

Key Biodiversity Areas: Prairie Region - Indigenous Perspectives and Engagement

A Workshop Report Created by:
The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER)
for
Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Canada



CIER
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Environmental Resources

Acknowledgments

The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Canada would like to acknowledge and thank all the participants who attended the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) workshops. Ultimately, we hope that Key Biodiversity Areas can be complementary to and supportive of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.

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Introduction

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Canada partnered with The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER) to develop a regional virtual workshop to introduce and Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) to Indigenous communities in the Prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) for their feedback.

KBAs are sites that contribute significantly to the persistence of biodiversity. This means that the survival of a species or ecosystem may depend on the management and stewardship of the KBA. The process of identifying a KBA is a scientific one based on scientific understanding of the relationships between animals, plants, and places in terms of numbers. A large proportion of a species population or of an entire ecosystem need to be present in a place for it to qualify as a KBA. Because KBAs are based on a standardized, international scientific approach, the outputs are broadly trusted and can be used to support conservation decisions and actions focused on those places and species.

Prior to the workshops, the role of Indigenous Peoples, in Canada, in the KBA process included:

- High-level Indigenous input in the Terms of Reference for the National KBA initiative;
- A contract with an Indigenous expert to assess the KBA Standard;
- Discussions with and a presentation to the First Nation Advisory Committee on Species at Risk (FNACSAR); and,
- Two past national workshops reaching over 80 people from 30 different communities.

The overall goal of the KBA Program in Canada is to identify KBAs and map priority areas that meet the scientific criteria for a KBA. As mentioned, while the scientific criteria developed to identify KBAs does not include a focus on Indigenous values and knowledge, it is highly likely that some KBAs may also be areas that hold significant cultural, spiritual, and economic importance to Indigenous Peoples. Because KBAs are considered important to the survival of species and ecosystems from a scientific perspective, it is likely they also have many other values that also enables nature (and people) to survive and thrive.

Key objectives of the workshop:

- Provide information about KBAs and the process to identify them in Canada and answer questions from Indigenous communities and organizations.
- Listen to Indigenous communities and organizations from the Prairie region on how they may want to be involved in the KBA Program.
- Explore what is needed to support and enable participation in the KBA Program.
- Explore how the KBA Program might support the prairie priorities and vision that Indigenous communities and organizations have for their homelands in AB,SK, and MB.

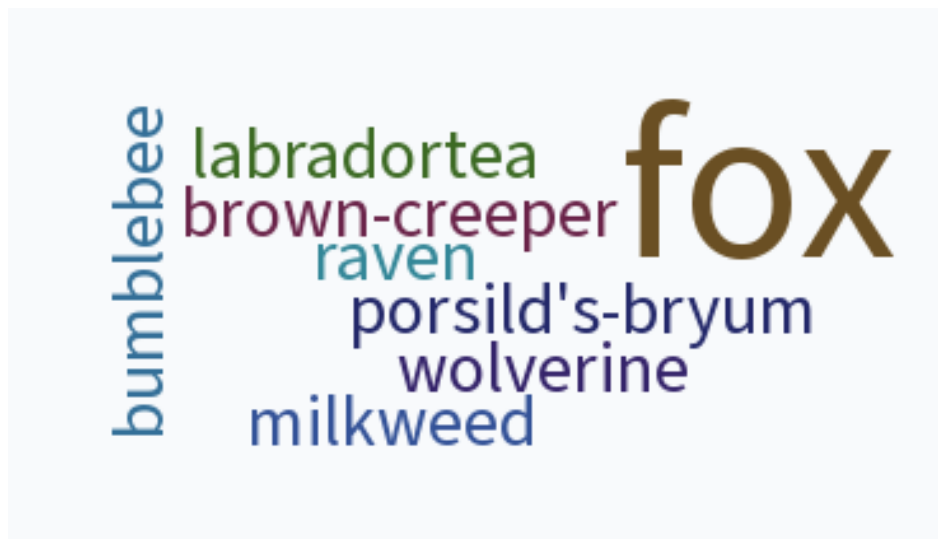
The Workshop

On January 10th, 2023, the online workshop was presented by WCS Canada's Dr. Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne, Director for KBAs, Dr. Peter Soroye, KBA Assessment and Outreach Coordinator and Dr. Cheryl Chetkiewicz, Director, Indigenous Communities and Conservation. Facilitation was provided by The Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources (CIER)'s Lynn Mallett, CIER Project Manager, with support from Shianne McKay, CIER Senior Project Manager, and Anita Murdock, CIER Research Associate.

Figure 1. Communities identified by participants who attended the KBA Workshop on January 10, 2023 and responded to the first polling question, "Which community or organization are you from?"



Figure 2. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on January 10, 2023 and responded to the second polling question, "Name a plant, animal, or place that has a special meaning to you?"



Each workshop was visually recorded to provide a visual summary and overview of the workshop and discussion. We used graphics and artwork provided Aaron Russell of [Conference Doodles](https://www.conferecedoodles.com) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Visual recording from the KBA Workshop held on January 10, 2023 (Credit: Aaron Russell at www.conferecedoodles.com).



