored or surveyed for unsanctioned uses, and by whom? • What are the consequences of engaging in unsanctioned use of the site(s)? <p><i>If there are extensive and ongoing issues of unsanctioned use of the site(s) resulting in negative impacts to biodiversity conservation, or if there are no means to enforce rules and limitations on use of the site(s), the site(s) may not be eligible to contribute to contribute to the 30×30 target.</i></p>
<p>LONG TERM</p> <p>The area is permanently protected or conserved and not easily reversed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any wording in the above documentation (e.g., strategies, management plans, land acquisition plans or other relevant documents) which speak to the long-term/permanent intent to protect this site(s)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, in which documents do these statements occur? • Briefly, what would be required to reverse the primary protective mechanisms (e.g., internal staff decision, board or council vote, public consultation period)? What, if any, would the consequences of reversing the protections be? <p><i>If the applicable protective mechanisms are easily reversed (e.g., internal staff decision with no consultation) or intended to be temporary in nature, the site(s) may not be eligible to contribute to the 30×30 target.</i></p>
<p>TIMING</p> <p>Biodiversity is protected or conserved year-round.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are protective mechanisms in effect year-round? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If any protective mechanisms apply only during certain times of the year, please elaborate. <p><i>If there are certain times during the year where no protective mechanisms apply to the site(s), the site(s) may not be eligible to contribute to the 30×30 target.</i></p>

Table 2: Standards that further define and distinguish between Protected Areas and OECMs

Criteria	Information Needed
<p>SCOPE OF OBJECTIVES</p> <p>Objectives have sufficient scope to result in the in-situ conservation of biodiversity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is biodiversity/natural area conservation mentioned in the key objectives of the management plans applicable to the site(s)? • What are the other management goals/objectives for the site(s)? Please list or link to all relevant documents.
<p>PRIMACY OF OBJECTIVES</p> <p>Objectives are such that they result in the in-situ conservation of biodiversity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is biodiversity/natural area conservation the primary management goal/objective for the site(s) or do other goals/objectives supersede? • If other management goals/objectives supersede, how are they managed so that they do not undermine the conservation value, goals and/or objectives of the site(s)?
<p>GOVERNING AUTHORITIES</p> <p>The in-situ conservation of biodiversity is not jeopardized by relevant governing authorities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the site(s) co-owned or co-managed with another authority or organization? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, please specify which site(s) are co-owned or co-managed and the name of the relevant authority or organization. Please also provide details about the nature of the co-ownership or co-management agreement. • Does any other level of government (Indigenous, provincial, territorial, federal) have jurisdiction over the site(s)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, please specify what authority the other level of government(s) has. • Is there any way that the future conservation of the site(s) could be jeopardized by the governing authority or authorities (e.g., co-owners or co-managers, other levels of government with jurisdiction)? • Does your municipality (or any co-owner of the site(s), as applicable) have a land disposition policy? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, please specify what conditions would trigger a disposition and to whom could the site(s) be transferred. <p><i>If any governing authority is able to jeopardize biodiversity conservation at the site(s), the site(s) may not be eligible to contribute to the 30×30 target.</i></p>

<p>BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION OUTCOMES</p> <p>Biodiversity is conserved in-situ.</p>	<p>Information relevant for this section may commonly be found in the following types of documents (the more recent, the better):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Documentation of biological and environmental surveys/inventories where possible (e.g., wildlife, fish, flora, trees, wetlands, ecosystem types, Natural Assets inventory). <input type="checkbox"/> Documentation related to the presence of any rare or at-risk species. <input type="checkbox"/> Description or documentation of any other types of environmental studies done on the site(s) (e.g., partnerships with community groups, NGOs, universities). <p><u>Note:</u> Comprehensive mapping of sensitive species or ecosystem information are not required to satisfy this criterion, nor are comprehensive species lists. The information provided should be summarized to provide a succinct overview of the biodiversity value of the site(s).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any studies, reports or documentation demonstrating improvements to the biodiversity value or ecological health of the site(s) over time (e.g., increased diversity, improved stream/lake water quality, improved tree cover, etc.)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes, please elaborate. • Describe any activities (planned or in-progress) that contribute to maintaining and/or enhancing biodiversity and conservation outcomes at the site(s) (e.g., annual tree planting events, stewardship events, restoration plans, invasive species management), as applicable.
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Optional: Additional Sections and Appendices

Appendix: Informational Site Maps

If available, providing maps of property lines, protective designations, key ecological features, existing development or infrastructure (e.g., trails or recreational, educational or interpretive facilities), and the broader geographic context of the site(s) can provide strong visual evidence for how the criteria of the DST are met.

Appendix: Table of Site-specific Details

When conducting a batch assessment, it can be challenging to summarize the over-arching legislation, policies, management directions and ecological features that apply to all sites without losing important site-specific details. In these cases, it may be useful to provide site-specific details in an appendix. The following table may be used as a template to structure site-specific information.

Site Name	Area (ha)	Year Established	Designation	Protective Mechanisms (e.g., legislation, legal agreements, policies)	Primary Management Direction	Biodiversity Values
Provide the site name (one site per row).	List the area of the site, in hectares.	List the year(s) the site was acquired for conservation by the governing authority or authorities.	Provide the designation for the site, reflecting the designation(s) listed in the Basic Information table.	List mechanisms that protect biodiversity at the site, reflecting the information provided for Effective Means 1.	Describe the primary management objective and/or direction for the site, including the source(s) of that objective or direction.	Briefly summarize the biodiversity values specific to the site. This section could include information about the site's location and ecodistrict, connectivity value, descriptions of the ecosystems and key species present, and/or brief descriptions of site-specific management or restoration activities, as applicable.

References

Providing reference information for documents, reports and other resources used to complete the DST ensures that the source of all information can be identified in the future, if needed.