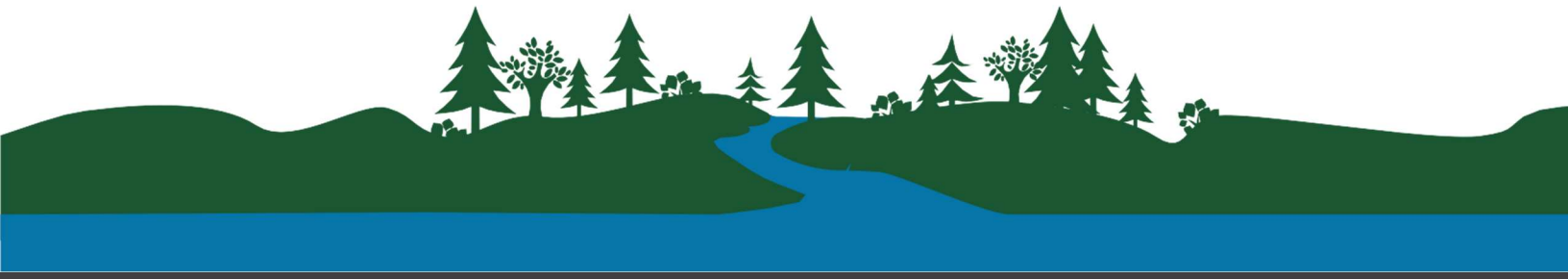
VALUING NATURE CONSERVATION ON PRIVATE LAND



A Landowner-Centred Strategy for Advancing Canada's Conserved Areas Commitment

Centre for Land Conservation
Centre pour la conservation des terres

This report is published under the CLC's *Accelerating Private Land Conservation* report series, which is devoted to the advancement of land conservation policy, science, and management issues of national interest. The objectives of the series are to increase Canadians' awareness of the value and importance of private land conservation and to promote improved conservation policy and practice that will help achieve better, faster, and durable conservation outcomes in Canada to meet the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and a changing climate. Visit centreforlandconservation.org to view other publications.

About the Centre for Land Conservation

The Centre for Land Conservation (CLC) is a not-for-profit, registered charity established in 2019 that seeks to support the conservation of private lands in Canada. Our vision is for conservation lands in Canada to contribute significantly to biodiversity targets through strong and leading-edge practices. Our approach reflects a commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and collaboration with conservation partners. As custodian of the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices, the CLC works with the land conservation community as an independent voice to enhance public trust and confidence in private land conservation.

Valuing Nature Conservation on Private Land: A Landowner-Centred Strategy for Advancing Canada's Conserved Areas Commitment. V. Vermette, R. McLean. 2025. Centre for Land Conservation.

Prepared by Véronique Vermette and Robert McLean
July 2025

Également disponible en français

Centre for Land Conservation
Toronto, Ontario
M4K 1P1

Canada

www.centreforlandconservation.org

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We extend our sincere thanks to Bryan Gilvesy (ALUS Canada), Guy Greenway (Corvus Centre for Conservation), Glen Prevost (Ontario Woodlot Association), Jeremy Pittman (University of Waterloo), Tom Nudds (University of Guelph), Renata Woodward (Association of Canadian Land Trusts), Cameron Mack and Jessica Burns (Wildlife Habitat Canada) for their generous participation in discussions and reviews, and for providing valuable information that greatly supported the preparation of this report. We also thank Lara Ellis, John Lounds and Sarah Winterton from the Centre for Land Conservation for their reviews and comments that greatly improved this report.

Our gratitude extends to all participants in the focus groups for their incredibly insightful and thoughtful contributions.

We acknowledge and thank Saleema Hutchinson (Communagir) for her trust and expertise in leading these focus groups.

The combined efforts, insights, and careful review of all these contributors significantly enhanced the accuracy and quality of the information presented in this document.

CLC is particularly appreciative of the financial support provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada that enabled the completion of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Framing the Challenge: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss

The accelerating loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity is now widely recognized both globally and nationally. In response to the need for urgent action, Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy established a shared vision for halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Canada. A priority component of the Strategy is Target 3 which aims to conserve 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and marine areas by 2030, an ambition commonly referred to as "30x30".

The national effort to achieve "30x30" includes three areas of focus: protected areas, areas under other effective conservation measures (often referred to as OECMs) and Indigenous-led conservation areas. This paper specifically explores opportunities to increase the recognition of OECMs in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD), with an emphasis on privately owned agricultural and forested lands.

Within Canada's southern landscapes where most land is privately owned, many landowners are already stewards of areas important for biodiversity conservation and maintenance of healthy ecosystems. Some of these lands are contributing to long-term conservation outcomes and may meet the criteria for OECMs. Yet, while more than 12,000 protected areas are recorded in Canada's national accounting, only about 240 terrestrial OECMs are recognized. This indicates that OECMs are a significantly underutilized tool at the present time, despite their potential to advance progress toward the 30x30 target.

For Canada to realize this potential, conservation policies must recognize and support landowners as key partners and strengthen the capacity of conservation organizations to assist landowners in implementing and enhancing conservation practices. Appraising and recognizing the current contribution of landowners to conservation within Canada's working landscapes and leveraging incentive programs that reflect and respond to their interests, beliefs, and needs have the potential to improve conservation outcomes in these landscapes. Further engaging landowners in this effort is necessary not only for conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecosystem services and integrity, but also for the sustainability of rural economies and the well-being of communities now and for future generations.

The challenge to inclusion of private lands in CPCAD lies not in the legitimacy of a landowner's conservation actions but in whether current recognition frameworks are sufficiently flexible, attractive and innovative to acknowledge them. The critical issue is how and to what extent the governance behind recognition mechanisms can adapt to accommodate diverse, locally grounded conservation practices within national and international reporting systems. Ultimately, scaling up conservation in southern Canada will depend on adapting to new paradigms, ones that reflect landowner values and lived realities, while advancing shared national goals for biodiversity.

Findings and Recommendations to Increase the Presence of Private Lands in Canada's National Accounting: A Summary

Focus first at the source: the landowners

As private landowners generally seem to find few benefits from having their lands accepted as OECMs, the key to progress lies in a solid understanding of landowners and what motivates them to contribute to conservation in the first instance. Effective conservation strategies and incentives to promote broader participation by landowners and enhance conservation actions on their lands need to be designed in a way that takes into account and reflects the following landowner perspectives, values and interests.

Preserving local autonomy, a key value, reflects the landowner's desire to define, implement, and adapt conservation practices in alignment with their own priorities, values, and land use objectives. It is reflected in their willingness to choose whether, how and with whom to engage.

Maintaining economic stability is essential, especially when conservation requires changes to land management practices for the provision of ecological goods and services. These efforts should be fairly compensated whether directly or indirectly through supportive programs or other means.

Legacy and stability are important drivers for many landowners and can lead to a willingness to enter into long-term conservation agreements. Others prioritize flexibility and may prefer shorter-term commitments due to economic uncertainty, perceived risks, or a desire to keep future land-use options open.

Stewardship is a deeply held value among many rural landowners, particularly for those with generational ties to the land. For those who value legacy and community pride, public recognition of their role in preserving natural heritage and sustaining rural economies can be especially meaningful.

Success in engaging landowners in conservation depends on building and maintaining landowner trust. This begins with clear communication. Trust will grow from a sense that a landowner's way of life and values are respected, and be sustained by long-term, reliable relationships and ongoing support. Organizations working directly with landowners play a central role in establishing landowner trust.

Ensure Appropriate Conservation Incentive Programs are in Place

Recommendation 1: Conservation incentive programs need to be scaled up and sustained

Conservation on private land requires more than recognition through frameworks like OECMs. Many landowners are already engaging in stewardship practices that support biodiversity, but are limited by a lack of incentives, awareness of opportunities, or concerns about privacy, autonomy, and long-term commitments.

Over time, a range of social, financial and regulatory incentives has been created to reflect and respond to the diverse motivations that attract landowners to conservation programs. As such, the central challenge is not the absence of a full range of incentive types that align with the landowners' values and priorities but rather the need to expand or scale up existing programs. For example, property tax-based conservation incentives are not widely used in Canada, while financial incentive programs for land stewardship or habitat restoration may lack sufficient funding to meet the demand.

The diversity of landowners' perspectives, values and needs, and the varied preferences within and between Canada's southern geographies point to the importance of having a suite of incentive programs and instruments in place. Stackable, flexible, and context-sensitive incentives, tailored to regional and cultural realities, are most effective at increasing landowner engagement. This may also necessitate ongoing or layered incentives or performance-based payments that can offer economic stability without requiring immediate long-term legal commitments.

Conservation incentive programs must be sustained over the long term in line with the long-term commitment expected of landowners in delivering biodiversity and ecological benefits, rather than being treated as one-time interventions that typically occur during the initial implementation.

Recommendation 2: On private working lands, the cost of conservation should be shared

Financial incentives play a critical role in encouraging woodlot and agricultural landowners to engage in conservation efforts. These incentives help offset potential annual revenue loss through changes in land management or from land-use restrictions associated with conservation commitments. Key financial incentives available to landowners are mostly related to reduced taxes, direct payments for conservation services, and cost-share programs common in agricultural incentive programs. Market-based programs such as carbon and biodiversity credits or certifications may also provide opportunities to generate external revenues, creating complementary income streams alongside traditional land uses like ranching or forestry. There is growing interest in leveraging mechanisms that recognize and adequately compensate landowners, particularly those adapting management practices on working lands, who contribute to social and community well-being generated through their land stewardship.

Recommendation 3: Whether and how to use "safe harbour" or similar agreements should be explored

A safe harbour agreement is a voluntary agreement with a private landowner whose actions contribute to conservation. In exchange for their conservation actions, the landowner receives assurances from the relevant government agency that additional actions will not be required or imposed provided the conditions of the agreement are fulfilled.

While the United States has made use of safe harbour and similar agreements, particularly in relation to its *Endangered Species Act*, this incentive type has not been extensively used in Canada. Ontario has enabled the creation or enhancement of "safe harbour habitat"—defined as an area for the conservation of species at risk—through the use of safe harbour

instruments, although the use of this incentive appears limited.

As with other incentive programs, a safe harbour or similar agreement may not appeal to all landowners. For landowners particularly motivated by the importance of "local autonomy" and assurances that they make their own land management decisions, programs of this type can be an important incentive to enhance conservation actions and improve conservation outcomes on their lands. A key element of such agreements is an understanding on the part of the landowner of the need for monitoring and reporting on the commitments made by them in the agreement.

Enhance the Capacity of Land Conservation and Stewardship Organizations to Connect with Landowners

Recommendation 4: Strengthen the capacity of organizations that engage directly with landowners

While many landowners already demonstrate strong stewardship values, conservation outcomes at scale cannot be achieved without addressing a fundamental need: ensuring capacity is in place to effectively support landowners. Trusted intermediate organizations bridge the gap between conservation programs, science and on-the-ground realities, while building relationships and offering a culturally sensitive approach. Supporting landowners with the right tools, knowledge, incentives, and trusted relationships are crucial to enable sustainable and meaningful conservation actions on the part of landowners.

Enhancing organizational capacity to communicate and build relationships with landowners and others is as important as investing in technical conservation skills. Organizations that support networks of conservation-minded landowners are well placed to achieve and sustain long-term conservation outcomes, and respond to ecological and social changes over time. They also build and maintain trust, and ensure inclusive and equitable approaches.

Recommendation 5: Explore mechanisms that enable organizations to establish and maintain connections with landowners

A key and costly challenge for organizations is building and maintaining a network of conservation-minded landowners. Mechanisms or tools that improve engagement could significantly accelerate land conservation by connecting landowners with conservation organizations, technical experts, funding programs, and peer networks. Acting as an action-oriented hub, they would enhance knowledge sharing, facilitate support and amplify the collective impact. The success of such tools would rely on strong partnerships, with trusted conservation or stewardship organizations as frontline facilitators, leveraging their relationships with landowners and partner organizations to promote awareness and provide ongoing support.

A well-designed digital platform, for example, could provide a scalable, inclusive response to current gaps in recognition, support, and coordination. Its purpose would be to foster a stronger conservation culture on private lands by bridging technology with trust, data with meaningful action, and linking recognition directly to tangible outcomes.

Reflect Landowner Values and Perspectives in the Implementation of OECM Guidance

Recommendation 6: Enable self-determined levels of information disclosure and/or aggregated or batch reporting of lands as OECMs

A key reason for the virtual "absence" of OECMs in CPCAD is the tension between privacy and public recognition. While many landowners may be implementing conservation practices on their land, they are reluctant to have their names, property boundaries, or property information publicly disclosed, or have the perception that it is indeed mandatory to report their lands.

One solution to this landowner concern would be to modify the registry to enable flexible, self-determined information disclosure where conservation areas are recognized, but landowner information remains private unless the landowner chooses to share it. Options could be full public recognition (name, location, and conservation data, partial visibility (general location such as a township, a county or a watershed and conservation data), or full confidentiality (the land is counted toward national targets at the provincial/territorial scale, but no other identifying information is made public).

In addition, or perhaps alternatively, another approach would be to have trusted intermediaries to whom landowners could report, intermediaries that would hold and submit the data on behalf of the landowner, keeping personal or property details confidential. Such an approach could enable an aggregated system to allow for reporting of multiple conservation lands as part of a collective such as a watershed group, agricultural cooperative, or forest owner network, with no individual land identified, but conservation contributions acknowledged in aggregate within a specific geographic area or region.

Recommendation 7: Empower qualified third parties to accept OECMs into CPCAD

Voluntary conservation and thus voluntary reporting of conservation lands rely heavily on trust. Qualified community-based "intermediaries" such as local conservation or stewardship organizations are best placed to establish and maintain landowner trust. Empowering a credible independent third party, one that is well versed in Target 3 objectives and OECM guidelines, which has ecological expertise and that can act as a trusted intermediary for landowners to evaluate lands has the potential to enhance reporting of OECMs. Such third parties can foster landowner buy-in as private landowners like farmers and woodlot owners often feel that "outside actors" may not fully understand their land or management practices, and their interests and motivations.

Landowners may be apprehensive about the potential regulatory implications of recognition of their conservation lands. A common concern is that once a property is formally recognized, such as through the OECM process, it could lead to increased government oversight or new land-use restrictions. Engaging third parties in the OECM process has the potential to mitigate this concern.

Recommendation 8: OECM guidance should be interpreted with a focus on outcomes from land management practices

Currently, OECM recognition requires case-by-case documentation, evaluation, and approval, which is often technical, time-consuming, and intimidating for landowners. To minimize duplication of effort and ease paper burden, existing documentation, such as forest or farm management plans, could be better leveraged in the OECM process. Rather than require additional or redundant information, the process should be designed to integrate information already collected through other programs or land stewardship activities.

Creating space for non-traditional yet credible forms of evidence that reflect long-term biodiversity conservation intent has the potential to increase the presence of OECMs in CPCAD. While tools like conservation easements are commonly used to demonstrate legal permanence, they may not always align with the needs, values, or realities of all landowners, particularly those who prioritize legacy, cultural continuity, or intergenerational land care. To expand opportunities for recognition, non-regulatory but formally acknowledged commitments by a landowner to the dedication of their land to long-term conservation should be explored. These commitments could meet OECM criteria, especially if paired with monitoring strategies.

Rethinking Participation Pathways

Recommendation 9: Consider proactive engagement with landowners

Canada's current opt-in model for recognizing privately conserved lands as OECMs places the full burden of participation on landowners, leading to low engagement.

An alternative, voluntary opt-out model, inspired by nudge theory involves shifting the default: eligible landowners are proactively notified that their lands are important for conservation, meet or may meet OECM criteria and are offered the opportunity to opt out of recognition of their lands as OECMs in CPCAD. This voluntary opt-out model maintains landowner autonomy while reducing procedural barriers and improving participation.

Piloting this approach in ecologically significant regions, through trusted intermediaries and with flexible disclosure options, could meaningfully accelerate the recognition of conservation lands, improve national accounting under Target 3, and build a stronger culture of stewardship across working landscapes.