What we heard at KBA Workshops

The following section describes the questions and responses to presentations, discussion questions, and polling questions in Sessions 1, 2 and 3. Footnotes refer to workshop participants (Appendix C removed for public report). Where several participants had the same question or comment, there are multiple footnotes.

Session 1: What are KBAs?

Presentation by Ciara Raudsepp-Hearne on what KBAs are followed by a question-and-answer period to consider opportunities and challenges of the KBA approach.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Q: Is there any funding for Indigenous participation in providing input for KBAs?¹

WCS Canada: Yes, stipends/honorarium are provided for time and expertise. So far interest has been in site delineation and identification. WCS is constantly fundraising and looking for opportunities. The primary issue is the large geographic scale of Canada and being able to reach out to the right people.

Q: Is there any funding support for communities to develop base line studies monitoring or management and enhancements plans for KBAs?²

WCS Canada: Maybe. WCS is a small NGO. Funding is mainly to make sure that people are compensated for participation but there are only small pots of funding. There is always potential for larger amounts, but how fast this would become available is not clear right now.

KBA APPROACH

Q: For each KBA, what are you tracking? Status? For example, migration patterns shift, or problems with areas that cause biodiversity to leave change over time.³

WCS Canada: Yes, KBAs are meant to be reassessed every 8-12 years, recognizing global change of lands and waters. It is not expected that KBAs will be listed as a KBA forever. However, to be considered as a KBA (ex: Caribou birthing grounds), species must be confirmed for approximately 3 of the last 7 site visits. As for maintaining information, a national registry with a site description, contributing information with links to freely available data is a work in progress. Some things which will be included are number of species at site. Bringing together this information, with site descriptions, can highlight items to be shared publicly, recognizing special work and other specifics.

Q: What is the process and timeline of designating KBAs?²¹

WCS Canada: It can take a while, because WCS is a small NGO. Steps would include:

- Reaching out to local experts.
- Delineation of boundaries with experts and communities.
- Expert review (technicians, stakeholders, Indigenous communities)
- Submitting KBA proposals to the national steering committee.
- Then submitting proposals to the global KBA Secretariat.
- At a minimum it could take 2-3 months.

Q: Our community is interested in developing a KBA for the Lower Fraser River for habitat restoration. Would this be a joint venture?²²

WCS Canada: It would not require co-partnership, but we're open to any kind of collaboration that suits a community best. WCS can take on the burden of financing and logistics, like connecting to experts and filling in proposals forms. But we're also happy to support communities and organizations if they want to do the work themselves. Birds Canada can be a partner on this KBA work and is available to help with information on local bird species from a Western perspective.

ENGAGEMENT (community/industry/business)

Q: Is KBA information available or used in the forest industry? Does industry ask for this information, or is this something that is offered to them?⁴ We have been looking for something like this around our area for our trappers and Elders related to biodiversity. We would like to bring in our sister communities. The

mining industry is already being done, but forestry doesn't have on the ground baseline studies. They're flying blind.⁴

WCS Canada: It is important to share with other industries like forestry and mining, but it has not been done yet. It is freely available to them, but it needs to become part of their regular business. Sharing at a global scale has seen more progress. Reports from user groups (business/industry) have shown that they do make use of this information. There are portals for industry to access this data to get started. It's about making sure it becomes a regular part of industry's way of doing business. Low industry footprints are special sites across the North, but methods are new for this process.

Q: How is the scoping done? What would be the next steps if in fact our community was identified as a KBA? It looks like our community was targeted in the original assessments for potential KBAs, South of Montreal. We do host biodiversity in the region.⁵

WCS Canada: We may or may not have had access to species inventories in some parts of Canada so we've only scope out potential KBAs where we already have some data, which is imperfect. There are two things to know: 1) If we did have access to data showing a potential KBA, and were able to explore, the next step would be to reach out for interest in participation to get more information and interpret the data that we have. Presently, there is a Quebec coordinator lead available to discuss this with. 2) If no data was identified and therefore, we don't know about a potential KBA we search for opportunities for discussion brought forward by community. The objective is to identify all KBAs in Canada, but this is challenging due to lack of information. We will do our best and count on reaching out to community experts to identify the rest of them which will take time.

Q: Any discussion around integrating any cultural dimensions to KBAs? Taking into consideration that biodiversity intersects with language and the land⁶. There are concerns over lack of Indigenous engagement from the start^{19,23}. Oral history is still a relevant form of knowledge holding for our community¹⁷.

WCS Canada: Hard to answer but initial past discussions haven't gone very far. This tool at the global scale cannot be changed because it is for a particular purpose. We're struggling with how to make it relevant, but it can't be relevant to everyone because it's missing the cultural piece. We would have to develop something complementary to the KBA tool, but then we run into issues on how to make it appropriate to all nations or regionally/community focused, because those cultural pieces are different across Canada.

Overall Themes and Key Messages from Session 1 included:

1. Funding opportunities for Indigenous participation.
 - Stipends and honoraria should be provided for people's time and expertise in KBA engagement and will be available from KBA Canada.
 - There is a potential to obtain additional funds for Indigenous communities and organizations to support baseline studies, monitoring programs, and enhancements associated with KBAs.

