



Ministers review progress on the conservation of Canada's biodiversity and recovery of species at risk

SASKATOON, SK, Oct. 5 /CNW Telbec/ - Federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for Forests, Wildlife, Endangered Species, and Fisheries and Aquaculture met today in Saskatoon to review progress on activities targeted at recovering species at risk and protecting Canada's biological diversity.

"Biodiversity is important to all Canadians and Saskatchewan people are particularly appreciative of the need to maintain the variety of plant and animal species on our natural landscapes. As the host province Minister, I take pleasure in welcoming my colleagues from across the nation to our province during this our Centennial year," Saskatchewan Environment Minister David Forbes said.

"We need to accelerate action to conserve Canada's biodiversity and recover species at risk," said Canada's Environment Minister Stéphane Dion. "A healthy natural environment supports not only the health and well-being of Canadians, but also contributes to sustaining a strong and dynamic economy for Canada, both for today and for the future. I invite all of our governments to consider investing the funds necessary to implement the activities agreed to by Ministers today."

Ministers today approved a plan to develop a Biodiversity Outcomes Framework for Canada. This Framework will build on ten years of collaboration and on existing plans and strategies implemented by all jurisdictions and will better equip federal, provincial and territorial governments to manage, measure, and report on biodiversity conservation in Canada. The newly approved plan sets the stage for a joint federal-provincial-territorial work program and consultations with a range of stakeholders in order to complete the Framework by the fall of 2006.

The general approach to conserve Canada's biodiversity supports a number of concrete activities agreed to by Ministers. In this context, Ministers recognize the risks posed by wildlife diseases not only to wildlife, but also to human health and Canada's long-term economic sustainability. Ministers also acknowledge the potential negative impact of wildlife disease on the Canadian cattle industry. Ministers addressed this important issue and approved the National Wildlife Disease Strategy, which provides a broad national framework to deal with wildlife disease issues. The National Wildlife Disease Strategy aims to minimize the damaging effects of wildlife diseases on wildlife, livestock, human health and the economy.

Ministers also approved the National Chronic Wasting Disease Control Strategy. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is an infectious, fatal disease affecting deer and elk. The goal of the Strategy is to eradicate CWD from Canada or control it so it does not spread to new geographic areas or species. The need for a national approach has been demonstrated by the recent discovery of CWD cases in Alberta and New York State and by the expansion of the disease in Saskatchewan.

Ministers also endorsed the Action Plan for Invasive Alien Terrestrial Plants and Plant Pests - Phase Two, and the Implementation Strategy 2005-07 for Aquatic Invasive Species, which will further implement the Invasive Alien Species Strategy for Canada approved last year. Invasive alien species, such as zebra mussels in the aquatic

environment and the weed purple loosestrife, threaten Canada's biodiversity, economy and society. Federal, provincial and territorial governments will now build on existing partnerships and establish new collaborative efforts to prevent the introduction of new invasive alien species into Canadian habitats and to manage and prevent the spread of existing invasive alien species.

A key initiative to encourage collaborative action is the Invasive Species Partnership Program, which Ministers approved today. This national, federally-funded program will allocate up to \$1 million annually for five years to community-based projects aimed at reducing the introduction and spread of invasive alien species. Ministers instructed their Deputy Ministers to engage officials responsible for national, provincial and territorial parks and protected areas in addressing invasive species, and called for a federal-provincial-territorial meeting of Ministers responsible for parks.

Ministers also noted the role Canada's Aboriginal people play in conserving our biological diversity. It was recognized by Ministers that protecting our resources requires continuing consultation and cooperation. Ministers agreed to focus continuing attention on national cooperation to examine best practices as well as encourage capacity building to include effective involvement by Aboriginal people and communities in natural resource management. They also agreed to meet in the coming year with the NACOSAR (National Aboriginal Committee on Species at Risk) to discuss species at risk programming across Canada.

A discussion paper for consultation with Canadians was approved by Ministers, setting out the policy questions and issues relating to Access to genetic resources and Benefit Sharing (ABS). ABS is the third objective of the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, which calls for "the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge". The Ministers agreed to continue assessing the challenges and opportunities of developing ABS policies in Canada, with the aim of making it a priority to promote Canada's social, environmental and commercial interests.

Ministers responsible for species at risk made progress on several matters at the Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council (CESCC) annual meeting. The ministers discussed recovery of at-risk species and released the 15th annual Recovery of Nationally Endangered Wildlife Program (RENEW) report and its companion document entitled "Saving the Wild". The RENEW Report provides information on the status of recovery planning and implementation in Canada.