To build trust, this approach should be implemented through the trusted intermediaries cited previously who can act as liaisons and data submitting resources. By combining default inclusion with flexible privacy, trusted facilitation, and links to tangible benefits, this opt-out approach offers a scalable, low-friction pathway to normalize conservation recognition while respecting landowner autonomy.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Context

Halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity

The accelerating loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity is now widely recognized globally and nationally, as is the need for urgent action. The implications of this loss extend beyond the importance of resilient natural systems able to mitigate and adapt to climate-driven changes, to include social and economic impacts. In response, Environment and Climate Change Canada led a collaborative process with provinces, territories, and Indigenous representatives, and with input from partners and stakeholders, to develop Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy,[1] a shared vision for halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Canada. Among the targets, governments have established an ambitious objective for Target 3 to conserve 30% of important conservation areas by 2030, often referred to as "30x30",[2] through an effort to expand the network of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)[3].

OECMs and Southern Canada

While OECMs, as a concept and tool to recognize conservation lands, are of use and value throughout Canada, recognition of lands as OECMs is of particular relevance in Canada's southern landscapes. In these landscapes, where most private land is found, the 30x30 Target will not be achieved by federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments alone. Reaching the target will depend on the active participation of private landowners and land managers,[4] and the organizations that foster, incentivize and support such participation. This is not to discount the importance of publicly owned parks and other protected areas which indeed play a significant role in the conservation of biodiversity in Canada's southern landscapes. Rather, it recognizes the importance of complementing protected areas by engaging landowners across vast agricultural and forested landscapes and rural areas to achieve the 30x30 Target.

Within these southern "working landscapes", many landowners are stewards of important ecosystem features such as wetlands, species at risk habitats or lands that provide essential corridors for species to adapt to climate-related ecological changes. Their lands provide numerous benefits, ranging from grasslands that support pollinators to wetlands that purify

[1] Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy and the Nature Accountability Bill
[2] Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada
[3] See Annex 1 for more information on Canada's Pathway initiative to expand the network of protected areas and OECMs.
[4] Note that throughout this paper, a reference to "landowner" includes a private landowner and private land manager.

water and mitigate flooding. The commitment of these people to conservation, whether through voluntary land protection, sustainable land management, participation in habitat restoration initiatives, or simply by maintaining natural conditions, is essential to maintaining ecological connectivity and resilience, and halting and reversing biodiversity loss. As such, programs and tools that enable individual, organizational and community-led conservation projects and that empower landowners, and the organizations that work with them, to contribute to conservation while not sacrificing economic profitability and viability, nor one's values and principles, are essential to achieving Target 3 and other biodiversity goals.

Rationale and Report Objectives

Although OECMs can apply across a variety of land tenures and governance types including public, Indigenous, and community-managed areas, this report focuses specifically on private agricultural and woodlot lands. This focus reflects both their ecological importance and their practical significance for reaching Canada's 30x30 Target, particularly in southern working landscapes where government protected areas alone will be insufficient. These lands are often managed by individuals or families whose values, responsibilities, and constraints differ markedly from public or institutional landholders. Understanding the motivations, barriers, and enabling conditions specific to this group are essential to unlocking broader participation.

A programmatic response to the challenge of inclusion of more OECMs in an accounting database such as Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) therefore begins with understanding individual motivations that underpin a landowner's decision to manage lands for conservation outcomes. While many surveys show that landowners care about conservation and are actively engaged in it, they are often reluctant to publicize their efforts or seek formal recognition. Progress depends on understanding their perspectives and what resonates with them in a way that motivates them to contribute to conservation. This report explores whether common drivers of action can be identified and mobilized to increase participation in conservation among agricultural, woodlot, and other landowners in Canada.

Incentives are a critical lever for expanding conservation on private lands and building a broader "Canadian conservation network". They can spark initial interest, support meaningful stewardship, and serve as a gateway to recognition woodlots and agricultural lands as OECMs in the CPCAD. This report examines how a mix of social, financial, and regulatory incentives, tailored to local contexts and grounded in landowner perspectives can enhance landowner engagement, accelerate conservation outcomes and support greater recognition of conservation efforts on private lands. It presents practical options and policy directions to increase awareness, build trust, and facilitate engagement in conservation that aligns with national biodiversity goals while emphasizing the need for context-specific, flexible policy approaches.

Recognizing that landowners are not alone in this effort, the report highlights the vital role of trusted intermediary organizations, as they are often the first point of contact for landowners providing technical assistance, delivering incentives, and helping navigate the complex landscape of conservation tools and reporting processes. Their capacity to build trust with landowners and support participation is essential to scaling up recognition of privately conserved lands.

This report also explores the reasons why many eligible lands remain unreported as OECMs, including barriers rooted in landowner motivations, institutional constraints, and trust gaps. Findings are grounded in a combination of online research and qualitative insights gathered through in-depth interviews and focus groups with private landowners, landowner associations, and conservation organizations conducted in early 2025.

By focusing on opportunities to expand OECM recognition, this report offers practical strategies to help ensure that conservation efforts already underway on the ground are formally acknowledged. Encouraging broader participation through flexible, landowner-aligned approaches presents a pragmatic, inclusive, and effective pathway toward Canada's 30x30 Target—one that respects landowner rights and reflects the realities of conservation across diverse landscapes.

Tracking Toward Canada 30% Target 3 Objective

About the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database

The most up-to-date data on Canada's progress toward Target 3 is found in the CPCAD.[5] This database contains spatial and attribute data on marine and terrestrial protected areas and OECMs. CPCAD is compiled and managed by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), in collaboration with federal, provincial, territorial jurisdictions, and other data providers.

CPCAD is used by a wide range of organizations, including governments, environmental non-government organizations, academia, land managers, industry, and the public, and supports Canada's international reporting on protected areas and OECMs to the World Commission on Protected Areas, further to commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

Canada Conservation reports that there are more than 12,000 protected areas in Canada.[6] In comparison, just somewhat more than 240 terrestrial OECMs are recognized in CPCAD,[7] suggesting that OECMs are a significantly underutilized tool and present an opportunity for Canada to demonstrate more progress toward the 30x30 Target than is currently the case.

There must be more lands in Canada that could count toward Target 3—why aren't they counted?

It is likely that a number of privately owned lands across Canada is already being managed for long-term in situ biodiversity conservation and either meet or, with minor adjustments, could meet the criteria for inclusion in CPCAD as OECMs. Efforts to improve the recognition and capture of these areas in CPCAD should be informed by the perspectives of landowners as well as the organizations that support them in implementing and maintaining conservation practices.

The pan-Canadian Pathway initiative has identified some elements of the process and guidance for submission of lands for inclusion in CPCAD (including communications about the process and time-consuming information requirements) that act as barriers to participation.

[5] Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database
[6] Canada Conservation: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative, Protected Areas
[7] Canada Conservation: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative, Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures

The initiative is actively working on reducing these barriers and has enhanced the information available about Target 3 through the Canada Conservation website. In addition to information on protected areas and Indigenous-led conservation, Canada Conservation provides a number of tools designed to foster and facilitate the submission of candidate sites for acceptance as OECMs.

It is important to recognize that in some ways, the OECM framework remains fairly new in Canada. It is understandable that landowners whose mission is not strictly conservation haven't sought such recognition so far; indeed, it is unlikely they are aware of CPCAD. The IUCN Guidance *on other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)* document was only recently released, as is the case for the Quebec guideline, *Recognizing Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECM) Within Continental Quebec*. *Canada Conservation* is also a recent development. Provinces and territories in collaboration with conservation organizations are working on mechanisms to help in the evaluation and reporting of land eligible for inclusion in CPCAD as OECMs. For landowners, conservation groups and policymakers who are aware of this guidance and these tools, it is likely that they are still familiarizing themselves with them. Because the reporting and recognition process, and awareness of it, is still evolving, landowners and organizations may have questions about eligibility, benefits, and long-term commitments before formally submitting lands for acceptance as OECMs.

There are numerous and varied reasons why individuals or groups may choose to submit or not to submit their lands to CPCAD. The range of potential contributors includes non-profit conservation organizations, municipalities and community agencies, Indigenous communities and governments, corporate landholders and landowners, such as farmers, ranchers, and foresters, whose primary objectives may differ from conservation. Each of these stakeholders brings distinct motivations, priorities, and concerns which ultimately influence their decision whether to participate in the CPCAD process.

Also, it is not surprising that the owners or managers of private lands that might count as OECMs, or the organizations that partner with or represent them, are not proposing or submitting eligible lands for inclusion in CPCAD. Beyond recognition, there are a few benefits to landowners from the inclusion of their conservation lands in CPCAD. Governments at all levels benefit by being able to report on protected and conserved lands while the effort to have lands "count" is borne by landowners and non-government organizations but with few if any benefits for that effort. This imbalance is further compounded by concerns over how the review and approval process is experienced. While formal guidance exists, landowners and organizations often face uncertainty about how criteria will be applied, how long the review will take, and whether they will receive sufficient feedback if a submission is rejected. This perceived lack of transparency and predictability can discourage participation, especially when the burden of effort is high, the outcome is uncertain and the benefits are few.

Researchers and conservation and other organizations point to the importance of landowners' needs and values in better understanding why certain provisions or elements of the OECM guidance and criteria may be barriers—if not irritants—to the submission of private conservation lands for inclusion in CPCAD. For example, factors linked with conservation instruments and mechanisms such as length of agreements or contracts, privacy and data protection, and trust in the organization that delivers the instrument or mechanism, are among major preoccupations of landowners. Above all, many landowners prioritize the ability to

continue managing their land productively and view these programs through that primary lens.

If a landowner is receptive to having their lands included in CPCAD, it is likely that landowners will most often work with the non-government organization that supported their efforts to protect and conserve their land. As with landowners, there are few benefits for these organizations in submitting lands for inclusion in CPCAD beyond, in some cases, being eligible to access funds for land conservation as a condition of receiving such funds. The effort needed to gather information from a landowner and prepare a submission to CPCAD is considerable and unfunded, and of limited benefit.

Beyond limited benefits, a second significant consideration from the perspective of non-government organizations is the level of effort required to actually contact landowners in the first instance. Even those organizations with capacity and resources sufficient to identify important conservation lands within their area of focus are able to engage with only a relatively small number of the owners of such lands. The inclusion in CPCAD of more private conservation lands is limited by the capacity of non-government organizations to "prospect" and connect with more landowners.

Aiming at the Target, focusing on the means: a pathway to counting more OECMs

Incentivizing and accelerating the inclusion in CPCAD of private conservation lands as OECMs will depend on more than guidelines and the technical improvements introduced through the pan-Canadian pathway initiative via Canada Conservation or other means. Rather than focusing on incentives for and the benefits of "counting", a focus on incentives that motivate landowners to undertake or enhance conservation on their lands in the first instance should be the first consideration. Achieving meaningful progress toward the 30x30 Target, particularly in southern landscapes with significant private land holdings, will rely on a mix of socially relevant incentives—financial, social, and legal or policy-based assurances—that reflect the realities of landowners.

A focus on incentives and support for landowners to undertake land management actions that enhance conservation outcomes has the potential to immediately increase submissions to the OECM process. It would also build a broader base of conservation-minded landowners, some of whom may undertake additional land management actions over time. A landowner may start with a small project and over time gain trust in the non-government organization with which they are working, leading to more significant conservation actions on their land that may in turn result in their land being eligible for inclusion as OECMs—a sort of stewardship journey or "ladder" to enhanced conservation outcomes on their land.

Success in building a broader base of conservation-minded landowners will also depend on programs and initiatives that support organizations in sustaining their existing relationships with landowners and build their capacity to engage a wider landowner audience within their geography. It is conservation and stewardship organizations that leverage conservation incentive programs to grow a network of conservation-minded landowners. Building and sustaining the capacity of these organizations to connect with landowners in their areas of focus has the potential to increase the presence of OECMs in CPCAD.

Accelerating the "counting" of private conservation lands will not be achieved solely through the availability of socially relevant, better-targeted incentives and organizations with the

capacity to connect and sustain relations with landowners. Landowner concerns with respect to the inclusion of their lands in CPCAD will need to be addressed. Enhanced outreach through improved access to online information and targeted awareness campaigns aimed at landowners would be an essential first step toward increasing awareness of landowners about CPCAD, land conservation incentive programs and the organizations that implement such programs or offer other support to landowners.

As awareness increases, and governments and non-government conservation organizations offer clear guidance and strengthen available incentives, a growing number of landowners are expected to pursue OECM recognition as a way to demonstrate their contribution to Canada's biodiversity goals. However, expanding the pool of participating individuals and organizations will only be possible if existing conservation programs evolve and adapt. Currently, many of these programs tend to engage only a narrow segment of already conservation-minded landowners, limiting their broader reach and impact.

PART TWO: FROM CONVERSATION TO CONSERVATION: INCENTIVE ALIGNMENT

Engaging landowners in conservation requires more than well-intentioned programs, it requires a grounded understanding of their perspectives, values, and lived realities that must be taken into account and reflected in any meaningful conservation strategy. This understanding points to the need for more flexible, respectful, and incentive-aligned approaches, what could be called "conservation by choice."

To be recognized and accounted for in CPCAD, privately conserved woodlots and agricultural lands must meet conservation criteria such as long-term protection, biodiversity value, and effective conservation measures. Various incentives help landowners meet these requirements by:

- Supporting protection, restoration and sustainable land management practices that align with the 30X30 Target through education and capacity building.
- Providing financial or other support to maintain conservation practices on their working lands.
- Encouraging long-term land conservation through agreements such as conservation easements or other forms of management agreements or instruments.

Key Learnings

Efforts to improve recognition of OECMs in CPCAD should consider:

- There is limited awareness, confusion or unfamiliarity with the terms, the mechanism and the process for recognition of OECMs among landowners and some conservation or stewardship organizations.
- Even if lands qualify for OECM recognition, a question from landowners remains: *"what's in it for me"?*
- The time required to establish provincial and federal recognition mechanisms, coupled with the recent and still-emerging guidance on OECMs, has restrained organizations and agencies from proactively promoting recognition of lands as OECMs. In the absence of an accessible and well-defined process for submission and evaluation, private agricultural and woodlot organizations have largely adopted a wait-and-see approach before initiating recognition efforts for the inclusion of the lands of targeted landowners in CPCAD.
- To contribute to the 30x30 Target with private woodlot and agricultural landowners seems unrealistic, given landowner perspectives. Relationship building and trust are needed first, followed by information and support.

- Misalignment between recognition criteria and landowners' goals and values, especially concerning the term agreement, privacy and confidentiality, continues to be a significant barrier to engagement.
- Key drivers for better-targeted incentives for conservation, and by extension, for recognition, are that they must reflect the need to respect the independence, autonomy, and property rights of landowners and provide innovative policy mechanisms to incent their participation in conservation programs.[8] The scope and scale of potential OECM incentive measures have not been articulated.
- Regional and flexible approaches, with third-party facilitators, and stackable incentives, show promise.

Conservation by Choice: Aligning Incentives with Landowner Perspectives and Motivations

Conservation incentives must be designed to align with landowners' perspectives, values, and needs. Pittman refers to this as "social fit" where conservation approaches match the values and interests of individuals, enabling them to make conscious choices about which incentives or instruments work best for them. A review of past surveys and literature combined with discussions undertaken in this project reveals local autonomy in conservation governance, economic stability, trust and recognition as most valued by ranchers and farmers.[9] These same themes, particularly stewardship, legacy, and autonomy, also resonate strongly with woodlot owners, many of whom are themselves farmers or ranchers.

Local autonomy, a key value, refers to a strong sense of duty for many landowners to care for the land from a governance perspective. It is a commonly cited value in the conservation literature, especially when referring to ranchers and farmers, even ones managing leased crown lands. Landowners express autonomy in various ways, such as through independent or collaborative decision-making about how conservation is carried out on their land and within their communities. This autonomy is expressed in their desire to define, implement, and adapt conservation practices in alignment with their priorities, values, and land use objectives. It is reflected in their ability to choose whether, how and with whom to engage. For farmers and woodlot landowners, local autonomy is not just about flexibility, it is about empowerment, relevance, and sustainability. It is enabled by allowing landowners to define conservation in ways that are compatible with working landscapes, where biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use coexist. Importantly, for landowners to develop an interest in OECM recognition, the formal criteria required for inclusion of their lands in the CPCAD must reconcile with the value placed by landowners on autonomous and locally led conservation.

As much as autonomy in decision-making is a strong driver to gain interest and participation in conservation programs, **economic stability** is an equally important consideration, as long as

[8] Pittman, Jeremy, Raphael Ayambire, Kwaku Owusu Twum (2025). The Social Fit of Conservation Policy on Working Landscapes. Rangeland Ecology & Management, Volume 100, May 2025, Pages 56-62. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rama.2025.01.009].
[9] Ibid.

conservation is not treated as a trade-off but as an integrated, incentivized, and recognized land use practice. The costs and financial burden of managing lands and participating in conservation programs to provide societal goods and services should, for many landowners, be compensated either directly or indirectly through programs or other means.