2. Timeline for KBA approach.
 - Designating a KBA can take approximately 2-3 months or longer from the first steps of reaching out to local experts to global steering committee approval.
3. Engagement.
 - There is legitimate concern that this KBAs information will be used against First Nations.^{19,24} Trust is key to building relationships. Any steering committee should include Indigenous members, and not as a separate Indigenous specific committee. KBAs should move away from “gathering” knowledge, and instead support current Indigenous led work.¹⁹
 - The KBA Program has not engaged the forestry and mining sectors specifically about this work, and this could be relevant to Indigenous interests in KBAs.

At the conclusion of Session 1, participants were polled to identify what other things should be considered when talking about KBAs across Indigenous lands on February 23 (Figure 5) and March 7 (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on February 23, 2022 and responded to the third polling question, “What other things should we be considering when talking about KBAs across Indigenous lands?”

What other things should we be considering when talking about KBAs across Indigenous lands?



involve cultural protection of species in the future.⁴ If we could combine our programs with other programs, to add biocultural elements and it would make a difference to map it (done respectfully).⁴ Some elders don't want to share this. We want to protect values and share.¹⁶

WCS Canada: We can use the culturally sensitive information (biocultural values) to help describe a KBA, but not map or include this information publicly.

We would like to collaborate with Guardians of the Fraser Valley, because Elders would share information with Guardians, they would already know what the plants are, and can't share with just anyone for cultural safety reasons.¹⁷

All species are linked. Baseline studies (mining, forestry, infrastructure) and now leveraging SARA to further mitigate efforts for species that are here.^{7,8,17,19} Our Fisheries/Lands and Resources approach: "We are all one" in our language¹⁰. The goal is to preserve the ceremonial and cultural relationship with the land's resources through advocacy work against industry^{19, 20}.

Other conservation work would involve medicinal plant work (wetlands) and future evaluation for species identification. Another program involves conservation of migratory bird and bats.³ We feel like everything should be prioritized to preserve ecology especially of traditional importance.^{3,8}

Animals in our community include caribou, moose, and trout, and we have noticed a big dip in numbers. There may be a lot of reasons for this, maybe pollution, as we don't manage vehicle waste, infrastructure, and sewage very well. Our community was included in the Canada Nature Fund target 1 - Fawn River Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). So, there has been prior work done, which is a good step.⁹

We want to protect and regenerate what we have left. Our community is in a cold watershed area, so logging will have minimal impact. We want to bring back beaver to help regenerate estuaries and wetlands and we want to look at what local resources like the resident seals and sealions are feeding on, like steelhead and trout, which are in immense decline.¹⁰

We are in a Southern rocky mountain trench. Fire suppression practices and invasive plants have affected the quality of habitat for elk, deer, and local endangered plants such as Spaldings Campion. We are helping to improve habitats for these species and others. We have worked on forest thinning and invasive plant management but due to overgrazing, open grasslands aren't doing well so we need management support. Surrounding provincially led programming does not apply to Federal reserve land.¹¹

Other Indigenous conservation priorities mentioned by participants included the following:

- Protection of our local canyon area where our fishermen fish. This area draws a lot of tourists.¹³
- Tree species of concern include black ash (being threatened by emerald ash borer) and hemlock trees (being threatened by hemlock woolly adelgid).¹⁴
- We are a young lands department (3 years old) so we're trying to figure out what species should we be focusing on in our community. We already know that the moose population and lake sturgeon need to be part of our focus.⁴
- Blueberries are in decline. But not sure how KBA could be useful for blueberries.¹⁵

- Moose are a common concern for a lot of communities. Moose population is low.^{4, 14, 15} Not a species at risk in some regions, so funding is limited. Moose are arguably important for Indigenous people across turtle island.

WCS Canada: Moose are likely an issue with the KBA process because they are not threatened and they range so far, so there is not likely to be specific 'sites' that are disproportionately important for moose. The KBA solution is to focus on the ecosystem that supports moose survival.

- We are working to update files and locating maps for 7 reserves.¹³ We are building back from the ground up. Our land use plan needs to be updated, and we need to identify areas on reserve that need to be protected from development. Traditional lands aren't included but we are working on it. We are also collecting verbal history.¹³
- There is a gap in addressing the spiritual and cultural understanding between wildlife and Indigenous people. Some communities have agreed to save the blueberries for the bear population during a heavy forest fire year. Traditional spaces impacted by fire²⁰.
- Animal and plants are our brother and sisters. Utilize momentum behind Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC)¹⁹.