CESCC also released the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada's (COSEWIC) annual report on the status of species at risk in Canada. Ministers thanked COSEWIC for their work on assessing at-risk species and provided guidance to COSEWIC for its work in the coming year.

Ministers reviewed progress on the development of bilateral agreements on species at risk and the recently completed and signed Canada - British Columbia bilateral agreement as an example. In addition, other provinces, territories and the Government of Canada are committed to completing their respective bilateral agreements.

Minister Michael Miltenberger, NWT, will host next year's meetings in the Northwest Territories.

Backgrounders:

- National Wildlife Disease Strategy
- Invasive Alien Species
- Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing (ABS)
- The Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council

Related Background Information:

- Canadian Biodiversity Information Network
<http://www.cbin.ec.gc.ca>
- Canada's Strategy for the Protection of Species at Risk
www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca
- The Species at Risk Act:
www.sararegistry.gc.ca .

(Egalement disponible en français)

BACKGROUNDER

NATIONAL WILDLIFE DISEASE STRATEGY

Wildlife diseases are diseases that originate or develop in wildlife. Wildlife diseases are having an increasingly destabilizing impact on wildlife, human health and agricultural production and are putting pressure on health systems, trade and economies across the world.

Approximately 70 per cent of emerging diseases affecting human health and commerce are believed to have a wild animal source. Examples of wildlife diseases include Avian Influenza, Chronic Wasting Disease, SARS, HIV-AIDS, West Nile Virus, Bovine Tuberculosis and Lyme Disease.

The direct cost on wildlife diseases to the Canadian and global economies are now being measured in the hundreds of millions of dollars per year. For instance, estimates for 2002 place the costs on Canadian governments to deal with four wildlife diseases (Chronic Wasting Disease, West Nile virus, Tuberculosis and Brucellosis) at around \$36 million.

Under international obligations within the World Health Organization, World Trade Organization, World Organization for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Canadian authorities are expected to exercise vigilance and transparency in detecting, identifying, reporting and containing wild animal diseases.

Canada's management of wildlife disease issues has been challenged in recent years by the increased number, complexity and magnitude of high-impact disease occurrences and by the threat of bioterrorism. In light of these factors, there is a need for more comprehensive wildlife disease strategies.

Currently, wildlife disease issues are managed by a variety of government departments and agencies with support from aboriginal and non-government organizations. The spread of West Nile Virus across

North America and the devastating outbreaks of Avian Influenza are just two examples that demonstrate the need for enhanced coordination and capability among these organizations.

In 2003, Ministers responsible for wildlife, forests, and fisheries and aquaculture agreed on the need to develop a National Wildlife Disease Strategy (NWDS) and directed their officials to complete the task. Environment Canada, through the Canadian Wildlife Directors' Committee, led the development of the Strategy in consultation with provincial and territorial wildlife agencies and federal departments responsible for health, food safety and fisheries management, as well as with the Canadian veterinary colleges.

The NWDS is a response and management framework that aims to minimize the negative impacts of wildlife diseases on wildlife, human health and the economy. The Strategy will complement existing disease management mandates and programs of government agencies across Canada, by building on their disease management policies and programs, identifying and filling gaps, and improving coordination. For instance, NWDS will strive to establish greater coordination of animal disease management programs in all sectors across federal, provincial and territorial governments. The non-government sector, in particular universities, may play an important role in delivering the Strategy.

The Strategy will provide a framework to coordinate approaches across agencies and jurisdictions in managing wildlife diseases in Canada. The Strategy focuses on six main goals: Prevention; Early Detection; Rapid Response; Disease Management; Education and Training; and Communication. Its objectives are to be achieved through a series of action plans developed for each of the goals, and will be implemented collaboratively among the responsible jurisdictions.

Action plans have been developed by committees of experts, with representatives from federal and provincial departments and agencies responsible for wildlife, health, food safety, and agriculture, as well as representatives from non-government organizations and the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre.

The action plans identify existing programs and agencies relevant to each goal and provide a better understanding of existing capability, possible gaps and funding priorities. These action plans, taken together, create a comprehensive overview to identify and address existing and emerging wildlife disease issues.

Further information on Canada's National Wildlife Disease Strategy can be found on the Internet at: www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/cnwds/index_e.cfm or call Environment Canada's Inquiry Centre at: 1-800-668-6767.

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