While **long-term stability** is a key consideration for landowners, particularly in relation to land use and financial planning, it often does not translate into a willingness to enter long-term legal agreements. This creates a mixed message: on one hand, many conservation incentive programs (including the effort to recognize lands as OECMs) aim for "permanent" conservation mechanisms which align conceptually with the landowner's desire for stability; on the other hand, many landowners prefer shorter-term commitments, reflecting uncertainty, economic risk, or a desire to retain **flexibility** in future decision-making.

This tension is evident in findings such as those from Ayambire's research[10] which suggests that landowners, especially farmers and ranchers involved in species-at-risk conservation, tend to favour contracts of less than 10 years, a timeframe that falls well short of OECM requirements without additional binding commitments. In such cases, social and familial values can outweigh financial incentives, with decisions rooted more in legacy, cultural connection to the land, or the desire to retain autonomy, rather than in monetary gain. To bridge this gap, creative and flexible financial and other mechanisms are needed, such as ongoing or layered incentives or performance-based payments that can offer economic stability without requiring immediate long-term legal commitments. These tools may offer a more realistic pathway to aligning landowner interests with the long-term objectives of conservation programs and OECM requirements.

Many landowners, especially farmers, ranchers or woodlot owners, view CPCAD recognition with skepticism or caution, due to concerns such as loss of autonomy or control, apprehension about future restrictions or enforcement and lack of transparency. Building and maintaining **trust** in the process and its governance is essential, and this begins with transparency, and clear communication. Landowners trust what they understand and people and organizations they know. Trust also grows from a sense that "the system" respects a landowner's way of life and values, and that is backed by long-term, reliable relationships and ongoing support.

Stewardship is a deeply held value among many rural landowners, particularly for those with generational ties to the land. They are more likely to be heard referring to themselves as "stewards" and not "conservers" of land. For many, being a "good steward", in a societal way, is a source of pride and identity, a motivation passed on as a legacy, and a form of moral responsibility not only toward nature but to their community as well. Large-scale, public **recognition** strategies emphasizing the positive role of landowners in sustaining rural economies and preserving the natural heritage for future generations resonate with those who value legacy and community pride.

Legacy, particularly family heritage, serves as both a positive force and a barrier when encouraging landowners to participate in conservation programs and receive recognition in CPCAD. As much as stewardship and local knowledge are valued within their current

[10] Ayambire, Raphael Anammasiya, Jeremy Pittman and Andrea Olive (2021). Incentivizing stewardship in a biodiversity hot spot: land managers in the grassland. FACETS 6 (1), 1307-1322. Online [https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/pdf/10.1139/facets-2020-0071?download=true]

managerial practices, legacy considerations can also act as a barrier to long-term conservation commitments. Landowners may prefer avoiding complexity or limiting future flexibility regarding land use opportunities for their descendants. Rather, many prefer to keep future options open, and any type of long-term agreement that may limit land use is seen as potentially reducing the land's utility or market value. Long-term agreements can be perceived as a complication in succession planning, risking the introduction of legal complexities or perceived burdens for heirs, thus making longer-term binding incentives less attractive to some landowners. Agricultural and woodlot landowners will be more likely to subscribe to conservation incentive programs that embed these values in their design and implementation.

Over time, a range of incentives have been created to reflect and respond to the diverse motivations that attract Canadian landowners to conservation programs. These not only align with personal values but also with preferences for a specific type of conservation instrument. A recent survey with ranchers and farmers involved with species at risk conservation programming on the Canadian Prairies[11] found that respondents who favoured conservation management agreements tended to prefer annual payments, while those who favoured conservation easements preferred legal assurances over a more direct form of payment. Pittman also highlighted how the results obtained from Saskatchewan farmers differed from ones reported in social research literature on incentives in the USA, suggesting that the social and geographic context can influence preferences for incentives. The diversity found within the southern landscapes of Canada points to the importance of having a flexible suite of incentive programs in place, able to respond to the variety of individual preferences of landowners.

Recognizing the diverse values, motivations, and interests of landowners are essential to designing relevant, motivating, and effective incentives for voluntary participation in conservation and subsequent recognition of lands as OECMs. A wide range of incentive types and stewardship arrangements can lead to positive conservation outcomes, depending on the landowner's goals and mindset. The challenge to inclusion of these lands in CPCAD lies not in the legitimacy of a landowner's conservation actions but in whether current recognition frameworks are sufficiently flexible and innovative to acknowledge them. The critical issue is how and to what extent the governance behind recognition mechanisms can adapt to accommodate diverse, locally grounded conservation practices within national and international reporting systems.

[11] Pittman, Jeremy, Raphael Ayambire, Kwaku Owusu Twum (2025). The Social Fit of Conservation Policy on Working Landscapes. Rangeland Ecology & Management, Volume 100, May 2025, Pages 56-62. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rama.2025.01.009]

PART THREE: OVERVIEW OF CONSERVATION INCENTIVES

The categorization of incentives into social, financial, and regulatory types is well established in the literature and reflected across various existing programs. It provides a useful lens for analyzing how different incentive mechanisms can encourage conservation on private lands. The relevance and effectiveness of these incentive types ultimately depend on how well they align with landowners' lived experiences, values, and priorities.

The following sections, as well as the tables provided in Annex 2, do not aim to offer an exhaustive inventory of existing conservation incentive programs, but rather explore how well-selected incentive approaches resonate with landowners. What follows illustrates how the categories of incentive types play out in practice to motivate and recognize private conservation efforts.

Social Incentives

Research highlights that social motivators are crucial, especially in rural and agricultural contexts. **Recognition-based incentives** acknowledge landowners for their environmental stewardship efforts through public recognition, certifications, awards or branding opportunities and for some may be sufficient motivation to maintain and enhance conservation efforts on their lands (as opposed to other incentives such as direct financial compensation). These incentives enhance the landowner's, or their affiliated organization's, social standing, reputation and access to conservation networks, making participation in conservation efforts more attractive. They also appeal to broader motivations that go beyond individual benefit, tapping into a sense of community pride and a desire to contribute to a healthier environment for future generations. Local or community-level recognition is often more meaningful and motivating to landowners than formal national recognition such as inclusion in CPCAD. This recognition not only reinforces personal and collective identity but, through peer influence, also has the potential to inspire wider adoption of conservation measures.

Recognition such as inclusion in CPCAD by a government agency may not hold the same value for some landowners as other forms of public acknowledgment. In certain regions, particularly in rural areas, participation in recognition programs, even on a voluntary basis, can be perceived as a gateway to government oversight or interference, serving state objectives rather than reflecting the landowner's own goals.

A lack of knowledge and understanding of conservation measures and mechanisms as well as limited access to technical support and expertise remain a significant barrier for many landowners and land managers when considering conservation actions. In this context, education, technical support and capacity building play a crucial role in supporting conservation engagement. Programs that incorporate feedback and learning opportunities, rather than focusing solely on accountability or measurement, tend to foster stronger and more sustained engagement over time. Access to expert guidance and practical resources can also reduce the burden and uncertainty landowners experience when navigating conservation programs. Land conservation and sector-based organizations report that many landowners are unaware of existing conservation mechanisms, leading to low demand for assistance. These organizations are essential to facilitate conservation action, simplifying complex information and offering technical expertise such as mapping and geospatial services. Empowering individuals and communities through knowledge transfer supports landowners' desire for autonomy in decisions-making. When they feel informed and confident, rather than feeling "coerced" by external forces, they are more likely to take action that aligns with both their personal values and broader conservation goals.

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together". The power of **social movement** and **community empowerment** can be strong motivators for landowners, particularly when they realize that others around them are also taking action (versus a single action bias).[12] This contrasts with the perception of acting in isolation which can deter engagement.

Research in behavioural science supports the idea that individuals are more likely to participate in conservation programs when they perceive that others are already engaged or achieving results. The sharing of information, the visibility of collective progress, and the reinforcement of positive norms all contribute to increased interest and action.

Well-established conservation networks with a strong reputation, clear structure and a foundation of trust are particularly effective at fostering coordinated, community-based conservation efforts. When a critical mass of landowners within a region participates in a program, it not only helps reach thresholds needed for ecological impact but also drives behavioural shifts, reinforcing a shared social value around stewardship. This transformation from isolated actions to collective momentum is essential for achieving long-term conservation goals at scale.

A summary table available in Annex 2 outlines how the three main categories of social incentives can effectively support landowner engagement in conservation and the recognition of their efforts. These tap into values such as community identity, pride, learning, and legacy. Key takeaways highlight that social incentives are most effective when they respect landowner identity, heritage, and autonomy. It also highlights some programs that demonstrate how combining recognition, education, and peer support can build long-term trust, community ownership, and pathways toward formal conservation recognition.

[12] Nguyen-Van, Phu, Anne Stenger and Tuyen Tiet. Social incentive factors in interventions promoting sustainable behaviors: A meta-analysis. PLoS One. 2021 Dec 8;16(12):e0260932. [doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0260932]

Financial Incentives

While social incentives are powerful tools for fostering conservation values and voluntary action, they are often not sufficient on their own. For many landowners, particularly those managing working lands, economic viability is a critical consideration. Financial incentives play a key role in bridging this gap by providing direct compensation, reducing economic barriers, and reinforcing stewardship as a valued and supported land use. Financial mechanisms ranging from tax relief to payment for ecosystem services can complement social incentives and strengthen landowner participation in long-term conservation.

"Environmental Sustainability Can be Defined as Financial Sustainability"

Financial incentives play a critical role in encouraging woodlot and agricultural landowners to engage in conservation efforts. These incentives help offset potential revenue loss or land-use restrictions associated with conservation commitments by providing economic benefits. Key financial incentives available to landowners are mostly related to reduced taxes, direct payments for conservation services, grants, and cost-share programs common in agricultural incentive programs. In addition, market-based programs such as carbon and biodiversity credits or certifications provide opportunities to generate external revenues, creating complementary income streams alongside traditional land uses like agriculture, ranching, or forestry.

Landowners voice concerns about the perceived inequity in current conservation financial support systems highlighting that those who have historically maintained or restored their lands in ways that benefit society have often done so without compensation (nor recognition) while others are receiving financial incentives for newly implemented actions. This perspective underscores the importance of designing policy frameworks that are inclusive and retrospective, acknowledging the value of long-standing stewardship, not just newly adopted conservation practices. Failure to do so risks undermining trust and discouraging continued voluntary engagement from landowners who feel overlooked. Justice through recognition refers to the idea that landowners, particularly those who have been quietly stewarding their land for years, deserve to be acknowledged and fairly compensated for the ecological services they provide to society.

There is growing interest in leveraging mechanisms that recognize and adequately compensate landowners, particularly those adapting management practices on working lands, who contribute to social and community well-being generated through their land stewardship. As an example, in Quebec, an innovative financial incentive model is currently under development, exploring tax-shifting mechanisms and performance-based payments for ecological services to enhance conservation outcomes provided by private landowners (L. Parenteau, personal communication, February 2025). This redistributive ecofiscal approach proposes to develop a municipal taxation tool structured around an equalization payment. This payment, applied in the context of transactions involving non-market ecological goods and services, is intended to value conservation by compensating for the value of services provided by land parcels. The model encourages landowners to reduce their tax burden by adopting or expanding conservation practices such as naturalizing marginal lands or minimizing ecological disturbances. Grounded in the principles of "polluter pays" and "user pays", taxes collected would be reinvested locally to support area-based conservation

initiatives, contribute to biodiversity recovery and strengthen ecosystem resilience at the regional scale.

A summary table available in Annex 2 outlines a range of financial incentives available to landowners that can support conservation efforts by making them more economically viable and rewarding. In addition, examples illustrate how different models or programs can combine financial support making conservation more attractive and feasible, especially for owners of "working lands".

Regulatory Incentives

Governments at all levels, federal, provincial and municipal, have regulations in place to protect the environment generally and nature specifically. Regulatory mechanisms take various forms including zoning laws, legal frameworks, cross-compliance measures, and permitting or reporting requirements. For instance, conservation easements and zoning protections are legally binding instruments that can permanently restrict damaging land uses. The norm for such regulations is that they compel compliance on the part of regulatees and, if regulatory requirements are not met, regulatees risk enforcement actions and prosecution. In addition, some types of regulatory protection may result in civil court cases seeking compliance with regulations or agreements, or compensation for harm done as a result of non-compliance with regulations or agreements. Given the widespread use and familiarity of these types of regulatory mechanisms, and as the focus of this paper is on incentives for voluntary actions on the part of landowners, this type of government regulation is not examined. Actions undertaken or avoided in order to comply with regulatory requirements are difficult to characterize as voluntary.

This paper considers "regulatory incentives" through the other side of the lens, voluntary actions undertaken by a landowner so as to avoid regulations or negative consequences from regulation. As with other incentive programs, "regulatory avoidance" incentives may not appeal to all landowners. However, for landowners particularly motivated by the importance of "local autonomy" and assurances that they make their own land management decisions, programs of this type can be an important incentive to enhance conservation actions and improve conservation outcomes on their lands.

"Regulatory avoidance" incentives have not been extensively explored in Canada. In Ontario, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks enables the creation or enhancement of "safe harbour habitat"—defined as an area for the conservation of species at risk—through the use of safe harbour instruments.[13] However, the use of this incentive appears to be limited. Ontario's Environmental Farm Plan Program (EFP program), when linked to stewardship agreements, can serve as an entry point to programs like the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP)[14] which incorporate elements of regulatory flexibility. However, the degree to which these mechanisms provide robust legal protection is still a matter of debate within the agricultural community.

[13] Safe Harbour Habitat under the Endangered Species Act, Ontario
[14] About Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program

Conversely, under the Endangered Species Act in the United States, more extensive use of safe harbour and similar agreements has been made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Safe Harbor Agreements,[15] Candidate Conservation Agreements,[16] Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances,[17] Conservation Benefit Agreements,[18] and Enhancement of Survival Permits with Conservation Benefit Agreements).[19] A key element of these programs is an understanding on the part of the landowner of the need for monitoring and reporting on the commitments made by them in their safe harbour agreement.

A summary table available in Annex 2 outlines key types of regulatory incentives that support voluntary conservation by reducing risk, simplifying compliance, and building trust among landowners. It highlights practical tools and program examples that encourage participation while respecting landowner autonomy.

Incentive Programs: Two Examples

ALUS

ALUS is a community-led, farmer-delivered conservation program that supports landowners in producing ecosystem services (like clean water, carbon sequestration, biodiversity, pollination, and flood and drought mitigation) on marginal, uneconomic or ecologically sensitive portions of their land. ALUS is currently active, and growing, in more than thirty communities across six provinces, including Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Saskatchewan.

ALUS stands out for how it blends financial, social, and monitoring incentives in a way that aligns well with what research shows are the most effective conservation motivators for private landowners, especially farmers and woodlot owners. It also overcomes fear of regulatory measures, as it promotes a voluntary and non-punitive framework.

What makes the ALUS program appealing to farmers and ranchers is that rather than imposing strict conditions, ALUS partners with landowners to voluntarily maintain and restore natural capital, biodiversity, ecosystem connectivity and habitats, and to manage carbon in the soil, while continuing to farm. Landowners are incentivized by receiving monetary compensation for the production of ecosystem goods and services created through their land management. Annual payments tied to ecosystem services delivery are one of the most effective motivators. Not only does ALUS pay (fully or partly through cost-sharing) for the implementation phase of a project (such as planting native grasses, fencing off riparian zones, restoring wetlands), but in certain cases, it also covers maintenance costs for managing and maintaining the ecological benefit of the project over the contractual period. The structure of the payment, particularly its regularity and potential for renewal, reinforces the recognition of landowners as important stewards of the land, adding a social and symbolic dimension to the program that complements its financial incentives. Another financial incentive explored by ALUS in some regions is environmental markets such as carbon and biodiversity credits, opening new revenue opportunities.

[15] Safe Harbor Agreements, US Fish and Wildlife Service
[16] Candidate Conservation Agreements, US Fish and Wildlife Service
[17] Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances, US Fish and Wildlife Service
[18] Conservation Benefit Agreements, US Fish and Wildlife Service
[19] Enhancement of Survival Permits with Conservation Benefit Agreements, US Fish and Wildlife Service

A strength of the ALUS program is the leveraging of existing programs such as the Environmental Farm Plan Program and partnerships with producer organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Keystone Agricultural Producers in Manitoba, and the Union des producteurs agricoles in Quebec. ALUS also places importance placed on social value incentives such as peer recognition where landowners are celebrated locally and through ALUS national stories, awards and media. Community learning opportunities are also in place. ALUS organizes field tours, workshops, and farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange.