WHAT COMMUNITIES ARE DOING

We're mapping with GIS in our region. If we want to share using KBAs, how do we collaborate with ongoing projects generating metadata? Indigenous language is key to language being attached to these points. Language overlay, helps retain language, this could support communities and culture¹⁸

We're starting a Guardian's program to take care of all territory and BC has started to take Indigenous advice on a future province-wide Guardians' programs.¹⁷ We can identify the ecological criteria and the nations and elevate those sites.¹⁷

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

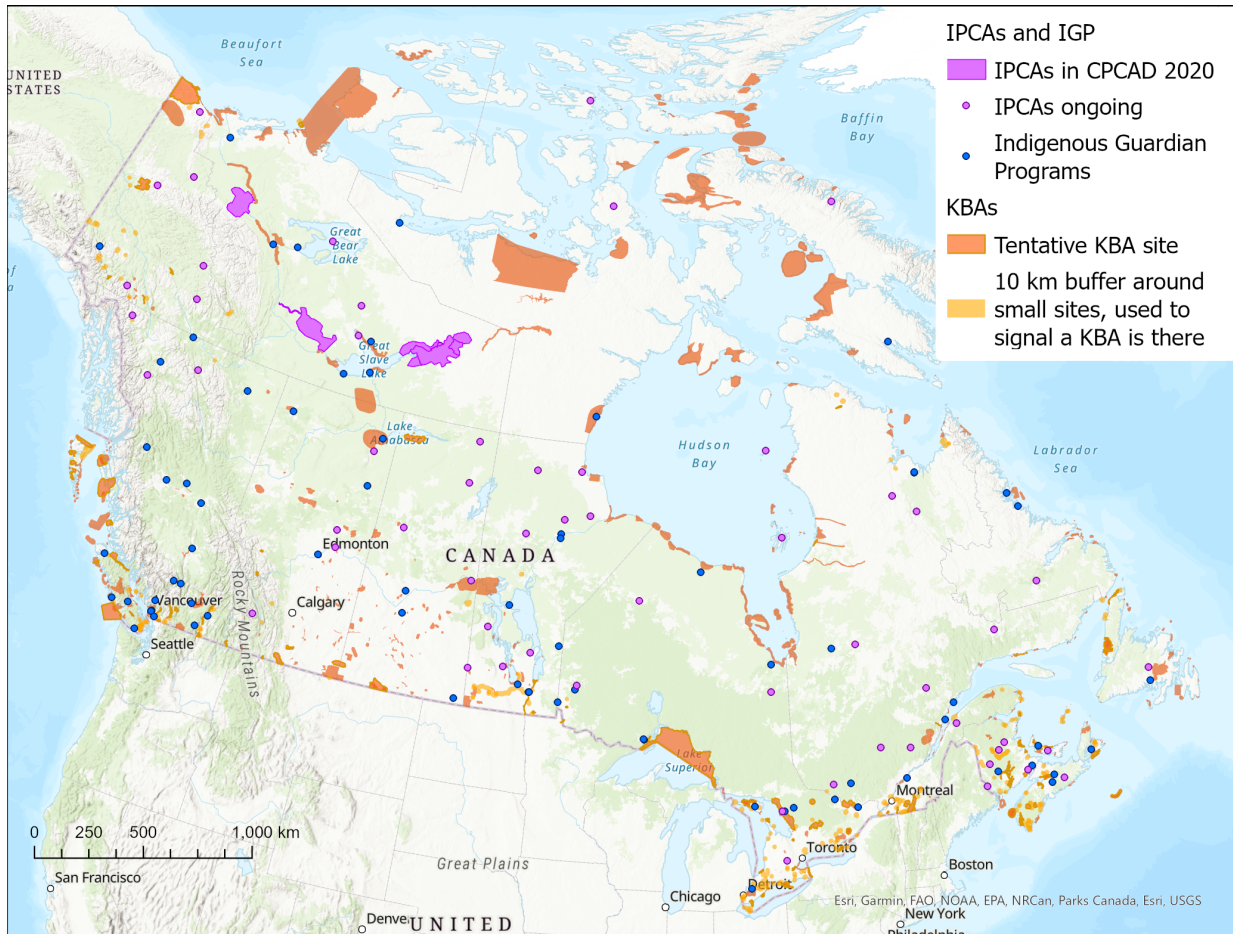
SAR Ontario and SAR Federal – Traditional lands are not exempt from the Federal SAR legislation, but Ontario allows for forestry industry legislation.⁴

KBAs could be helpful to source funding^{8, 11} to be more proactive rather than reactive⁸. KBAs should be outlined in a territory to show importance to others.^{8,9,11} KBAs would be beneficial and complementary to our work.¹⁰ KBAs could help open and cover more area to other areas like watersheds or unique ecosystems.^{9, 11}

Applied for multiple funding pots, Species at Risk Act (SARA), Indigenous Forestry Initiative (IFI), and at least two others to gather more information and find most important/special areas to members. They haven't been documented yet so in the future lead into more leverage for protection funding whether by KBA or IPCA.⁴ Currently undergoing a public hearing process to decide what is the best way to conserve caribou. Wolf/Caribou relationship important to people in Sahtu, this region has a few IPCAs that overlap KBA map shown (Figure 7).¹²

If communities know more about protecting the land, the better. Do what we can for land stewards and set good examples.¹² Create ease of use through decision tree of funding opportunities based on desired outcomes.

Figure 7. Map of KBAs identified and tentatively identified to date in relation to Indigenous Guardians' Programs and IPCAs



Participants returned to the main room following the discussion in Session 2 and were asked a fourth polling question as to whether international recognition of places on their homelands would be beneficial for their priorities (Figure 8, Figure 9).

