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# Brainstorming Session on Strategies for Parks and Protected Areas

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## Abstract

*Attendees at the 21st annual Carolinian Canada Conference were given background on progress in the writing of the Carolinian Woodland Recovery Strategy. They were also given background on what is being done to conserve, restore, and protect woodlands in parks and protected places in Canada, Ontario and Toronto. They were then asked to brainstorm ideas on how the work that is already being done could be expanded and improved upon. The resulting large body of ideas was categorised by the participants into four main areas of focus: Research and Technical, Education, Communication, and how to Affect Policy Change. They will be added to the Carolinian Woodland Recovery Strategy Actions table.*

## Introduction

The Carolinian Canada Coalition (CCC) and the Ministry of Natural Resources are co-leading a team of professionals and volunteers representing a wide range of stakeholders to develop a *Carolinian Woodland Recovery Strategy* (CWRS) under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). The work had been ongoing for almost a year when the progress was presented at the CCC AGM in May 2005 (May and Kanter, 2005).

Efforts to protect and restore woodlands and critical habitat in Canada and Ontario Parks have been improving since they were initiated in the 1890s. In 1972, the idea of ecosystem management had started to enter the official policy at Parks Canada and, by the late 1980s, the policy had expanded

to embrace sciences like conservation biology and landscape ecology (Stephenson, this volume). Today, Parks Canada has excellent policy documented, as exemplified by the ecological integrity statement of Point Pelee National Park; but, in practice, protection and restoration work has a long way to go. However, the potential is there for national and provincial parks to play a lead role in the protection and restoration of critical species.

In the City of Toronto, High Park is one of the great examples of what can be done in an urban public space. The park had been used and abused for almost a century when it was decided to try to restore large parts of it to a more natural state consistent with historical records. Since then, much work has been done, including the removal of exotics, prescribed burns in the oak savannah and woodland areas, and plantings of species that were known to have occupied the area (McEwan, personal communication, 2005). The restored areas have been carefully monitored, and the programs are considered to be a success.

## **Ideas for Additional Work Arising From the AGM Workshop**

### *Research and Technical Actions*

Over a third of the ideas generated at the workshop were related to research and technical activities. The identification and establishment of management boundaries based on ecosystem functions, so that these can be protected and/or restored, was considered a priority for research. Invasive species were mentioned several times. The identification of areas of invasives and, where feasible, the application of experimental adaptive management and interventions to remove these alleged invasives were thought to be key activities for an implementation group. A more widely applied, better focused, and standardised monitoring program was recommended for parks and protected spaces, as well as more and better mapping of Species at Risk (SAR) and their critical habitats. This mapping activity needs to be extended to the landscape outside protected areas to identify further priority lands that need to be secured. A final area of research that was recommended for the parks was to do a survey of the park visitors to determine what they understand by “Natural Heritage” and what benefits they see in its preservation.

Among the technical activities suggested was restoration of degraded areas, focusing on upstream areas of watersheds. The restoration of private lands surrounding the parks was also mentioned. Key activities that were recommended were to provide sources for native species and technical support for

property owners. This technical support would be part of an infrastructure that needs to be set up to help landowners accomplish Carolinian Woodland preservation. The group also counselled that management disturbance should be a continual focus in parks and protected spaces.

### ***Education***

A key component of any successful program to establish better protection for Carolinian Woodlands in and around parks is the education of park users and landowners. Participants at the workshop advised the Carolinian Woodland Recovery Strategy team to include educators in their strategy development process. The education of young farmers, workshops for teachers, and an education package for communities surrounding protected spaces were considered priorities in this area.

### ***Communication***

The media is a critical part of any successful campaign to raise awareness and understanding about an issue. We need to influence people's thinking about the role of Carolinian Woodlands in a healthy environment. There are many other ways to help spread the word. Members of the community can be included in the strategy development stage. Coalitions with like-minded groups to leverage communication efforts can be very effective. Using symbols such as flagship species or habitats to catch people's attention has been used successfully in the past. Alternatively, neighbours of parks could be asked to sign an Accord to protect Carolinian Woodlands. Direct contact with surrounding landowners can be quite motivational, and asking them to sign conservation easements is a concrete way to obtain better protection. Recognising and rewarding success is an excellent tool for communicating ideas, as are programs for collecting and sharing data on the status of Carolinian Woodlands and improvements brought about by the strategy implementation.

### ***Affect Policy Change***

Affecting policy change is one of the most effective ways to improve and broaden protection for Carolinian Woodlands both in parks, and on the wider landscape. Some of the priorities the participants mentioned included: the application of Greenlands strategies to all remaining Carolinian Woodlands, changes to improve the incentives that are provided for conservation, and the advocacy of a moratorium on development in protected areas and significant Carolinian Woodlands. Key activities the *Carolinian Woodland Recovery Strategy* should include would be to target municipal politicians

to communicate values and to benchmark agricultural policies from Europe and other advanced areas of the world for recommendation to Ontario policy makers.

Another important focus for the improvement of the condition of Carolinian Woodlands in parks and protected areas is that there is a need for society to endorse the capacity for evolutionary change. In other words, we need areas which are quite large and which are left relatively undisturbed so that the communities in them can evolve on a geological time scale, unaffected by human intervention.

## **Conclusions**

The brainstorming session resulted in a large number and wide variety of ideas that can be incorporated into the *Carolinian Woodland Recovery Strategy*. Several of them have already been brought up during the deliberations of the team; however, the fact that they arose in this session only emphasises their importance in the strategy implementation. Many new ideas arose, and these will help to strengthen the strategy and increase the effectiveness of the implementation stage.

## **References**

- May, N. S. and M. Kanter, 2005. Development of a Strategy to Conserve and Restore Carolinian Woodlands. In: Nelson, J.G. et al. (eds.) *Protected Areas and Species at Risk. Proceedings of the Ontario Parks Research Forum Annual General Meeting*. University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON. Pp. 427-434.
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