As frequently mentioned in social research, trust in the program governing body is an essential component for greater participation. Its program is community-developed, delivered and governed locally by Partnership Advisory Committees (or PACs) made up of farmers and local organizations. It works in partnership with landowners to build projects that fulfill both parties' objectives. It promotes collaborative, user-friendly and practical bottom-up monitoring to track environmental outcomes of the projects in a manner that provides autonomy to landowners, rather than top-down requirements.

While the ALUS program is widely recognized for its community-led, voluntary approach, it faces several limitations in the broader conservation landscape. One concern is its focus on marginal or edge-of-field areas, rather than promoting conservation within productive on-field zones, which may limit the ecological impact at scale. Without long-term legal protections or secure funding, concerns remain about the permanence and durability of outcomes, and compensation levels may not always reflect the true opportunity costs faced by landowners. Emerging market-based tools offer promise but are still underdeveloped, making it more difficult to sustain or expand participation through alternative revenue streams.

As with many other existing conservation programs, landowners' hesitance to commit to long-term or permanent contracts or legally binding agreements such as easements is a barrier encountered by ALUS in terms of having lands included in CPCAD (ALUS does not hold easements or land in fee-simple title). Farmers who show interest in the ALUS program have other common concerns such as uncertainty about the economic value of the land in the future, the equitability in compensation payments as compared to land market value, and fear of losing their independence and control over land management. Nevertheless, given it is held in high regard within the conservation and farming communities, ALUS is reviewing OECM criteria to determine whether some lands can be recognized. It aims at conservation outcomes that are documented and monitored, and offers trustworthy governance. With a few adjustments to its program, including matters related to long-term protection and legally binding conservation easements, covenants or other mechanisms, some ALUS-enrolled lands could be recognized and registered as OECMs.

Main lessons learned from the ALUS program

- Blended incentives (financial, social, monitoring) align with landowner motivations.
- Voluntary, flexible framework avoids regulatory fear and respects landowner autonomy.
- Annual payments for ecosystem services are an effective and motivating approach.
- Integration with existing programs (e.g., Environmental Farm Plans) increases relevance and efficiency.
- Landowners remain cautious about permanent legal agreements and future land-use restrictions.

To learn more

- **ALUS** : https://alus.ca/
- **General Program FAQ**: https://alus.ca/frequently-asked-questions/

The Chesapeake Conservancy

The Chesapeake Conservancy is a leading non-profit organization based in Maryland, USA. It is dedicated to protecting and restoring the Chesapeake Bay watershed, one of the most ecologically and culturally significant regions in the United States. The Conservancy employs innovative technology, community engagement, and strategic partnerships to advance its conservation mission, with a strong focus on land protection, stream restoration, and precision conservation. Combined, the use of data-driven and co-designed projects with landowners and local governments creates an empowered collaboration that improves overall water and wildlife habitat quality.

Among its successes is the Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center (CIC), which is using cutting-edge technology to empower data-driven conservation projects, and the engagement and decision-making processes behind the projects. At its core, the Center utilizes high-resolution land use/land cover datasets to map the landscape. The leveraging of technology overcomes common barriers to land protection and restoration, such as limited data, which leads to fragmented planning and inefficient resource allocation.

"Empowering with data", the CIC has democratized the use of technology and data through the creation of more than 60 web applications and online tools, and of customized prioritization tools, analyses and maps to assist local and regional partners in planning and decision-making.[20] An example of the benefit of the use of technology is the high-resolution tree canopy analysis led by CIC, in partnership with the University of Vermont and the Harry R. Hughes Center. The results of this analysis directly supported a bill that brought major positive changes to the Maryland Forest Conservation Act, in 2023. Sixteen percent of the Chesapeake Conservancy annual expenses in 2023 were invested in data-driven planning (while 56% of it went toward land conservation).[21] It is funded by government grants and cooperatives, various agreements (mostly federal government), fees for service contracts and charitable donations.

The Chesapeake Conservancy has emerged as a leading force in conservation, not only because of its innovative use of technology and strategic partnerships but also due to its effective application of a diverse suite of incentives to encourage landowners, organizations, and communities to engage in conservation action. By blending social, financial, monitoring, and regulatory incentives, the Conservancy has created a model that is both adaptive and inclusive. It meets landowners where they are, building programs around landowners and scaling impact across the vast Chesapeake Bay watershed. It works closely with landowners and partners to unlock funding through federal and state programs, including cost-sharing for best management practices, conservation easements, and habitat restoration. For example, in projects such as precision restoration planning with farmers in Pennsylvania, financial

[20] Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center Turns 10
[21] Chesapeake Conservancy Annual Report 2023

incentives are used to support riparian buffer planting, nutrient management, and wetland restoration, ensuring that ecological stewardship doesn't come at the expense of farm profitability. These efforts are often supported by grants from sources such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state-level conservation funds.

What stands out the most regarding incentives is that the Conservancy understands the importance of addressing social incentives. People are motivated not only by funding, but also by meaning. By leveraging social incentives such as public recognition, storytelling, and inclusion in regional identity-building and collaborative initiatives, the Conservancy taps into landowners' pride and values. Through various activities, it elevates conservation champions, featuring them in public outreach, digital content, and policy discussions.

Importantly, unlike many traditional conservation organizations, the Conservancy invests heavily in technical support, local capacity building, and simplified outcome-based monitoring tools that lower barriers to participation. The availability of free, user-friendly dashboards and open-access data empower rather than burden participants. Dashboards are scaled to various levels, enabling them to be available to a variety of users. The dashboards are considered great motivators as they enhance transparency and reduce the cost and complexity of reporting and accountability as well.

A strength of the Chesapeake Conservancy's conservation strategies, including the promotion of existing incentives such as government programs, is its integrated and context-sensitive approach. Rather than relying on a single strategy, the Conservancy tailors a mix of incentives based on land types, ownership model, regional policy, and community values. Financial incentives provide foundational support, social incentives foster a conservation ethic, monitoring tools validate impact, technical support value empowerment, and regulatory alignment ensures long-term protection. Yet, Chesapeake Conservancy acknowledges difficulties in its incentive programs, especially the financial ones that often rely on federal and state grants programs or private foundations. Funding uncertainty or inconsistency makes it difficult to plan long-term or offer multi-year incentive commitments. Also, there is a need to improve equity in access to conservation benefits, as Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) and low-income landowners are underrepresented in their projects, and public access is often limited.

Main lessons learned from the Chesapeake Conservancy actions

- Technology can be a powerful conservation enabler, using high-resolution spatial data and digital tools to drive precision conservation, prioritize actions and inform and influence policy as well as the public.
- Social motivation matters. Storytelling, recognition, and involvement in collective identity-building foster landowner pride and participation.
- Blended incentives maximize engagement. Integration of financial, social, regulatory, and monitoring incentives to meet landowners where they are and increase uptake, supporting stewardship without sacrificing profitability.
- Outcome-based monitoring reduces barriers: user-friendly, scalable monitoring tools make it easier and less costly for participants to demonstrate results, enhancing transparency, trust, and ongoing engagement.
- Investment in technical support and local partners empowers communities and reduces dependency on centralized decision-making.

In 2024, Maryland announced that it had met its goal of conserving 30% of its land base, over 1.85 million acres, six years ahead of the 2030 Targets.[22] This success laid the foundation for a new, more ambitious objective: protecting 40% of the state's lands by 2040, as set out in the 2023 *Maryland the Beautiful Act*. The Chesapeake Conservancy played a significant role in achieving the 30% milestone and shaping the new target, particularly through its leadership in high-resolution mapping, data-driven conservation planning, and cross-sector collaboration aimed at accelerating land protection across the state.

As Canada scales up efforts to meet its 30x30 target and enhance recognition of OECM recognition, the Conservancy offers a relevant and replicable example of how diverse incentives can activate conservation at scale, while still being responsive to community realities and ecosystem goals.

To learn more

- **Chesapeake Conservancy:** https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/
- **LandScope America/Chesapeake**: An interactive, user-friendly mapping platform that allows users to explore conservation values, ecosystem services, and protected areas. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/b24d53e750164f48ba56399b1c8b529e/page/Home

Customized Dashboards and Web Apps: For tracking project implementation, modelling conservation impacts, and reporting metrics: https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/what-we-do/chesapeake-conservation-center

Navigating Consent: The Trade-Offs Between Opting In and Out

The current voluntary, opt-in approach to OECM recognition has failed to generate sufficient interest among private landowners. Although numbers are slowly increasing, partly due to new OECM guidelines and organizational partnerships, participation remains far below potential. Without targeted outreach, clear information, and meaningful incentives, participation will likely continue to lag.

An opt-in approach requires landowners to act proactively, voluntarily initiating the process of having their eligible lands recognized for conservation. This means they must not only be aware of the opportunity but also understand the conservation goals, recognition criteria, and procedural steps involved. Full participation relies on trust in the authority responsible for evaluation, registration, and data management, especially regarding how information is used, stored, and protected. Landowners must also be willing and able to demonstrate compliance with established criteria and, where applicable, regulatory standards.

The opt-in model's strongest advantages lie in its alignment with landowner values, particularly autonomy, ownership and privacy. It avoids the imposition of conservation designations or obligations by ensuring that recognition is not imposed, but rather initiated through his/her voluntary engagement. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and collaboration, knowing the landowner remains an active participant in the process rather than the subject of external control.

[22] Maryland Meets 30% Land Conservation Goal Six Years Ahead of Schedule

Conversely, to increase the pace and scale of recognizing eligible lands, voluntary opt-out models could be explored, particularly those that rethink the choice architecture behind landowner participation in conservation recognition. In these models, the landowner acts responsively rather than proactively. Drawing from the concept of nudging, which has proven effective in fields like healthcare and insurance but remains underused in environmental policy, this approach would shift the default toward inclusion. Instead of requiring landowners to initiate the process as in the current opt-in model, those owning ecologically valuable lands would be notified of their potential eligibility and included in the recognition process unless they actively decline. By designing participation around default enrollment—while preserving choice and transparency—this model could facilitate recognition and unlock broader participation without compromising landowner autonomy.

While potentially effective in scaling up recognition, the opt-out approach introduces ethical, legal, and perceptual risks. Comparisons to "negative billing" practices in consumer services ("I didn't sign up for this!") highlight the risk of perceived manipulation or loss of control. Identifying lands for potential inclusion without prior explicit consent can raise perceived overreach into private property matters and autonomy concerns. It may be viewed as a top-down imposition, particularly in regions where private property rights are strongly defended. Even if the designation carries no regulatory implications, it could still be viewed as a precursor to government intervention, particularly when the recognition process is initiated or overseen by a government body.

The success of an opt-out model depends on building trust. If an opt-out model is considered, it must be paired with a clear, accessible, and transparent process for landowners to decline participation. Communication strategies should not only convey the non-regulatory nature of the initiative but also include formal assurances that participation will not trigger regulatory obligations or unintended consequences. The process must uphold the principles of informed choice, respect, and trust building. When well designed, such an approach would reverse the default expectation, instead of requiring action to participate, landowners must act only if they do wish to decline their participation.

International examples demonstrate that default inclusion in conservation recognition systems is administratively feasible when paired with clear procedural safeguards, though they remain relatively uncommon. For instance, the Germany's Federal Nature Conservation Act allows for the designation of certain protected areas on private lands without requiring landowner consent. The German law requires notification and provides a formal objection and appeal process. This could inspire Canada to a "soft" opt-out for recognizing OECMs, which would also need transparency and the right to refuse. A mandatory regulatory process for qualifying sites is applied in Germany, whereas a Canadian soft opt-out model for OECMs would be voluntary and non-regulatory, aiming to invite further participation rather than to impose it.

PART FOUR: REFLECTIONS FROM LANDOWNERS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES ON PUBLIC RECOGNITION OF THEIR CONSERVATION LANDS

To better understand the interests, motivations, and barriers faced by private agricultural and woodlot landowners regarding the recognition of their lands in the CPCAD, we implemented a multisource qualitative research strategy. This strategy centred on the review of public information and research literature, in-depth interviews and conversations, and focus groups with both individual landowners and representatives from associations that support them. The goal was to identify what fosters or inhibits voluntary participation in conservation recognition and to inform future recommendations for improving trust, alignment, and uptake of lands eligible for inclusion in CPCAD.

Methodology for In-Depth Interviews and Focus Groups

In February and March 2025, nine (9) semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse cross-section of associations and networks that represent or work closely with agricultural and woodlot landowners, or that study and implement conservation policies. These interviews aimed to explore landowners' perceptions, values and concerns related to conservation practices and incentives, conservation programs and governance, and recognition mechanisms. The open-ended interview format encouraged candid dialogue, allowing participants to introduce topics and perspectives that enriched the overall analysis.

In parallel, twenty-six (26) individuals and organizations were invited to participate in group conversations, resulting in three (3) focus group sessions (two in English and one in French) with a total of nineteen (19) participants. These sessions provided an opportunity to share early insights, test emerging assumptions, and collect feedback on possible solutions and framing strategies.

Following the focus groups, we conducted a comparative analysis of findings across interviews and group discussions. This process allowed us to identify both points of convergence, such as shared values around stewardship, a strong desire for autonomy, and concerns about regulatory overreach, and areas of divergence, including the desire for privacy but also public recognition of stewardship, and varying levels of trust in governance systems. These insights will assist in the development of adaptive, inclusive, and trust-building strategies, tailored to address the nuanced perspectives of private landowners across Canada.

Understanding the Hurdles: Why Private Conservation Lands are not Better Recognized in National Accounting

Lack of Understanding of Conservation Measures and Enrollment Processes

Despite its critical role in tracking Canada's progress toward 30x30, concepts of conservation measures and the process for enrolling and reporting land in national or provincial conservation databases remain largely unfamiliar to many potential contributors, particularly private landowners. Many reported being unaware of the process or hesitant to engage for a variety of reasons. A key barrier is the lack of accessible information and education. Many conservation-minded landowners are simply unaware that their existing sustainable land management practices might already meet certain criteria for recognition in CPCAD.

Administrative Burden and Time Constraints with Complex Requirements

Landowners cited the time and administrative burden of self-reporting and documenting conservation activities as a major obstacle, especially for those already busy with managing their land and operations. The registration process is viewed to be complex and time-consuming, likely due to the technical criteria and documentation requirements associated with conservation programs. However, no technical questions were asked to explore these perceptions, as most focus group participants were unfamiliar with the OECM recognition and submission process.

Several participants perceived that the lack of alignment between reporting requirements across different conservation programs and funders may make participation in 30x30 more cumbersome and time-consuming. Each program appears to have its own set of expectations, formats, timelines, and points of contact, which makes it challenging for landowners to keep track and respond efficiently. This absence of common standards was seen as a barrier, especially when navigating multiple programs with different reporting requirements and individuals with whom to engage.

In addition, a simple lack of motivation to report was also mentioned, not as a rejection of conservation itself, but rather as a reflection of the perceived burden of the reporting process.[23] These factors highlight that barriers to recognition are not necessarily about opposition to conservation, but often about the practical limitations landowners face.

[23] Ontario Woodlot Association (2024). Investigating Private Woodlots in Ontario as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures Supporting Canada's 30x30 Target 1 Challenge (unpublished report).

Concerns About Regulations and Property Rights

Many landowners expressed apprehension about the potential regulatory implications of conservation recognition. A common concern is that once a property is formally recognized, such as through CPCAD or any other process, it could lead to increased government oversight or land-use restrictions. These concerns are especially pronounced in regions where property rights and landowner autonomy are deeply valued. The lack of clear assurances around long-term regulatory impacts contributes to hesitancy, even among those supportive of conservation in principle.

Distrust Toward Conservation Organizations and Governance

Some landowners, particularly in rural communities, expressed a long-standing skepticism toward conservation organizations and government rooted in experiences and perceptions. This could contribute to their reluctance to engage in conservation efforts. Rebuilding trust will require consistent, respectful, and locally grounded engagement that affirms landowner values and priorities. In some cases, distrust toward conservation organizations stems from previous interactions perceived as dismissive or overly prescriptive, where landowners felt their knowledge was undervalued or their concerns were ignored. Insistence on scientific approaches without space for dialogue that takes into account landowner knowledge, or a perceived imposition of external priorities, has left lasting impressions in certain communities. These experiences highlight the importance of co-creation, engagement that builds relations, and mutual respect in conservation initiatives.