Figure 8. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on February 23, 2022 and responded to the fourth polling question, “Would international recognition of the important places and relationships you have with the land, waters, places, plants, animals, and each other would help your community with its vision for taking care of its homelands?”

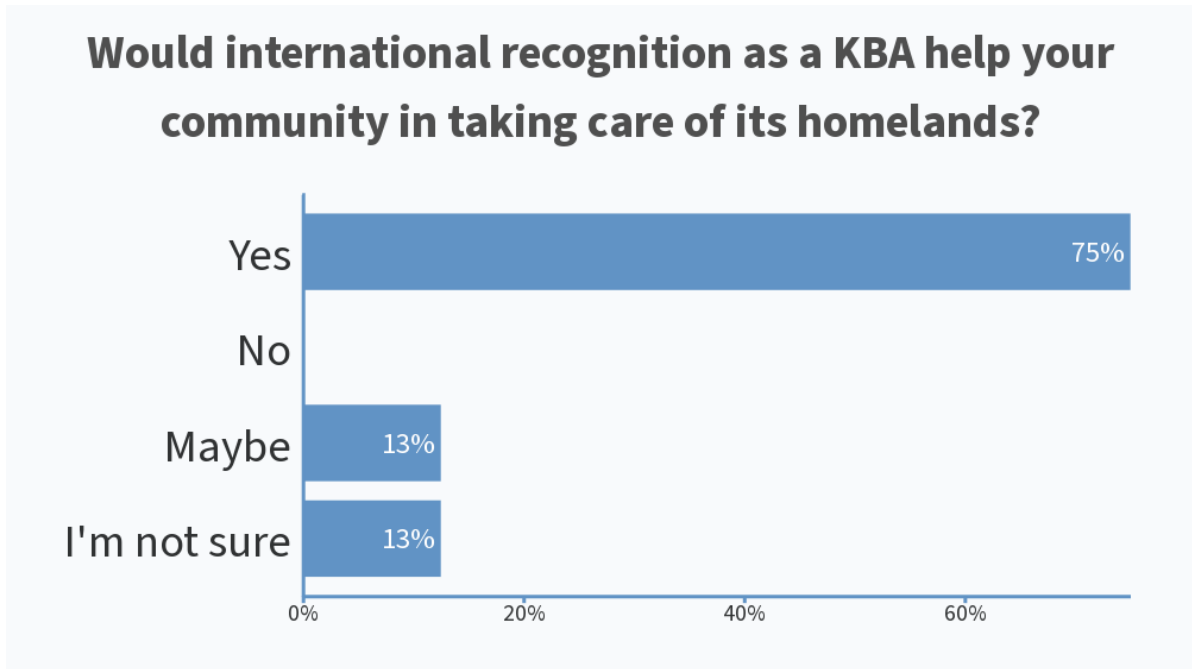
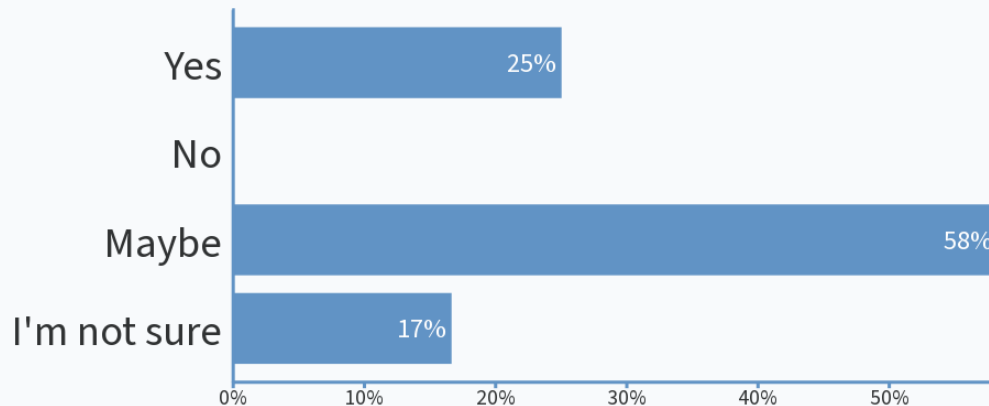


Figure 9. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on March 7, 2022 and responded to the fourth polling question, “Would international recognition of the important places and relationships you have with the land, waters, places, plants, animals, and each other would help your community with its vision for taking care of its homelands?”

Would international recognition as a KBA help your community in taking care of its homelands?



Session 3: How would participants like to participate in KBA work?

Questions to Discuss:

- What more would you like to know about KBAs?
- How might you like to be included in identifying KBAs across your homelands?
- What advice would you like to share with the KBA program leads about being involved?

NATIONS FEEDBACK AND ADVICE

Going out on the land as an approach for KBAs would be received well.

