



Official Opening Remarks: Manitoba's Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

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Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you, Dr. Shoesmith, for your greetings and comments. On behalf of the Wildlife Branch, I, too, want to welcome everyone to Manitoba. I must say that I am overwhelmed by the extent to which the interest and excitement in northern forest owls that we saw here in 1987 has grown since that time. A lot has happened in owl research throughout the world, and a lot has happened in the management of Manitoba's natural resources in the last 10 years.

Not long after the 1987 owl symposium, our province embarked on a new initiative that was to guide us into the next millennium. On the heels of the 1987 Brundtland Report, we adopted that commission's principles of sustainable development. More than just a buzz word for the 1990's, sustainable development is a common sense approach that recognizes the connection between the well-being of people, the health of our environment, and the economy. I am pleased to announce that sustainable development strategies for fish and wildlife are to be developed for Manitoba.

Among the principles of sustainable development, we find requirements for local and international cooperation in the maintenance of biodiversity, research, and the development of comprehensive solutions to our problems. Hence, our gathering here today is one step in the on-going implementation of the principles of sustainable development. Further, following the UNCED Convention at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, Canada, with Manitoba's active participation, initiated an inclusive process that culminated in the development of a Canadian biodiversity strategy.

We are proud of the fact that all jurisdictions in Canada have signed onto this document and have signed a statement of commitment that expresses our country's political resolve to implement the three main articles of Agenda 21 related to global biodiversity needs:

1. Conservation of biodiversity.
2. Sustainable use of biological resources.

3. Fair and equitable sharing of the benefits that result from the use of genetic resources.

These broad goals are being approached from an ecosystem-based management perspective which will form the cornerstone of our future resource management programming.

Notwithstanding our public commitment to move forward with this ecosystem-based management approach, it is with the full recognition that individuals and groups of species require intensive study to determine their place and future in the ecosystem. Owls, for example, are one of the yardsticks by which we will attempt to measure and constantly monitor ecosystem health and assist with future planning.

Manitoba's biodiversity contributes to global environmental health. A loss of diversity weakens entire natural systems, systems which humans depend upon. In Manitoba, to help maintain biodiversity in our resource-based economy, we look to new ways of doing our jobs. A landmark example is that our forestry planning is now based on ecosystem management, not tree stand management. In cooperation with the Manitoba Model Forest, we have also developed habitat models for 20 species of wildlife, including the Barred and Great Gray Owls. These models will be integrated with our forest resource inventory database.

When all is said and done, however, we have to be able to evaluate our efforts at maintaining biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem. Certain species, such as owls, are some of the best yardsticks for monitoring our success. I wish you well with your symposium. Your wisdom will guide us in our efforts to make our planet a better place for all living things. And in closing, I want to say thanks and congratulations to the many dedicated individuals who have worked so very hard at organizing this event. This is not an easy task. I am sure that the fruits of your efforts will be seen many times over as the events of the next few days unfold.

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