Desire for Privacy and Lack of Public Recognition

Many landowners were hesitant to enroll their land in conservation programs due to concerns about privacy and not wanting public recognition or acknowledgment of their conservation efforts on private land. Rural or family landowners especially value discretion; public visibility is perceived as a direct threat to their sense of private stewardship. Landowners also worry that having their property listed in an open-access database or promoted as conservation lands could lead the public to assume open access for recreation (e.g., hiking, hunting and fishing, birdwatching). Trespassing risks include property damage and vandalism, liability exposure (injuries or accidents on private land) and wildlife disturbance or land degradation by unauthorized visitors. It is true that information about private properties, such as property boundaries, is available publicly. The key point is that it is the linking of those properties to the attributes of the property that contributes to landowner concern.

> *"Once your land is publicly recognized for conservation, people might think it's like a park—they don't understand that it's still private. They will start showing up to visit or do recreational activities, and that's not what we signed up for."*
>
> — Focus Group Participant

Absence of Clear Financial Incentives and Uncertainties Around the Incentives or Benefits of Enrollment

The absence of clear, dependable incentives or strong motives is a significant hurdle to landowner participation in OECM recognition. Many are unconvinced that enrollment will bring meaningful returns and remain uncertain about what financial, social, or other benefits, if any, will follow. Without transparent, long-term commitments, the costs of adapting land management for conservation can seem risky or unjustified. This uncertainty deters even conservation-minded landowners from engaging. Clearly defined, accessible, and sustained incentive programs are essential to remove this barrier, reduce perceived risk, and make recognition a valued opportunity rather than an open-ended commitment.

Dilemma of Legal Permanence Versus Landowners Flexibility

For landowners, particularly farmers, perpetual easements can feel like a permanent loss of flexibility, reducing land value and limiting future use by heirs or future buyers. These long-term legal instruments can conflict with the values of intergenerational autonomy. Landowners worry about locking their land into an easement indefinitely. Decreasing its market value is one concern, the other is a feeling that a burden is being passed on to subsequent landowners. Long-term legal restrictions may be seen as conflicting with intergenerational autonomy and landowner sovereignty as well.

PART FIVE: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines the key findings that emerged from our analysis, along with a set of strategic recommendations to support greater recognition of privately conserved lands as OECMs in CPCAD. The analysis revealed shared motivations, recurring concerns, and barriers that influence landowner participation in reporting and recognition processes. These insights form the foundation for actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing engagement, trust, and inclusion of private conservation lands in Canada's conservation efforts.

Key Findings

- **Limited awareness and understanding**: Landowners and some organizations lack awareness of OECMs and CPCAD processes.
- **Misalignment with landowner values**: Recognition criteria often conflict with landowner priorities of autonomy, privacy, and flexible land management.
- **Privacy concerns**: Many landowners are reluctant to have their property information publicly available in databases.
- **Trust issues**: Rural landowners often distrust government and conservation organizations based on experiences.
- **Administrative burden**: The reporting process is perceived as complex, time-consuming, and offering few benefits to landowners.
- **Permanence vs. flexibility**: Many landowners resist long-term legal commitments that might restrict future land use and succession planning.

Actionable Recommendations

Create a privacy-respecting recognition model:

- Develop a confidential registry with opt-in information disclosure
- Implement batch recognition for identifying conservation lands without attributing individual owners
- Establish clear data protection policies co-designed with landowners

Establish a trusted intermediary system:

- Fund and train qualified third-party organizations to facilitate OECM reporting
- Create a community of practice to standardize training and share best practices
- Develop a nationwide evaluation committee with clear authority

Streamline and simplify the reporting process:

- Accept existing documentation (forest/farm management plans) to avoid duplication
- Create a step-by-step guide co-designed with landowners
- Develop a comprehensive digital portal as a centralized hub for conservation resources

Implement flexible recognition options:

- Explore alternative agreement models (conservation leases, legacy agreements)
- Allow for aggregation of smaller conservation areas
- Develop regionally tailored approaches that reflect local contexts

Design multidimensional incentive packages:

- Combine financial, social, and regulatory incentives
- Create stackable incentives that address diverse landowner motivations
- Shift toward outcome-focused recognition rather than activity-based metrics

Launch a targeted communication campaign:

- Bridge the urban-rural divide by highlighting landowner contributions
- Use trusted messengers from agricultural and woodlot associations
- Frame recognition as an opportunity rather than an obligation

Pilot a “soft” opt-out model:

- Implement regional pilot programs using third-party identification of potential conservation lands
- Provide landowners with clear, respectful communication and easy opt-out options
- Offer direct assistance with documentation and verification

1/ Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide and Landowners as Essential Land Stewards

A clear disconnection between urban and rural communities is still observed, as a few farmers and representative organizations expressed feeling misunderstood or unfairly portrayed—often seen as obstacles to conservation or contributors to environmental harm. The lack of formal recognition for their efforts often leaves them feeling overlooked, discouraging greater participation. Yet for many landowners, stewardship is deeply personal, rooted in values tied to legacy, productivity, cultural connection, and care for the land. To address this divide, it’s essential to shift the narrative and invest in communication and education efforts that foster mutual understanding and respect between these communities. By highlighting the vital role that agriculture, forestry, and rural landowners play in conservation, we can reduce misconceptions, cultivate mutual respect, and build broader support for sustainable land stewardship. Communication strategies must be put in place to elevate landowners to key allies in achieving conservation goals. Their long-standing stewardship and local knowledge position them as integral contributors to protecting biodiversity and sustaining landscapes. Without formal recognition of these efforts, programs risk reinforcing the very disconnect they aim to overcome. Acknowledgment affirms the value of their contributions and create a strong foundation for ongoing engagement.

A more flexible, relevant, and value-driven recognition mechanism is far more likely to be perceived as supportive and empowering. Engagement increases when landowners can see clear benefits, exercise choice, and participate in ways that align with their own values and motivations. Programs that clearly address the question, "What's in it for me?" are better positioned to build trust and encourage broader participation. A practical example of this approach can be found in efforts to enhance the reporting of PPAs to the *Répertoire des sites de conservation volontaire*. The Réseau de milieux naturels protégés collaborated with a key land trust funder, the Fondation de la Faune du Québec to introduce in the latest funding agreements a clause stipulating that final payments are conditional upon the accounting of eligible lands in a database. This mechanism establishes a clear, outcome-based incentive by directly linking financial support to the act of formal reporting, while reinforcing the importance of transparent and accountable conservation practices.

Although scientific monitoring does not seem a mandatory element of the OECM recognition process for landowners (although there must be mechanisms in place to monitor and evaluate whether the area continues to achieve effective in situ conservation of biodiversity), it certainly presents a valuable opportunity to foster engagement and build a sense of ownership among landowners. Approaches such as participatory monitoring, citizen science tools, and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing can deepen commitment and create meaningful connections to conservation outcomes. As highlighted by a focus group participant, landowners are more likely to become active advocates for broader conservation efforts when they can see the tangible outcomes of their own work—or the successes achieved by their peers. While monitoring is of interest, it is not something that landowners naturally see themselves participating in without adequate preparation, support, and clear purpose. In fact, there is often a perception that monitoring would simply add to their workload. To be effective, monitoring must be incentive compatible—that is, it must be simple to implement, accessible to those without technical expertise—as citizen science should be—and positioned as a helpful, empowering tool rather than an administrative burden.

Conservation and public recognition should celebrate all levels of contribution and stewardship

2/ Privacy in Opposition to Public Recognition

A growing number of private landowners are conserving land, yet they remain absent from the CPCAD. One key reason is the tension between privacy and public recognition. While many landowners care deeply about conservation and may welcome incentives, they are reluctant to have their names, property boundaries, or property information publicly disclosed.

This creates a dilemma: inclusion in the CPCAD results in a certain level of visibility, and landowners fear that public access to such information could invite scrutiny, unwanted attention, or future regulatory burdens. For some, especially in rural and tight-knit communities, or within groups and associations where the government's involvement is frowned upon, conservation is a personal or cultural value, not something they wish to make public.

A few solutions could be explored. A simple one would be to modify the registry to be confidential, with an opt-in and flexible information disclosure. The CPCAD would evolve to a secure internal registry where conservation areas are recognized, but landowner information remains private unless the landowner chooses to share it. Options could be full public recognition (name, location, and conservation status), partial visibility (general location (e.g., townships or watersheds) and conservation data are shown), or full confidential reporting (the land is counted toward national targets, but no identifying information is made public). Also, related to the ethical considerations discussed above for opt-in and opt-out methods, a plain-language consent form (including what information is shared, who would have access and the right to limit disclosure) and opt-out clauses in the CPCAD reporting agreement would reduce fear and increase confidence in participating voluntarily.

Another approach would be to have trusted intermediaries to whom landowners could report, organizations that would hold and submit the data on behalf of the landowner, keeping personal or property details confidential. Such an approach could enable an aggregated system to allow for reporting of multiple conservation lands as part of a collective (e.g., watershed group, co-op, forest owner network), with no individual land identified, but conservation contributions acknowledged in aggregate. It would enable the visibility of conservation efforts at the landscape scale without exposing individual participants.

This model of using trusted intermediaries to handle data reporting is not without precedent. For example, Statistics Canada already aggregates and anonymizes data for the Agricultural Census, allowing for detailed landscape-level analysis without compromising individual farm privacy. Similarly, the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) has developed robust protocols that enable researchers and decision-makers to access ecological data while safeguarding the location and identity of landowners and sensitive sites[24]. Leveraging these established practices could provide a credible foundation for designing a confidential, collective reporting mechanism for OECMs and private conservation lands, reinforcing trust while improving visibility at regional and national scales.

Enable visibility of conservation effort without exposing individual participants

3/ Trust-Building and Participatory Approaches: Empowering Relationships and Mutual Benefit

Trust is the foundation of voluntary conservation, yet it's precisely what's missing in current approaches. Landowners remain skeptical of conservation programs and reporting processes, even when provided with information, support, and user-friendly tools. This skepticism stems from fears of losing autonomy, facing unclear expectations, or encountering unexpected restrictions. Top-down recognition mechanisms have consistently failed to address these fundamental concerns. Without transparent and objective-focused communication and actively addressing autonomy and trust issues, voluntary conservation recognition will continue to stall.

[24] "The ABMI's site confidentiality policy exists to ensure the scientific integrity of sites we visit multiple times and to protect the privacy of landholders in Alberta". Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI)

This means communication on what reporting entails must be clear, as well as explicit regarding what recognition means, what it doesn't mean, and if and how landowners can opt in or out at any point. Landowners are more likely to participate when they feel heard and respected—not pressured. Similar to what was reported from the focus groups, a lack of understanding of CPCAD and the Decision Support Tool was also reported by land trusts owning lands eligible to CPCAD.[25] These organizations mentioned that for them to effectively and accurately contribute to reporting for accounting, they would need training, a more streamlined approach, and support.

Participatory design, where the targeted public is invited to co-create the evaluation framework and criteria, helps to build buy-in. Participatory design seems still limited, especially when it comes to private landowners like farmers and woodlot owners who believe that outside actors may not fully understand their land or management practices, and their interests and motivations. Minimally, engaging woodlot owners, farmers and ranchers in the co-development of data protection policies and assurances, levels of visibility or recognition criteria are critical. Co-designing a more practical, step-by-step guide for reporting their lands would also be another solution to explore. Ownership of the process is key to scaling up voluntary reporting.

Trust must be cultivated over time and is essential for scaling up conservation across private and community-managed lands.

Importantly, relationships with credible, community-based "intermediaries" such as local conservation organizations or regional stewardship networks to take charge of the evaluation process, could further deepen trust. Empowering an independent third party—one that is both well versed in Target 3 objectives and guidelines and capable of acting as a trusted intermediary for landowners—to evaluate OECM lands would perhaps enhance the quality and quantity of reporting to CPCAD. Such a body would bring both the ecological expertise and understanding of protection mechanisms needed for credible assessment, and the responsiveness to landowner perspectives necessary to ensure that, with full decision-making and interpretative power, recognition reflects not only technical compliance, but a broader intent and reality of conservation efforts on the ground.

4/ Flexibility and Context-Sensitiveness: Meeting Landowners Where They Are

Incentives for reporting should be tailored to fit the diversity of Canada's landscapes, cultures, and property types, while also accounting for regional ecological conditions, as well as the varied motivations of landowners. This includes recognizing that conservation mechanisms can take many forms beyond formally protected areas.

To strengthen participation and trust, programs must recognize, value, and actively promote sustainable management and stewardship practices already taking place on working lands—including agriculture, forestry, and ranching—as legitimate and impactful forms of conservation. These managed landscapes play a crucial role in maintaining ecological

[25] Association of Canadian Land Trusts, 2024. Protected Areas Reporting by Land Trusts to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) (unpublished report).

functions and biodiversity while supporting local economies. Harvesting, grazing, and land cultivation, when done sustainably, are not separate from ecosystems—but part of the broader socioecological system. Recognizing this relationship allows conservation frameworks to move beyond exclusionary models and instead promote coexistence between productive land use and biodiversity outcomes.

Flexibility in recognition programs should extend to the types and duration of agreements, management expectations, and cultural considerations. Adaptive approaches that respond to these distinctions can significantly build relevance and legitimacy. Moreover, recognition mechanisms should be capable of evolving alongside changes in land use, ownership, and climate conditions. A one-size-fits-all model is unlikely to succeed in such a diverse context. Customization and locally adapted strategies help increase engagement by emphasizing legacy, place-based knowledge, and cultural ties.

Streamlining Processes for Flexibility

Currently, OECM recognition requires case-by-case documentation, evaluation, and approval, which is often technical, time-consuming, and intimidating for landowners. Yet many land uses—such as sustainable forestry, rotational grazing, controlled hunting, or wetland protection—already achieve the outcomes intended by OECM criteria. These efforts go unrecognized largely due to administrative bottlenecks, lack of awareness, or perceptions of complexity. One way to ease the process is by accepting and encouraging the leveraging of existing documentation, such as forest or farm management plans, to minimize duplication of effort. Rather than asking landowners to submit additional or redundant information, recognition processes should be designed to integrate data already collected through other programs or land stewardship activities. By streamlining processes and reporting requirements and clearly validating diverse conservation practices—including those embedded in managed landscapes—Canada can unlock greater participation and more accurately reflect the full scope of conservation taking place across the country.

Addressing Perpetuity with Openness and Receptiveness

Flexibility also means creating space for non-traditional legal, yet credible forms of evidence that reflect long-term biodiversity conservation intent. From a conservationist's perspective, the ecological value of a given parcel of land may change over time due to natural factors or others, like climate change, habitat shifts, or surrounding land-use pressures, raising valid questions about the appropriateness of binding certain lands to permanent protection. While tools like conservation easements are commonly used to demonstrate legal permanence, they may not always align with the needs, values, or realities of all landowners—particularly those who prioritize legacy, cultural continuity, or intergenerational land care. To expand opportunities for recognition, there is an interest to explore the development of heritage or legacy-based agreements—non-regulatory but formally acknowledged commitments that reflect a landowner's or community's long-term dedication to conservation, even into perpetuity. These could be structured as voluntary declarations, memoranda of understanding, or locally grounded stewardship contracts that include recognition of past conservation actions and intent for future continuity, without necessarily placing legal restrictions on the title.

There are certainly promising avenues to explore, and alternatives such as the concept of conservation leases, also referred to as habitat leases, could be one. These term-based agreements (typically ranging from 10 to 30 years) allow landowners to commit to conservation goals without surrendering long-term control of their land.[26] They provide space for adaptive management, where both landowner and conservation goals can evolve over time. Such leases could be supported through funding from conservation organizations or as public-private partnerships. Importantly, these agreements could still meet OECM criteria, especially if paired with monitoring strategies. By embracing receptiveness over rigidity, this alternative, or any other ones using shorter, renewable phases, would make it less burdensome, more accessible, and more aligned with landowners' values and interests.

Multidimensional, Stackable Incentives

Financial, social and regulatory incentives exist but are fragmented across different jurisdictions and organizations. Landowners often lack the time and resources to navigate this complex landscape, missing opportunities to combine complementary programs. The potential to "stack" multiple incentive types (receiving benefits from several programs simultaneously) remains largely unexplored and underpromoted.