KBAs need to address harvesting rights. We still have caribou in our area and our people use it. Mitigate this by being upfront with community in meetings.¹² Our organization is the main link to wildlife management of the settlement (Co-management board), and we would work with our community partners.¹²

Create the opportunity to bridge the western and Indigenous science gap through funded project partnerships to address what the KBA is identifying. Go beyond the identification piece.¹¹

Best way to engage with Chief and Council is a briefing note (2-page max), which includes reporting that has already been done. Use presentations with lots of visuals, examples, and ideas, rather than dictating what should be done. Highlighting relevance and benefits to protect culture and providing the scope to any collaborations.¹²

Indigenous communities and knowledge are not likely going to be stored in a computer. As such, it is important to consider that Indigenous communities would like to see something done on the land, so

that the database you are using can be confirmed or not, by boots on the ground research and knowledge collection.

KBA QUESTIONS

Q: Is there an opportunity to partner with other organizations to work together? We would want to integrate Indigenous knowledge and what we're trying to protect on the land.^{4,11,25.}

WCS Canada: There are many opportunities to work with organizations within the KBA initiative, we are open to all collaborations and trying to help develop partnerships. We can't always focus on priorities that don't meet KBA criteria, but it would be certainly a goal to incorporate the stewardship of priority values of communities into KBA management and stewardship.

We're interested in learning more about KBA site overlaps in the nation and need more detail on what is needed.¹⁰ Cree Nation of Chisasibi has our own a research center for ecological studies, coastal habitats and methods to do research, like indicators of ecological integrity developed with Cree elders and land users.² Site: www.cerri.ca. West coast of Vancouver Island, focusing on cedar tree. Beavers could be introduced to maintain wetlands.¹⁰

Q: In the north, there are not a lot of grasslands and prairie regions to preserve species such as the Eastern meadowlark. Can an airport be used as a KBA?⁷

WCS Canada: Yes, so long as nature needs the site and meets KBA criteria.

Q: What is the minimum area or maximum area?⁸

WCS Canada: There is no minimum or maximum area, KBAs can be any size, but should be considered a 'site'. KBA is based on site scaled conservation. For example, a species at risk you may need 1% present at the site for example. Scale for effective stewardship.

Q: Is there an issue with trying to define a KBA that operates on Provincial and Federal reserve land?⁸

WCS Canada: International transboundary KBAs do exist. A KBA is a layer of information without a management strategy, so it is mostly reasonable to delineate sites on an imaginary map that do cross jurisdictions. It would be important to talk to both parties to determine the way to move forward. Alternatively, there could be two designated sites on either side of the "border".

How would KBAs fit in with other initiatives, and how they would support each other, in ecologically significant areas. For example, Territorial vs Federal protected areas.^{8, 12, 14}

WCS: For KBA work, one project in the Yukon is the only boots on the ground example. We let people know about KBAs through letters, phone calls, and presentations, before any scientific scoping work took place. Then a workshop was held showing existing or potential KBAs to propose to community. Community preferred to not have a part of land outlined in the final KBA because it was a sensitive fish spawning area, and therefore it was not included.

Q. Can you do a presentation to our Chief and Council?

WCS Canada: Yes. We will meet with any single person or group of people to discuss KBAs.

Participants returned to the main room following the discussion in Session 3 and were asked a fifth polling question on how they might like to be included in the KBA process (Figure 10, Figure 11) and a sixth polling question on whether they were interested in providing advice to the KBA program (Figure 12, Figure 13).

Figure 10. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on February 23, 2022 and responded to the fifth polling question, "How might you like to be included in identifying KBAs on your homelands?"

How might you like to be included in identifying KBAs across your homelands?

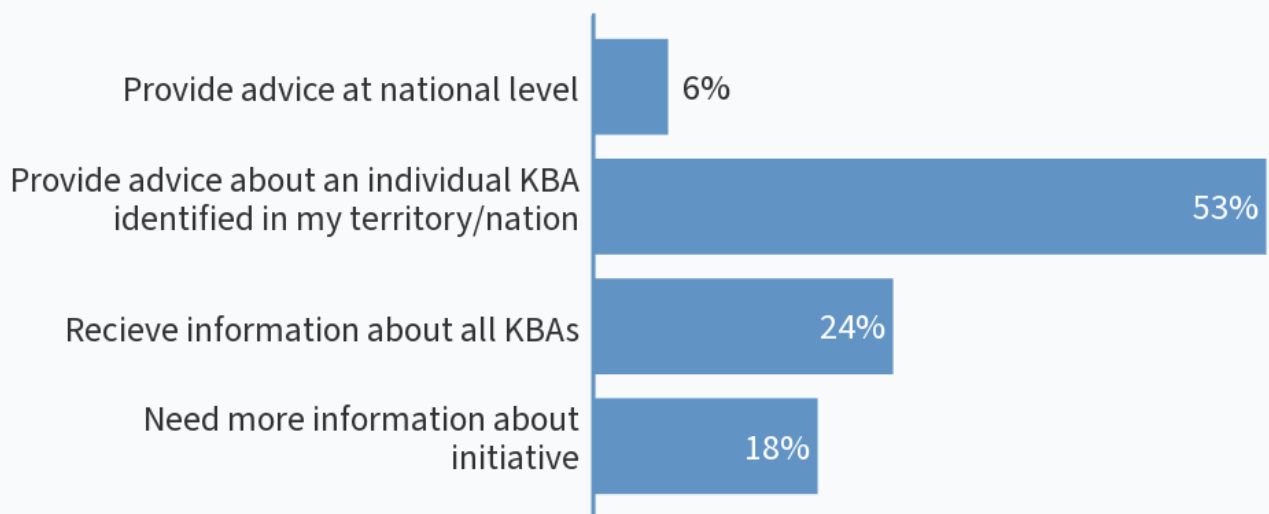


Figure 11. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on March 7, 2022 and responded to the fifth polling question, "How might you like to be included in identifying KBAs on your homelands?"

