

Publishing and accessing biodiversity information in Canada

Towards a Canadian biodiversity knowledge mobilization strategy

Brief history and raison d'être

Building a national coordinated network for biodiversity data and information providers is an essential service if Canada is to remain competitive as a global science & technology innovator and remain an environmentally sustainable nation, secure in its health, agricultural and natural resource strategies and practices.

Many attempts have been made to organize components of such a network but the most significant attempt to create a fully inclusive national network of providers and users was with the Biodiversity Knowledge Information Network (BKIN). BKIN was the outcome of a multilateral conference held in March 2001 at which a common agreement among stakeholders from government, academia, NGOs and industry was drafted. The untimely events of September 11, 2001 (9-11) turned government attention and support away from biodiversity and towards the issue of national security resulting in the collapse of the initiative.

The BKIN concept remains fundamentally as valid today as when it was first developed. What has changed is the increasing urgency and demand for information and the growth of capacity, tools and technologies by which to implement an integrated broadly inclusive and grassroots supported network.

For this reason Canadensys, NatureServe Canada and the Federal Biodiversity Information Partnership are proposing a workshop to review fundamentals of the BKIN concept, assess current need and to design a means to implement an innovative and community supported national network with attainable goals.

Current conditions

Canada has moved forward in several areas of data access and management since the creation of the BKIN concept that include expansion of digital data networks, improvements in digital technologies and slowly improving access to digital information, modest public investment in the growth of non-governmental networks and communities of purpose, the institution of a national biodiversity data portal and participation in the creation of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF).

What is not yet in place is a well organized and functional dispersed biodiversity information network, endorsed by all stakeholders, through which the open flow of biodiversity data essential to the needs of Canadians can be met. Neither is there any coordinated effort, identified resource base or recognized leadership to institute such a network. Funding is marginal with no clear priorities in place to approach demand despite the incrementally growing risks in an increasingly competitive international environment.

This workshop proposes to address key elements of concern noted above that need to be instituted, create leadership to build a national network, define the main parameters of the network and from this help focus on specific initiatives for which support will derive the most immediate success.

References

1. Biodiversity Knowledge and Innovation Network (BKIN) <http://bit.ly/hB9J4Q>
2. Canadian Taxonomy: Exploring Biodiversity, Creating Opportunity
(<http://www.scienceadvice.ca>)
3. State of Biodiversity Information
(http://www.natureserve.org/publications/natureserve_canada_SOBI_2010.pdf)