To effectively attract landowners to conservation and OECM recognition, a multidimensional suite of incentives is essential. Financial incentives such as the ones mentioned in this report are well-established motivators. However, financial incentives alone are rarely sufficient. Social incentives encourage engagement through cultural capital and reputation within a community. Educational incentives help landowners make informed decisions. Regulatory tools, meanwhile, provide the legal infrastructure and protections needed for enduring conservation. Complementing all of these, monitoring incentives reinforce long-term ecological outcomes while building confidence that their efforts make a difference and are recognized.

Combining these elements with flexibility is a real motivation. Some landowners are economically driven, while others prioritize legacy, biodiversity, or stewardship ethics. These tools must be designed to work synergistically. For example, social recognition can help build a culture that normalizes participation in conservation programs, while simplified regulatory pathways can reduce legal uncertainties that otherwise might deter private actors. Monitoring tools, if integrated with incentives and designed to be user-friendly, can support accountability without creating a burden. Also, if monitoring activities are outcomes-focused, it ensures measurable ecological impact, not just activity-based reporting, which is much more appealing to landowners.

To fit real lives, flexibility can't just invite participation, it must cultivate it.

[26] Jenkins, Megan and Harrisson Naftel (2022). Making Private Lands Count for Conservation: Policy Improvements toward 30x30. The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University. Online [https://www.thecgo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Private-Lands-30-x-30-1.pdf].

5/ Incentives That Matter: Making Submission for Recognition Worth the Effort

Encouraging landowners to submit for evaluation and recognition requires more than simply streamlining processes. It requires that the effort to submit be met with tangible value, including ideally practical support, relationship building, and meaningful acknowledgment.

While financial compensation plays a role, incentives must extend beyond direct payments to address the broader needs of landowners. One of the most effective ways to reduce the burden of submission is by investing in technical assistance and trusted support networks. Many landowners, particularly those managing working lands, lack the time or expertise to navigate the complexity of recognition criteria, data requirements, and submission tools. By supporting intermediaries—such as conservation advisors, local NGOs, or peer networks—programs can bridge this gap, helping landowners translate their stewardship into recognized conservation outcomes.

This approach also opens the door to the use of third-party monitoring and assessments as a complement or alternative to landowner-generated onsite evaluation. When delivered transparently, third-party involvement not only enhances the accuracy and consistency of data but also builds confidence in the legitimacy of the recognition process. It reduces the pressure on landowners to "prove" their efforts in isolation and fosters a more collaborative model of conservation accountability.

Acknowledging and incentivizing the act of submitting for recognition is more than a formality – it needs to be a gesture of trust, stewardship, and commitment that deserves tangible recognition and support.

Ultimately, acknowledging and incentivizing the act of submitting for evaluation is about more than checking boxes—it's about recognizing the commitment landowners make to long-term stewardship. Submitting for recognition reflects an investment of time, care, and often personal or family values. Treating that action as meaningful—and supporting it accordingly—is essential to building a conservation culture that is inclusive, participatory, and enduring.

6/ Landowner and Organizational Capacity: Building the Capacity to Deliver Conservation Outcomes

While many landowners already demonstrate strong stewardship values, conservation outcomes at scale cannot be achieved without intentionally addressing one fundamental factor: the need for capacity building and the development of effective support structures. Supporting landowners with the right tools, knowledge, incentives, and with trusted relationships structures is crucial to enabling sustainable and meaningful conservation actions.

Trusted intermediate organizations would bridge the gap between conservation programs, science and on-the-ground realities, while offering a culturally sensitive, relational approach. They would address the need of landowners to access legal guidance when engaging in formal conservation commitments, such as conservation easements, other voluntary agreements, or OECM recognition processes, and on legal certainty, particularly around property rights and autonomy. Support would certainly build confidence and lower perceived risks.

Investing in organizational education and relational capacity is just as important as investing in technical conservation skills. Building resilient networks of landowners and support organizations is essential for achieving and sustaining long-term conservation outcomes, building and maintaining trust, and meeting inclusivity and equity. The flexibility, essential to respond to ecological and social changes over time, demonstrated in the work of these networks is crucial for success.

Empowering people and connecting networks are the foundation of lasting conservation – a shared legacy shaped by trust, collaboration, and enduring care for the land.

PART SIX: A FEW DIRECTIONS FOR ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES

1/ Recognition Without Attribution: A Privacy-Respecting Model of Non-Attributable Spatial Reporting for CPCAD

Scaling up recognition of private lands will depend on trust-building and respect-for-privacy. Privacy concerns arise when individuals' identification and land data appear publicly in open-access platforms such as CPCAD. These concerns are both valid, widely shared, and need to be addressed head-on.

Batch recognition offers one approach to address the dilemma between protecting privacy and ensuring broad participation. By identifying and reporting lands at a generalized scale—such as ecological regions or landscape units—rather than naming individual landowners or properties, this approach respects confidentiality while still recognizing conservation contributions. It could be particularly effective for reaching Canadian private landowners who are hesitant to participate due to concerns about data privacy, regulatory exposure, or unwanted public attention.

A core principle of batch recognition is non-attribution: no landowner name, parcel identifiers, or property lines are disclosed in public datasets unless explicit, informed consent is given. Instead, eligible lands are identified using ecological and spatial data (e.g., intact habitats, biodiversity values, or long-term stewardship practices), combined with sensitive and transparent engagement strategies with landowners. The result is a generalized spatial layer showing areas that contribute to conservation targets, without referencing specific property lines or ownership. This allows for recognition of conservation contributions at scale, while protecting individual privacy and fostering trust.

To further credibility and protect landowners' trust, the data infrastructure supporting this campaign should follow key principles of data minimization, encryption, controlled access, combined with clear data governance protocols. Ideally, data infrastructure should be secure and federated, restricting access to authorized personnel within partner organizations. It emphasizes that the program should be designed to respect not only the land but also the people who care for it.

2/ Streamlining Recognition Through Administrative Conservation Aggregation

In parallel with batch recognition, aggregation mechanisms offer another pathway to accelerate and streamline recognition in CPCAD, particularly in regions where individual landholdings are too small to meet reporting thresholds on their own. Through aggregation, multiple small conservation areas—often under different ownership—are grouped into a single, larger unit that can be reported collectively.

Unlike batch recognition, which anonymizes contributions for privacy, aggregation emphasizes scale and efficiency. It allows for administrative streamlining by reducing the number of separate entries into CPCAD, and it highlights the collective impact of community-led or regionally coordinated efforts (e.g., land trust networks, woodlot owner cooperatives, or municipal stewardship programs).

Aggregation reduces the number of separate entries into CPCAD, streamlining the recognition process while showcasing the cumulative value of individual contributions. While individual landowners within an aggregated unit may choose to remain unnamed, their efforts can be recognized under a shared entity, such as a regional conservation organization or collaborative initiative.

Crucially, aggregation sends a powerful message: small, individual private efforts and actions matter, and, together, they count. It aligns with conservation values of inclusivity and collaboration, making it easier to account for stewardship that is dispersed but meaningful at a landscape scale.

3/ Intermediaries for Stronger Participation and Partnerships

To strengthen participation in CPCAD and overcome persistent barriers related to privacy, mistrust, and administrative complexity, a coordinated approach to intermediaries and partnership building is essential. Qualified organizations—such as land trusts, Indigenous stewardship groups, conservation NGOs, and agricultural or woodlot associations—could be financially supported, trained, and empowered to act as trusted intermediaries between landowners and government bodies. These organizations can play a vital role in facilitating informed participation, simplifying communication, and offering culturally and regionally appropriate support. Establishing a community of practice or a nationwide evaluation committee would help standardize training, share best practices, and foster a common understanding of conservation, activities eligibility and reporting. These could avoid discounting valuable conservation activities, creating inconsistencies in OECM evaluations an creating distrust in the whole system (*"This person doesn't even know what they are about and they are talking down to me"*)[27] While some level of quality control and evaluation must remain in place to ensure legitimacy and consistency, overly complex or burdensome approval for legal recognition processes, such as excessive case-by-case analysis risks undermining participation. To maintain landowner engagement, the process must be made clear, accessible, and responsive. Incorporating community-based governance models and collective monitoring practices would further decentralize decision-making and build trust, while

[27] Prevost,Glen. Ontario Woodlot Association (2025-06-11) (personal communication)

supporting adaptive management and shared responsibility. Together, these recommendations aim to create a more inclusive, efficient, and trusted framework for reporting privately conserved lands, thereby unlocking broader and more representative participation in achieving Canada's conservation goals.

4/ "*Softer*" Opt-out Reporting and Recognition Model

This proposal introduces a "soft" opt-out model to reform Canada's Target 3 recognition system. This approach would:

a. Use trusted third parties to identify lands with conservation potential;
b. Apply clear ecological criteria and advanced spatial analysis;
c. Notify landowners of their land's potential eligibility;
d. Provide a simple decision window for landowners to participate or decline.

This model would increase the identification of conservation-worthy private lands without requiring landowners to initiate the process themselves. It would work in opposition to coercive regulatory models, as landowners can easily decline the designation.

Under the proposed model, a neutral and competent third party (ideally an existing program, a conservation trust, an academic institution or others)[28] would use remote sensing, artificial intelligence (AI), and habitat modelling technologies to systematically scan the landscape and flag areas of high biodiversity or intact ecosystems. These technologies, as pioneered by institutions such as the Conservation Innovation Center of the Chesapeake Conservancy, have demonstrated the ability to analyze large territories efficiently and cost-effectively. Canada, with its extensive natural landscapes and patchwork of private landholdings, could greatly benefit from such an approach.

Following identification, landowners would receive formal, respectful communication explaining the process. This communication would include the rationale for identification, the preliminary findings from the spatial analysis, and a transparent overview of what a recognition for conservation could involve. Certain identified lands could be provisionally labelled as meeting baseline conservation characteristics, including OECM's, but would not yet be included in any official database, such as CPCAD or any 30x30 accounting database, until the landowner has agreed to participate in conservation efforts. Such agreement would be to recognize what he or she is doing, even if never accounted for in CPCAD. Crucially, landowners would have an explicit and facilitated right to opt out of the process.

For those who wish to engage further, direct assistance could be provided, including gathering documentation, filling in submission forms, and verifying site-specific conditions through field visits or expert consultations. Only when all necessary data has been confirmed and the landowner's voluntary participation secured, would the site be counted officially in CPCAD (or else) and reported toward national conservation targets.

[28] Examples: Provincial Programs (Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program -MFTIP ; PEI Forest Enhancement Program, New Brunswick Private Woodlot Program, Sustainable Forest Management Programs under Alberta, BC provincial agencies, …) ; Land Trusts and Conservation NGOs (national and regional) ; Indigenous Guardians and Indigenous-Led Land Authorities (Indigenous Guardians programs, …) ; Academic or Monitoring Institutions with Privacy Protocols (Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute -ABMI, …).

Another major advantage lies in the reduction of the administrative burden. Many landowners find the existing application process opaque, time-consuming, or intimidating. The technical language, required documentation, and uncertainty over eligibility can discourage otherwise willing stewards from engaging. By transferring the technical workload to trained professionals within third-party institutions and offering guided support, this model would leverage interest. Landowners would no longer need to navigate the process in isolation but could participate with greater confidence and clarity.

Furthermore, by utilizing third-party actors rather than a governmental body to initiate and manage the pre-identification process, the model builds trust among private landowners. Many landowners are wary of regulatory overreach and fear that conservation recognition may lead to restrictions on land use or future development. A system led by a conservation trust or academic partner may overcome skepticism and build more productive, collaborative relationships between landowners and the broader conservation community.

An additional benefit of the soft opt-out model is the potential to enhance data quality and information sharing across the conservation sector. Provisional designation based on high-resolution spatial analysis can reveal trends, gaps, and synergies in ecological representation. This insight would be invaluable not only for federal and provincial reporting but also for local governments and other stakeholders engaged in conservation planning. Data sharing protocols—respecting privacy and ownership rights—could enable projects such as habitat connectivity planning and restoration.

Importantly, the soft opt-out model does not remove the need for field validation or landowner input. Recognizing the limitations of remote sensing and AI in capturing on-the-ground management practices or social governance structures, the model proposes a hybrid approach. Once provisionally identified, sites would undergo a verification phase where landowners and/or local experts confirm conservation outcomes and management regimes. This two-step process—pre-identification followed by validation—ensures both efficiency and integrity. It also honours the role of the landowner as a knowledge holder and steward, incorporating their insights into the recognition process.

The proposal also acknowledges the importance of introducing safeguards. Landowners must be provided with clear and accessible information about the implications of recognition, and a defined window within which they can opt out without consequence. Any data shared or published must be subject to privacy agreements, backed by legal assurances, and participation must not affect landowners' rights or regulatory obligations beyond what they voluntarily agree to. Recognition in CPCAD should be framed not as a regulatory burden but as an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, gain access to stewardship support, and join a national movement for biodiversity conservation.

To further enhance participation and public buy-in, this model could be linked with existing incentive programs. For example, landowners whose sites are ultimately recognized could receive access to federal or provincial stewardship funds, tax incentives, or certifications that enhance the ecological and market value of their land. Programs like ALUS, the Ecological Gifts Program, or emerging carbon credit schemes could be integrated into a bundled approach, offering multiple layers of recognition and support. This would reinforce the message that conservation is not only a public good but also an economically and socially beneficial endeavour for landowners.

Equally important is the need for well-designed communication strategies. Public understanding of OECMs, CPCAD, and Canada's conservation goals remains low outside of specialist circles. A soft opt-out model will only succeed if landowners and their representative organizations are engaged through plain language, respectful, and tailored outreach. Messaging should be co-developed with agricultural associations, landowner federations, and local governments to ensure cultural and contextual relevance. Trusted messengers and local champions can help frame recognition not as an external imposition, but as an invitation to be part of a national success story.

The soft opt-out model presents a number of critical advantages that could directly address the current bottlenecks in Canada's conservation recognition system. Chief among these is the ability to accelerate OECM recognition across large, biodiverse landscapes without requiring landowners to take the first step. Many private lands in Canada already provide ecosystem services and contribute to biodiversity, even in the context of light or sustainable use, such as woodlots, pastureland, or wetlands on farmland. However, these areas remain unrecognized due to limited awareness, technical barriers, or concerns over regulatory implications. A model where these lands are identified independently based on ecological merit and where participation is structured around consent rather than compliance can rapidly broaden the conservation base without infringing on landowner autonomy. Pilot programs would be a critical first step in testing and refining this model. Through a limited-scale rollout, the process pilot could also serve as demonstration cases to build confidence among other regions and actors.[29]

Nonetheless, several potential barriers and limitations, particularly related to provincial jurisdiction and authority over land and conservation would need to be addressed. Each province or territory has its own legal frameworks, and legitimacy over criteria and processes for conserved areas and land-use planning. CPCAD recognition, even though it's federally managed, relies in many cases on provincial data and cooperation, especially for OECMs. Also, a federal-initiated third-party pre-identification approach, even with good intent, could be seen by some provinces as infringing on their jurisdiction, especially if done without early collaboration or alignment with provincial protocols.

To explore the viability of a softer opt-out recognition model, three to five cross-sectoral pilot projects could be initiated in regions with high biodiversity value and significant land-use pressure. Co-developed with provincial agencies, Indigenous organizations, landowner networks, and conservation NGOs, these pilots would enable real-world testing while fostering collaboration among key actors, and serve as a practical next step.

[29] Conservation and all it entails is a key element of climate resilience. The participation of landowners in increasing the conservation values of their properties is part of the solution to reinforcing and advancing it.

5/ Outcomes-Focused Design: Moving Beyond Activity-Based Recognition

To ensure conservation efforts deliver real benefits, incentive systems should support monitoring and outcomes rather than a form of "activity checklist", recognizing landowners for their impact and creating a results-oriented culture. Our interest goes beyond the adoption of conservation, protection and sustainable practices supported by traditional incentives. It lies in ensuring that these actions are achieving their intended biological and ecological goals.

Monitoring is widely used for regulatory compliance and state-of-environment reporting, but also plays a vital role in assessing the effectiveness of conservation actions and tracking changes in ecosystem function and/or condition. It is also used for the purpose of reporting to funders, stakeholders and the public.