How might you like to be included in identifying KBAs across your homelands?

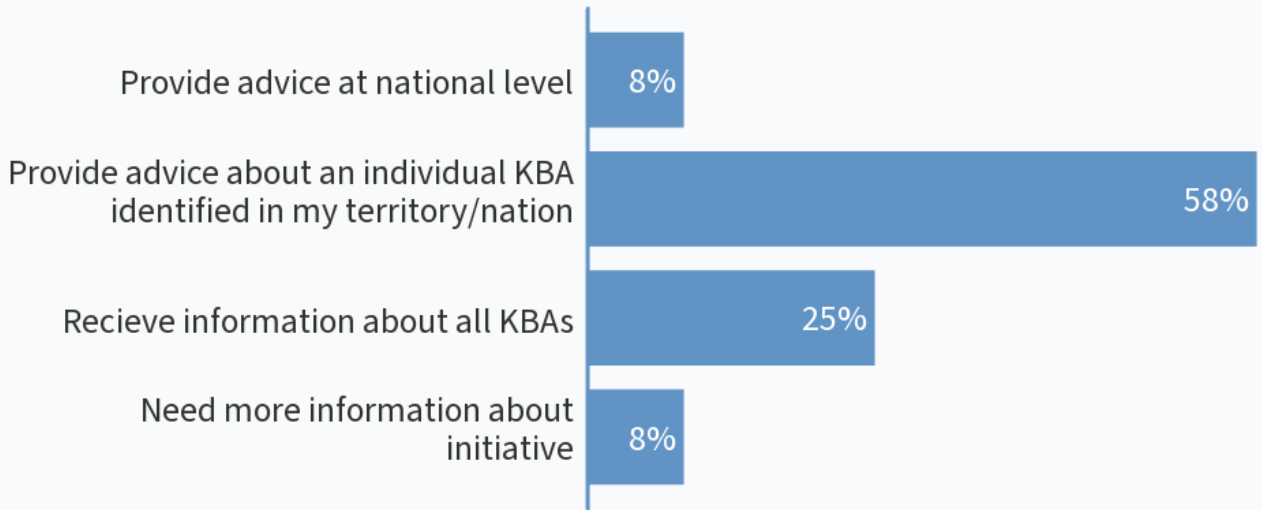


Figure 12. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on February 23, 2022 and responded to the sixth polling question, "Are you interested in providing advice to the KBA program?"

Are you interested in providing advice to the KBA program?

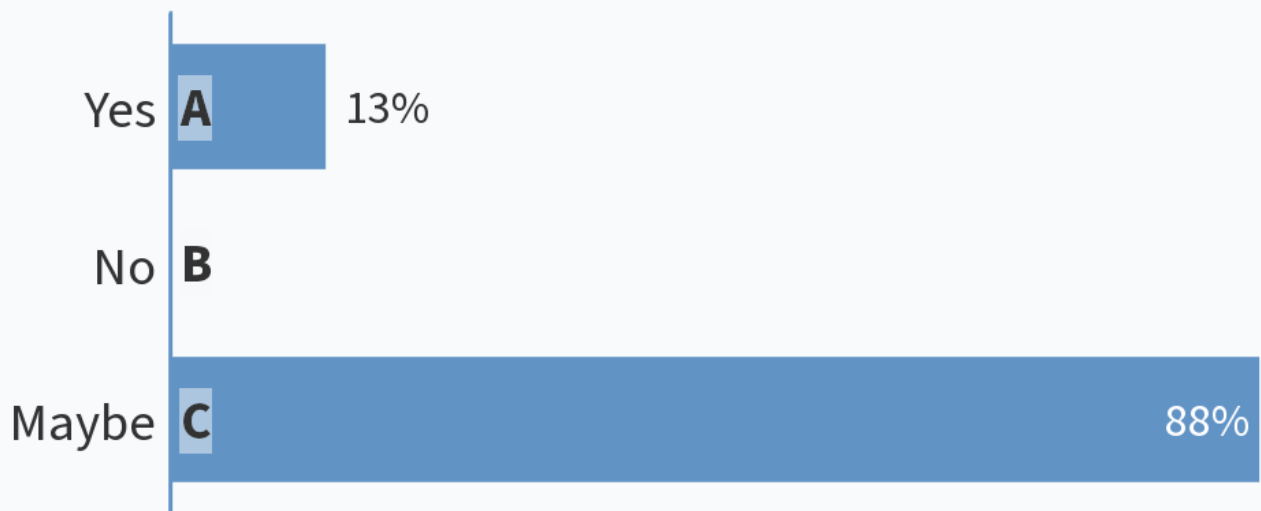
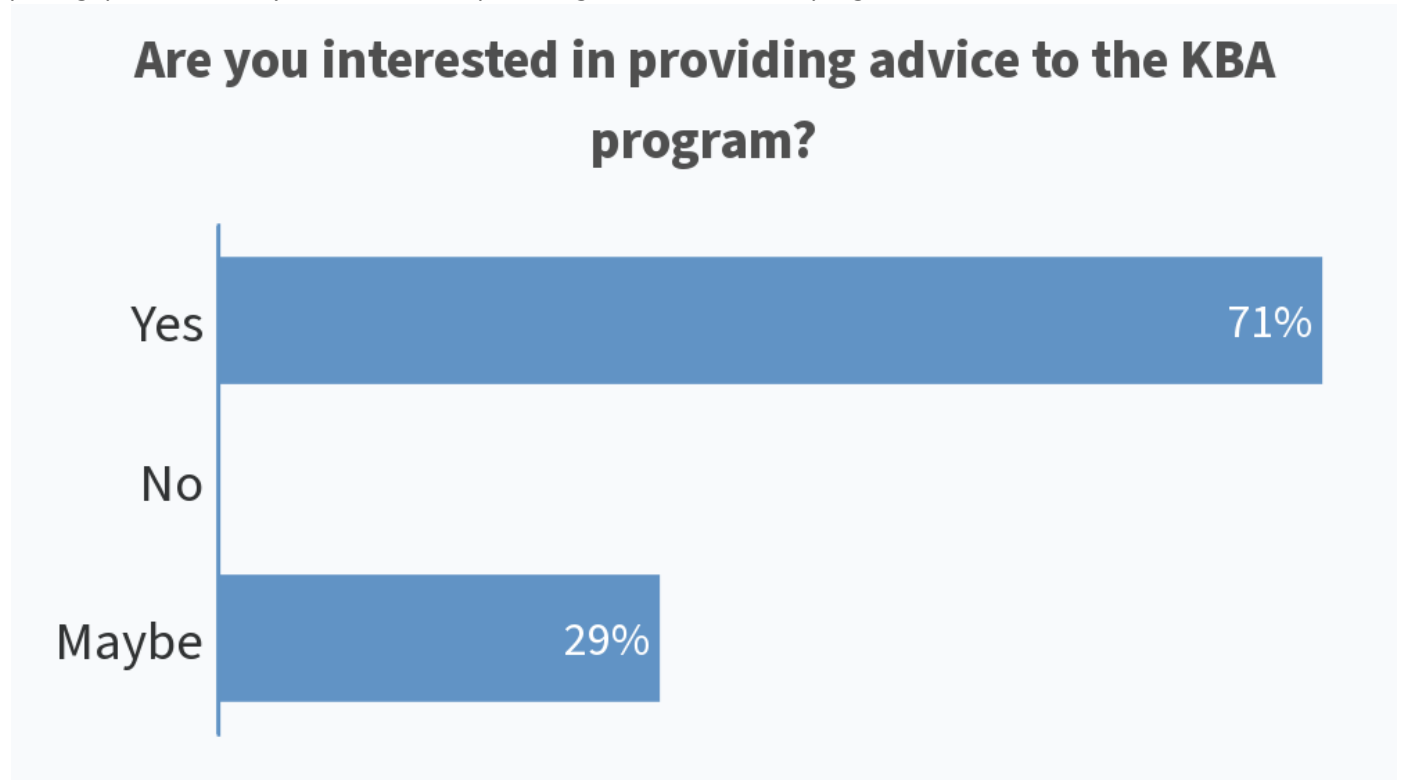


Figure 13. Participants who attended the KBA Workshop on March 7, 2022 and responded to the sixth polling question, "Are you interested in providing advice to the KBA program?"



Next Steps

The following items were identified as next steps for WCS Canada and CIER.

1. KBA Website

KBA Canada should build accessible webpages with tools and information for Indigenous communities and organizations involved in the development of KBAs across Canada. These webpages could potentially allow for socialization between communities about KBAs. WCS Canada will not include sensitive information or locations identified as such by communities in the public KBA database.

Recommend: CIER¹ continue to host a webpage for KBA work, linked to WCS Canada's KBA page².

2. Indigenous representation on the KBA steering committee

Several participants indicated interest in participating in the KBA Steering committee or continuing a relationship with WCS and the KBA project^{2,4,19,22}.

Recommend: WCS Canada staff will be in touch with these individuals directly to learn more about their interests in being on the steering committee.

3. Scoping for upcoming engagement

The KBA Program is developing regional approaches to the KBA process in BC, ON, MB, and SK and would benefit from CIER's support and engagement in the process.

Recommend: Further discussions on the delivery of Dialogue Sessions in these provinces that may include workshops, meetings, and engagement (email and telecommunications) with Indigenous communities, with CIER to provide support.

¹ CIER website: <https://yourcier.org/key-biodiversity-areas-project/>

² WCS KBA website: <https://www.wcscanada.org/KBA.aspx>

Contacts

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Appendix A: KBA Workshop Agenda

Appendix B: Participant discussion contact information:

The contact information from participants has been left out of this public document. Participant information will be kept private internally, to help WCS with report writing and the engagement phase of their KBA work.