However, many landowners—particularly those operating small-scale or independently—lack the tools and resources to measure these outcomes effectively. To support this proposition, programs must provide scalable, accessible monitoring options. This might include simplified biodiversity indicators, remote-sensing validation, or user-friendly digital tools (e.g., mobile apps, photo logs, monitoring kits). It encourages adaptive management and continuous improvement, moving beyond baseline compliance.

Financial support for monitoring activities, community-based or peer monitoring networks (e.g., land guardians), recognition for transparent reporting, training and capacity building to empower landowners should be considered in such monitoring programs to avoid conservation failures, wasted investments and landowners disengagement (if they see reporting as burdensome or irrelevant, or that there is no apparent benefit arising from their conservation actions).

As highlighted by Pittman,[30] scaling up conservation requires adapting to new paradigms that reflect landowner independence and autonomy while still advancing collective conservation goals. Outcome-focused recognition, backed by thoughtful monitoring design, represents a critical step in bridging that balance, ensuring landowners remain central, supported and celebrated for the real impact of their stewardship.

6/ Creating a Comprehensive Portal for Conservation

The current conservation landscape in Canada reveals a critical gap: while many private landowners demonstrate a long-standing commitment to land stewardship, there remains a lack of interest toward coordinated recognition frameworks, and a lack of accessible, tailored support and incentive structures that reflect the diverse motivations of these landowners. Landowners differ in their drivers—some act from deeply held personal values, while others are motivated by practical incentives.

To help address a few of those drivers in an effective and centralized manner, the development of a comprehensive, independent (non-governmental) digital platform is a

[30] Pittman, Jeremy, Raphael Ayambire, Kwaku Owusu Twum (2025). The Social Fit of Conservation Policy on Working Landscapes. Rangeland Ecology & Management, Volume 100, May 2025, Pages 56-62. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rama.2025.01.009].

strong proposition—one designed to support, empower and recognize private landowners through multiple pathways of conservation engagement. This initiative acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient.

A platform could be designed to accommodate this diversity, offering flexible points of entry and varied forms of support tailored to individual preferences and regional realities. Central to its design is the belief that recognition is not merely symbolic, but catalytic. When landowners are acknowledged for their stewardship, they are more likely to deepen their engagement and inspire others.

For recognition to be meaningful and inclusive, it must be adaptable and respectful of privacy concerns expressed by landowners. The platform should therefore provide graduated levels of recognition, enabling participants to determine how their contributions would be represented. This approach strikes a balance between the desire for access to information, personal support, and acknowledgment, and the equally important need for discretion and control over visibility.

Functionally, the platform should serve as a centralized, action-oriented hub, connecting landowners with the currently fragmented ecosystem of conservation organizations, technical service providers, funding programs, and peer networks. This coordination would facilitate knowledge sharing, reduce duplication, and amplify the collective impact of individual efforts.

To support the adoption of such a tool, particularly among older or rural landowners, the project should include a robust education and training component. Tutorials, webinars, step-by-step guides, and in-person workshops will ensure that all users can access and utilize key features confidently and effectively.

The success of the platform would depend on the strength of its partnerships. Conservation organizations should serve as frontline facilitators, leveraging their trusted relationships with landowners to promote adoption and provide ongoing support. Each region (to the least, each province) should designate a lead coordinating body responsible for managing outreach, aligning efforts among smaller organizations, and ensuring local relevance in data curation and service delivery.

Importantly, the platform should be clearly positioned as an independent, non-governmental initiative, with clear messaging, branding, and disclaimers.

In summary, a well-designed digital platform w.ould represent a scalable, inclusive response to current gaps in recognition, support, and coordination. Its purpose would be to foster a stronger conservation culture on private lands by bridging technology with trust, data with meaningful action, and linking recognition directly to tangible outcomes.

PART SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This overview of conservation incentives and the analysis of conditions affecting private agricultural and woodlot landowners' engagement with recognition through the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) highlights both the barriers and the opportunities involved in integrating private lands into national conservation reporting frameworks. While conservation actions in the private sector are increasing, reporting and recognition still need more attention. Many landowners face challenges—ranging from complex administrative processes to concerns over data privacy, legal commitments, and recognition criteria—that limit their willingness to participate.

Despite these ethical, social, and operational barriers, the analysis also reveals important pathways for improvement, particularly through enhanced local engagement and collaboration with trusted and independent third parties. The recent opening of the CPCAD submission process to direct entries from stakeholders represents a promising shift toward more inclusive and flexible reporting mechanisms.

Addressing together the following three most significant barriers currently slowing the recognition of privately conserved lands in Canada's effort to meet its Target 3 goals would target the most persistent bottlenecks in Canada's OECM recognition system: lack of privacy assurances on privately-owned land, a burdensome opt-in process, and insufficient motivation. Addressing them would unlock widespread participation, improve national conservation accounting, and accelerate meaningful progress toward Canada's 30x30 Target.

First, establishing a privacy-respecting and flexible recognition model is essential because privacy concerns are repeatedly identified in the report as one of the main reasons landowners hesitate to engage. Many fear that public disclosure of their conservation activities could lead to unwanted attention, trespassing, or regulatory consequences. The lack of privacy options creates a false binary: either public recognition or no recognition at all. Without mechanisms for anonymous or aggregated reporting—such as batch recognition or trusted intermediary submissions—even conservation-minded landowners are unlikely to participate. Addressing this issue is a prerequisite for expanding the pool of recognized OECMs on private lands.

Second, launching pilot projects to test a "soft" opt-out model because the current voluntary opt-in system is not producing the scale of participation needed to make meaningful progress, would be another action priority. Many eligible lands remain unrecognized not due to opposition, but because the burden of initiating and navigating the process rests entirely on landowners. A soft opt-out approach, where lands are pre-identified by trusted third parties and landowners are given a chance to decline, could shift the default in a way that increases recognition while maintaining voluntariness. Testing this model through a small number of regional pilots, perhaps co-designed, would allow for real-world learning, build trust, and

demonstrate viability without requiring a national overhaul.

Third, scaling up and diversifying incentive programs are critical because recognition alone is not enough to motivate most landowners. The report highlights that while many landowners are already engaged in stewardship, they do not see enough tangible benefits—financial, social, or otherwise—to pursue formal recognition. Without stronger, stackable, and longer-term incentives, broader engagement will remain out of reach, regardless of how streamlined or flexible the recognition process becomes.

Together, these three actions directly target the most persistent bottlenecks in Canada's OECM recognition system: lack of privacy assurances, a burdensome opt-in process, and insufficient motivation. Addressing them would unlock widespread participation, improve national conservation accounting, and accelerate meaningful progress toward Canada's 30x30 target.

Moving forward, sustained efforts are needed to promote, simplify, clarify and inform on the submission process for and with agricultural and woodlot landowners and landowners' associations. Unleashing national participation in conservation efforts requires more than policy change—it demands tools that are accessible, intuitive, and responsive to landowners' realities, interests and values. For example, holding a large, multi-stakeholder innovation lab would undoubtedly facilitate identifying the tools needed to advance conservation recognition. A dedicated web platform that could play a transformative role in this effort should be designed to meet landowners where they are, offering clear, step-by-step guidance, tailored resources, and recognition pathways that empower them to make informed decisions about stewarding resilient ecosystems. By simplifying access to information, and fostering a sense of community and support, this platform could serve as a catalyst for widespread engagement in Canada's conservation goals.

Strengthening the presence of private agricultural, forested and recreational lands in CPCAD not only enriches the national conservation dataset, but also reinforces the vital role of private and community-led efforts in protecting Canada's biodiversity. Recognizing these contributions will be key to building a more equitable, representative, and resilient conservation network across the country.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Global and National Framework for Biodiversity Target 3: Protected and Conserved Areas

The need for urgent action was recognized during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).[31] In response, Environment and Climate Change Canada led a collaborative process with provinces, territories, and Indigenous representatives, and with input from partners and stakeholders, to develop Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy,[32] a shared vision for halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Canada.

Among the 23 targets set out in the KMGBF and reflected in Canada's Strategy is Target 3 focused on terrestrial and inland waters, and coastal and marine areas governed as protected areas or under other effective area-based conservation measures. Canada's ambitious objective for Target 3 aims to conserve 30% of these areas by 2030—often referred to as "30x30".[33]

Target 3: Canada's Network of Protected Areas and Other Effective Conservation Measures

The pan-Canadian effort to expand the network of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, or "OECMs", was launched in 2017 with a recommitment by federal, provincial and territorial Ministers to Target 3 in 2023 following the adoption of the KMGBF. Known as the "Pathway initiative", the "Pathway is a partnership of federal, provincial and territorial departments responsible for conservation, biodiversity, protected and conserved areas, as well as Indigenous representative organizations, municipal governments and sectors of Canadian society".[34]

To expand Canada's network of protected areas and OECMs, the Pathway initiative sets out three areas of focus:

- Protected areas: a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values;[35]

[31] Global Biodiversity Framework
[32] Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy and the Nature Accountability Bill
[33] Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada
[34] Canada Conservation: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative, Who we are
[35] Canada Conservation: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative, Protected Areas

- OECMs: a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services, and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values;[36] and
- Indigenous-led conservation: areas where Indigenous peoples or governments lead or share leadership in conserving lands, waters and ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems.[37]

[36] Canada Conservation: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative, Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures
[37] Canada Conservation: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative

Annex 2: Examples of Social, Financial and Regulatory Incentives and their Objectives

Social Incentives, Activities and Examples	Objectives
Recognition	Acknowledge and publicly highlight the contributions of individuals, organizations, either independently or collectively, to conservation efforts.
Recognition and Certification Public acknowledgment and Media exposure	• Builds social prestige and reputation. • Encourages community recognition, or at a local, regional or national scale. • Encourages peer influence. • Provides market-based advantages (e.g., sustainable managed products). • Instills long-term conservation ethics and long-term stewardship. • Facilitates access to conservation support networks. • Normalizes land protection by showing that conservation is valued by society, in the public eye.
Education and Capacity Building	Enhance knowledge, skills and resources so that individuals and/or organizations can make informed conservation decisions and engage in sustainable land management and environmental protection.
Technical assistance Educational resources (e.g., learning videos, workshops, informational materials, guidance documents and direct consultations, for example) Demonstrations (e.g., field trips, workshops) Ambassador (Model landowner) and Leadership programs Micro-interventions (focus on altering beliefs about others to enhance model landowner engagement in collective action (e.g., in community meetings)	• Raise awareness of environmental challenges (impact of climate change, habitat loss, and land degradation). • Share and promote sustainable management solutions, science-based decision-making. • Facilitate access to technical advice and learning resources. • Facilitate comprehension and access to conservation funding, complementary markets (e.g., carbon offset markets and biodiversity credits) and support the application process. • Build technical and practical skills for managing and monitoring land. • Improve policy and regulatory awareness with guidance.

	• Enhance the feeling of efficacy of programs, and trust and credibility toward them.
Social movement and empowerment of the community	Mobilize collective groups and/or actions, strengthen local engagement and ownership of conservation and create long-term stewardship for environmental protection.
Cultural Recognition Conservation stewardship networks Partnerships	• Strengthen community support and engagement. • Encourage a collective or large-scale spatial (across-propriety boundaries) action for conservation. • Give a voice to smaller owners (or marginal) in decision-making. • Empower local communities. • Foster a culture of stewardship, to reinforce conservation as a social responsibility and shared community goals. • Encourage long-term conservation commitment (e.g., through organizational and generational knowledge). • Promote and facilitating peer-to-peer influence and learning, networking, and knowledge-sharing of best practices. • Empower local leaders.
Key takeaways	
What could make land conservation attractive regarding social incentives in Canada?	• Value strong attachment to land and natural landscapes, access to nature and resources. • Sensibility and respect of values attached to heritage, passing on land for financial and non-financial benefits and security for descendants. • Public interest in recognition and community appreciation activities. • Peer networks & landowner leadership: influence of each other when they see peers legally protecting land. • Trust in governance • Long-term engagement: landowners remain connected to conservation organizations after legal protection, ensuring continued involvement. • Combination with financial benefits: many social incentives work best when paired with tax incentives, payment for services or financial support.

Programs Example

How do incentives support engagement and CPCAD counting, meaning how they contribute to conservation area recognition in Canada?

Nature Conservancy of Canada

- **Public Recognition:** Landowners receive acknowledgment in NCC reports, media features and award programs.
- **Educational Workshops**: NCC provides training on conservation practices and the benefits of legal easements.
- **Stewardship Support:** Ongoing technical and ecological management advice.

And more…

- Enhances landowner reputation as conservation leaders.
- Builds long-term community networks around conservation efforts.

Ducks Unlimited Canada

- **Stewardship Awards & Certifications**: Landowners are recognized for protecting wetlands through conservation easements.
- **Public Media Acknowledgment:** Conservation participants featured in DUC publications and community spotlights.
- **Workshops & Peer Learning:** Farmers and landowners receive training and networking opportunities.
- **Partnership:** Forest Management and Wetland Stewardship Initiative (FMWSI) promotes and supports advance sustainable forest management, establishes guiding principles and best management practices to conserve wetlands and waterfowl in forest management planning and operations, and complements provincial forest management planning requirements and the needs of forest certification programs.

And more…

- Local recognition makes landowners feel valued in their communities.
- Educational workshops provide hands-on support for landowners transitioning to conservation.
- Partnership allows industries to be trained and to participate in the development of management tools.

Financial Incentives, Activities and Examples	Objectives
Tax-related benefits	Offer reductions, exemptions, or credits on taxes.
Property tax reduction Income tax deduction for conservation costs Capital gain exemption Tax deferrals for sustainable forestry	• Reduce the financial burden on landowners who dedicate part of their lands to conservation. • Highly acceptable to many producers. • Provide often immediate or short-term financial compensation to encourage protection (justice through recognition). • Compensate for income loss from land use restrictions (e.g., wetland protection, habitat conservation). • Encourage voluntary conservation without requiring permanent legal commitments (e.g., easements). But… • Could be complex to set up (transaction costs and mechanisms involving multiple levels of government). • Bring in a risk in reducing small, rural municipalities tax base if not combined with a coping mechanism (see Quebec current tax reimbursement program for land trusts, as a temporary solution). • Perceived inequities in local communities due to changes to the distribution of taxation and tax burdens. • The land tax can be relatively low and thus not a significant incentive.
Direct payments for protection and ecological services and grants	Provide immediate financial support, often short term, compensations for specific ecological benefits (such as water quality, wildlife and habitat conservation and carbon sequestration).
One-time (lump sum) or annual payment Grants	• Highly acceptable to many producers. • Providing often immediate or short-term financial compensation for income loss from land use restrictions (e.g., wetland protection, habitat conservation). • Encouraging voluntary conservation without requiring permanent legal commitments (e.g.: easements).

	But… • Require a sustainable source of funding. • Must not be viewed as a subsidy for exploitation activities (e.g., a landowner who has degraded land through intensive practices should not receive a lump sum simply for halting those activities).
Market-based premiums and mechanisms	Generate revenue by participating in environmental markets, with premium pricing, tradable credits, or certification advantages. Help to earn higher market prices or certification advantages for adopting sustainable land-use practices.
Programs providing revenues for maintaining conservation assets and landscapes Carbon, species, biodiversity credits Certifications Conservation banking (e.g., habitat mitigation or endangered species banks) Tradable water quality permits Transferable development credits Biodiversity offsets	• Growing interest in market-based conservation programs as new economic opportunities. • Increase conservation if it makes it easier for landowners to generate and sell conservation, they may increase the amount and quality of habitat in the landscape. • In cases where developers are required to offset environmental damages caused by their projects, market-based conservation provides an avenue for meeting restoration requirements. But… • Uncertainty of credit markets and failure may limit new opportunities for program development. • Credit failure risk: Credit quantities traded, conservation credit price, total earnings, and seller earnings all drop dramatically in the presence of credit failure risk. • Reluctance or apprehension among landowners toward entering long-term, legally binding conservation commitments. • Lack of research, clear guidance and examples sharing for recent markets may affect new investors.
Generation of alternative revenues from conservation-compatible activities	Generate non-market sources of side incomes from conservation-compatible or nature-based activities

Ecotourism Conservation leases Recreational access and leases Cultural and wellness services Habitat mitigation or endangered species banks (non-market models)	• Maintains and encourages activities compatible with conservation for the sake of the economic viability of the activity itself through sustainable land-use practices, or for supplementary side revenues from them (e.g., access fees for controlled activities (ex. hunting, recreational sports) • Generate revenue from maintaining landscapes and promoting conservation activities. • Foster community connections and broader awareness of nature (access to nature). • Does not rely on formal environmental markets. But… • Risks associated with fluctuating consumer demands and revenue streams. • Not all landowners have equal access or capacity to develop opportunities (inequity).
Costs-Relief Incentives	Reduce the financial burden of conservation by lowering upfront costs or offsetting ongoing expenses through shared investment or preferential pricing
Cost-sharing programs Discounts on services and supplies On: Insurances Memberships Certifications Legal services Surveys Appraisals Conservation essentials (e.g., tree planting, wetland restoration, invasive species control, fencing, …)	• An acceptable option to many producers. • On-the-spot reduction for “necessary” expenses. • Provide clear additionality for public investments. But… • Not all expenses might be eligible. • Delays in reimbursement of payments might be unreasonable. • Not a very strong incentive, as the amounts discounted can be seen as insignificant and not enough to offset costs • For many landowners, the reception of a direct payment may be more compelling than a discount. Can sometimes be viewed as top-down or overly prescriptive by producers. • In the case of conservation infrastructure projects, it tends to promote new infrastructure instead of improving, completing, or maintaining existing ones.

Key takeaways

What could make land conservation attractive regarding financial incentives in Canada?	• Many offer possibilities for stacking incentives over time and stretching benefits to get as close as possible to perpetual funding. • Flexible conservation tools to support economic adaptation and stability, to allow sustainable land uses and market possibilities. • Creative long-term funding, such as endowment and stewardship funds certification. • Well-balanced conservation programs to ensure landowners see tangible financial benefits while protecting their land.

Programs Examples

Ecological Gifts Program (EcoGifts)

- Provides important capital gains tax exemptions and income tax credits (charitable tax receipts) that can offset other taxable income, thus a form of substantial and interesting financial return in many cases.

And more…

- Encourages landowners to donate ecologically significant land or conservation easements to a qualified organization, which, in many cases, acknowledges the importance of the recognition and registration process and submits to it.
- One program application and approval process, even though administered at federal and provincial levels, thus providing an efficient and simplified process.
- It is well known, adopted and promoted by land trusts, which offer support or even take charge of certain obligations for the donor throughout the process.
- Landowners deeply connected to their land value perpetual protection as a safeguard against future development or incompatible use.
- Recognition: donors receive public acknowledgment from the government and conservation organizations for their leadership.

Ontario Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program (CLTIP)

- Private landowners who protect significant natural features (wetlands, forests, etc.) receive tangible benefits: 100% property tax exemption on the conserved portion of their land. And unlike standard tax deferral programs, this is a full exemption.
- Direct financial relief via tax savings for landowners.
- Many landowners view this approach as a respectful balance between **private property rights** and **public ecological interest**, particularly those who have a deep personal or generational connection to the land.
- Possibility for stacking opportunities for other financially benefiting conservation and tax programs.

And more…

- Although conservation easements can qualify under this program, they are not mandatory. The program incentivizes private landholders to protect ecologically valuable landscapes without placing restrictive conservation easements.
- The application process seems very light and facilitating, thus an easy effort for an important financial benefit. Though the ecological evaluation process might be questionable (in many cases, the initial ecological assessment is based on pre-existing data or mapping, and field verification is not always conducted).
- Compliance is assured with an annual declaration by the landowners (a signed confirmation form provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry) stating that the land remains in its natural, undisturbed state, and no disqualifying activities occurred.

Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS)

- Pay farmers and ranchers for the restoration and management of natural ecosystems (e.g., wetlands, riparian zones, grasslands) of marginal or uneconomic farmed lands.
- Payment for the production of ecosystem services generated by the conversion back to nature, thus offsets the potential loss of revenues from conversion back to nature or altered practices.
- Predictable revenues, thus provides financial stability.
- Direct payments.
- Payments do not interfere with eligibility to tax incentive programs (e.g.Ontario's Farm Property Class Tax Rate Program).
- ALUS Program can complement to increase revenues from other programs and grants.

And more…

- Focuses on working lands, meaning that agricultural activities and revenues are not excluded from a protection perspective but taken into consideration and encouraged through sustainable and adapted practices for nature capita benefits.
- Community delivered, designed to promote peer-to-peer knowledge sharing among farmers.
- Community-based programming (with provincial and regional offices) allows services offered to be adapted to local targeted publics, thus reducing the administrative load (simplified application process, support to enroll, quick approval responses, flexible contracts).
- On-land improvements and benefits from conservation (soil fertility, reduced erosion, and water retention), making farmland more productive.
- Fosters the ethic of land stewardship (of the environment), which is a strong social incentive for ranchers and farmers.

Regulatory Incentives Activities and Examples	Objectives
Compelling policies and Legal frameworks Enforcement	Require or strongly encourage landowners to protect ecosystems, manage land sustainably, or restrict harmful practices by using policy and regulatory power and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance.
Streamline permitting or reporting requirements	Reduce the administrative burden (e.g., paperwork, approval delays, compliance reporting).
Standardization requirements Timelines Digital platforms	• Reduce unnecessary steps and information to be provided for procedures to become more efficient. • Enhanced coordination and collaboration of agencies to streamline the permitting process, to reduce redundancy and to improve efficiency.
Cross-compliance	Makes benefits under existing regulations conditional on ecosystem protection efforts that go beyond legal requirements.
	• Go beyond legal requirements. • Brings greater demonstrated environmental performance. • Require flexibility.
Legal assurances	Mechanisms that legally ensure that voluntary participation in conservation actions will not lead to restrictions or other adverse impacts and penalties.
	• Reduce stress and promoting peace of mind. • Increase trust by reducing fear of negative impacts But… • Rigidity of assurance agreements could lead to missed conservation goals when new knowledge and scientific information being acquired and shared to evolve toward better protection. • Natural disasters (such as a flood, disease, or fire) or nature-controlled consequences on conservation targets seem not to be well covered, and are a preoccupation (e.g., natural forest fires).

Key takeaways

What could make land conservation attractive regarding regulatory incentives in Canada?	• Pairing with financial, technical, or recognition-based rewards. • Regulate and facilitate access and realization for regular compliance audits and reporting. • Enforcement with community support—collaborative enforcement (instead of punitive approaches) helps maintain participation and goodwill. • Monitoring for results mechanisms with defined standard programs with clear conservation performance metrics (e.g., biodiversity restoration, carbon sequestration) is easier to understand and to enforce.

Programs Examples

Ontario Safe Harbour Agreement Program

- Voluntary conservation agreement between landowners and a government or conservation agency.
- Provides legal assurance: no new regulatory obligations if species increase or colonize the property.
- Based on a "baseline condition"—landowners are only expected to maintain that baseline after the agreement ends.
- Legal certainty: landowners are protected from future restrictions under the Species at Risk Act (SARA).
- Legally protected from enforcement action if, after voluntarily creating or enhancing habitat for species at risk, those species begin to use their land. If landowners later wish to return the land to its original condition (as specified in the agreement), no additional ESA approval or permits are required.
- No Penalties for Positive Stewardship Actions: The program removes the disincentive where landowners might avoid creating or improving habitat due to fear of new regulatory obligations once a species colonizes the site.
- Agreements define a clear start and end date, along with baseline conditions, giving landowners flexibility in managing their land over time.
- Assures landowners who voluntarily improve habitat for endangered species that their future land development will not be limited if they attract endangered species to their property or increase their numbers, for example.

And more…

- Encourages landowners to create or maintain habitat for species at risk.
- Through partner organizations, landowners can receive ecological assessments, restoration advice, and habitat management support—often at no cost.

But…

- Habitat gains may be temporary, which can limit long-term species recovery or conservation outcomes.
- Some feel that compensation or support does not match the effort and potential land-use limitations.
- Past negative experiences with governance may create skepticism toward voluntary agreements.

- Participation does not automatically contribute to national conservation databases (e.g., CPCAD), which may limit the program's visibility in broader biodiversity tracking unless combined with other mechanisms.

Environmental Farm Plans programs (EFP)

- Supports compliance with environmental regulations.
- Helps farms identify and mitigate risks related to nutrient management, pesticide use, watercourse protection, and waste management—areas often regulated under environmental and agricultural acts.
- While the federal government supports the EFP Program, its management and delivery are decentralized, with provincial and territorial agencies, along with agricultural organizations, tailoring the program to meet regional agricultural and environmental needs.

And more…

- Many cost-shared funding programs under federal-provincial partnerships (e.g., SCAP) require or prioritize farms with a completed EFP.
- EFPs demonstrate commitment to environmental responsibility, improving social license and potentially opening doors to value-added markets or certification schemes.
- Provides capacity building such as training, peer learning, and tools for environmental planning and continuous improvement.
- Helps farms proactively manage environmental risks, reducing liability, operational interruptions, or potential fines related to pollution incidents.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

Association of Canadian Land Trusts (2024). *Protected Areas Reporting by Land Trusts to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD)* [unpublished report].

Ayambire, Raphael Anammasiya, Jeremy Pittman and Andrea Olive (2021). *Incentivizing stewardship in a biodiversity hot spot: land managers in the grassland*. FACETS 6 (1), 1307-1322. Online [https://www.facetsjournal.com/doi/pdf/10.1139/facets-2020-0071?download=true].

Bazerman, Max (2020). *Better, Not Perfect – A Realist's Guide to Maximum Sustainable Happiness*. HarperCollins. 256 pages.

Burns, Jessica, Wildlife Habitat Canada (2025-03-17) (personal communication).

Canada Conservation (2024). *Protected areas*. Government of Canada. Online [https://canadaconservation.ca/home/conserving-lands/protected-areas/]

Chizmar, Stephanie, Tamara Cushing, Srijana Baral and Tatyana Ruseva (2025). *How do landowners perceive and respond to incentives for sustainable forest management? A synthesis to inform discussions on programs for climate-smart forestry. Trees, Forests and People* 19 (2025) 100753. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tfp.2024.100753].

Convention on Biological Diversity. (2022). *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Online [https://www.cbd.int/gbf].

Canada Conservation (2024). *Who we are: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative*. Government of Canada. Online [https://canadaconservation.ca/home/about/who-we-are/].

Canada Conservation (2024). *Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)*. Government of Canada. Online [https://canadaconservation.ca/home/conserving-lands/oecms/].

Canada Conservation (2024). *Protected areas: A pan-Canadian Pathway initiative*. Government of Canada. Online [https://canadaconservation.ca/home/conserving-lands/protected-areas/].

Canada Conservation (2024). *The pan-Canadian Pathway initiative*. Government of Canada. Online [https://canadaconservation.ca/home/pathway-initiative/].

Chesapeake Conservancy (2024). *Annual Report 2023*. Online [https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Chesapeake-Conservancy-2023-Annual-Report.pdf].

Dudley, Nigel, Holly Jonas, Fred Nelson, Jeffrey Parrish, Aili Pyhälä, Sue Stolton, James E.M. Watson et al. (2018). *The essential role of other effective area-based conservation measures in achieving big bold conservation targets*. In Global Ecology and Conservation, Volume 15, July 2018. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2018.e00424].

ECO Magazine (2023, August 8). *Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center Turns 10*. Online [https://ecomagazine.com/news/coastal/chesapeake-conservancy-s-conservation-innovation-center-turns-10/].

Environment and Climate Change Canada (2023). *Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy and the Nature Accountability Bill*. Government of Canada. Online [https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/biodiversity/2030-nature-strategy.html].

Environment and Climate Change Canada (2023). *Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada*. Government of Canada. Online [https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/biodiversity/canada-2030-nature-strategy.html].

Environment and Climate Change Canada (2024). *Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD)*. Government of Canada. Online [https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/conservation-land-water/canadian-protected-conserved-areas-database.html].

Fitzsimons, James, Sue Stolton, Nigel Dudley (Equilibrium Research; IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas), and Brent Mitchell. *Defining 'long-term' for protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)*. July 2024. Technical note. Online [https://iucn.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/iucn-wcpa-technical-note-14.pdf].

Gilmore, Maya Kate (2024). *Credit failure risk in market-based conservation programs*. The Centre for Behavioral & Experimental Agri-Environmental Research. Online [https://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B-1355.pdf].

Gooden, Jennifer, Michael Sas-Rolfes (2020). *A review of critical perspectives on private land conservation in academic literature*. Ambio 2020, 49:1019–1034. Online [https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7067726/pdf/13280_2019_Article_1258.pdf].

Greenway, Guy, Corvus Centre for Conservation (2025-02-04) (personal communication).

Gilvesy, Bryan, ALUS Canada (2025-02-14) (personal communication).

Jenkins, Megan and Harrisson Naftel (2022). *Making Private Lands Count for Conservation: Policy Improvements toward 30x30*. The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University. Online [https://www.thecgo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Private-Lands-30-x-30-1.pdf].

Kopsieker, Lisa & Tilmann Disselhoff (2024). *The contribution of private land conservation to 30x30 in Germany*. Frontiers in Conservation Science, 09 January 2024. Sec. Global Biodiversity Threats, Volume 4 – 2023. Online [https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2023.1324928].

Lounds, John, Centre for land Conservation, (2025-03-11) (personal communication).

Mack, Cameron, Wildlife Habitat Canada (2025-03-17) (personal communication).

Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs (MELCCFP). Direction principale du développement de la conservation (2024). *Recognizing Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECM) Within Continental Quebec*. 1st ed. Online [https://www.environnement.gouv.qc.ca/biodiversite/aires_protegees/amce/lignes-directrices-AMCE-en.pdf].

Nguyen-Van, Phu, Anne Stenger and Tuyen Tiet. *Social incentive factors in interventions promoting sustainable behaviors: A meta-analysis*. PLoS One. 2021 Dec 8;16(12):e0260932. [doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0260932].

Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (n.d.). *Safe Harbour Habitat under the Endangered Species Act*. Government of Ontario. Online [https://www.ontario.ca/page/safe-harbour-habitat].

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (n.d.). *About Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP)*. Online [https://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/oscia-programs/species-at-risk/].

Ontario Woodlot Association (2024). *Investigating Private Woodlots in Ontario as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures Supporting Canada's 30x30 Target 1 Challenge* [unpublished report].

Pittman, Jeremy, University of Waterloo (2025-03-14) (personal communication).

Pittman, Jeremy, Raphael Ayambire, Kwaku Owusu Twum (2025). *The Social Fit of Conservation Policy on Working Landscapes*. Rangeland Ecology & Management, Volume 100, May 2025, Pages 56-62. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rama.2025.01.009].

Prevost, Glen, Ontario Woodlot Association (2025-03-13) (2025-06-11) (personal communication).

Qin, Siyu et al. *An inclusive, empirically grounded inventory facilitates recognition of diverse area-based conservation of nature*. One Earth, Volume 7, Issue 6, 21 June 2024, Pages 962-975. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2024.03.005].

Raymond, C. M., et al. *The influence of place attachment, and moral and normative concerns on the conservation of native vegetation: A test of two behavioural models*. December 2011. In Journal of Environmental Psychology 31(4):323-335. Online [https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2011.08.006].

Tabas, Philip, The Nature Conservancy (2025-03-12) (personal communication).

The Chesapeake Conservancy (2025). Online [https://www.chesapeakeconservancy.org/].

The Environmental Coastal and Offshore Magazine (8 August 2023). *Chesapeake Conservancy's Conservation Innovation Center Turns 10*. Online [https://ecomagazine.com/news/coastal/chesapeake-conservancy-s-conservation-innovation-center-turns-10/].

Thompson, Kristen, Bryan Gilvesy, Bob Bailey, and Dave Reid. 2009. *Growing ALUS in Ontario*. Pages 226-227, in Proceedings of the Ecological Goods and Services Technical Meeting, Ottawa, Canada. Prairie Habitat Joint Venture (Edmonton). Online [https://alus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/egs-techmeeting-proceedings.pdf].

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (n.d.). *Candidate Conservation Agreements*. Online [https://www.fws.gov/program/candidate-conservation-agreements].

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (n.d.). *Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances*. Online [https://www.fws.gov/program/candidate-conservation-agreements-assurances].

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (n.d.). *Conservation Benefit Agreements*. Online [https://www.fws.gov/library/collections/conservation-agreements].

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (n.d.). *Enhancement of Survival Permits with Conservation Benefit Agreements*. Online [https://www.fws.gov/service/enhancement-survival-permits].

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (n.d.). *Safe Harbor Agreements*. Online [https://www.fws.gov/program/safe-harbor-agreements].

Woodward, Renata, Association of Canadian Land Trust (2025-02-19) (personal communication).

Centre for Land Conservation

Centre pour la conservation des terres