



Opening Remarks
CCEA Annual General Meeting / Sept. 29th - Oct. 2 nd 1996
Conference Theme: Caring for Home Place: Protected Areas and Landscape Ecology
Regina, Saskatchewan

“Going back can be a homecoming”
Ed B. Wiken, Chair
Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA)

Looking Back

This expression – *looking back* -- is paraphrased from Bernice Morgan’s book ‘Waiting for Time’. You may well ask “How can looking or going back be a homecoming?” For over a decade, the CCEA and CSLEM organizations have been working using common ecological principles and, above all, the talents of many of the same leading Canadian ecologists, academics and resource managers. This *Caring For Home Place* Conference provides a reunion for the two organizations and for their past and current members. It also provides a great opportunity to revisit common ground, shared concerns and goals for future activities.

The Conference is also a homecoming in another way. Having goals pegged upon concepts like ecosystem sustainability and sustainable development are laudable. If appropriately applied, they are in effect creating a set of round trip tickets. This generation will use and protect ecosystems in a manner that will not jeopardize the availability of those same assets to the next generation. Determining the basis for sustainability is increasingly a matter of understanding nature’s baseline and limits. In Canada, protected areas give us the chance to go back and assess nature’s yardsticks. They have also helped us in selecting indicators to earmark our success in achieving sustainability---a luxury which is not readily attainable in countries where portions of native ecosystems have not been protected.

What is Home Place?

Home place is an odd expression. When you say it, you are more likely to say words like homestead, homegrown, homeless or, simply, home (Figure 1). Oddly, the notion of home place seems to refer to all of these. Basically, it means the place where we and many other organisms dwell. At one end of the spectrum, the home place is the ecosphere—the earth. From a more regional standpoint, it could refer to our country, the prairies or the family farm. In this area in particular, the homestead represents where we sank our roots and learned about the generosity and cruelty of nature. Years of experience on the land give people that homegrown stability. They typically seem to show a greater degree of practical judgment and intuition about their surroundings. As in

the pioneering period like that of the prairies, gaining good judgment about the land often arises from many bad experiences. Factors that must be weighed and balanced are varied. What is good for the family? How can the land with its soils, streams and vegetation best support the family? When will the land's carrying capacity be overextended---at this point, will the family unit then too fail and become homeless souls?

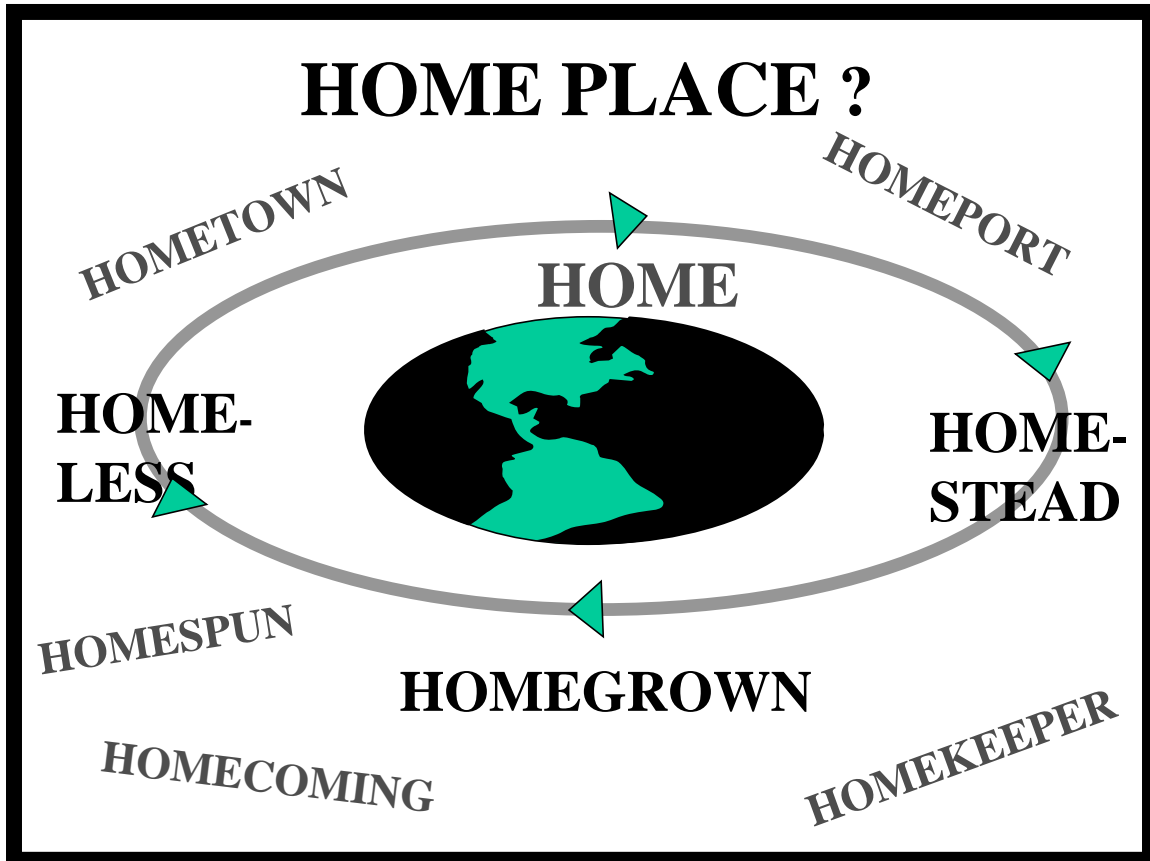


Figure 1: Some concepts related to 'home'

From a home to the homeless! It is a cycle of connections and relationships that often have repeated throughout North America from the dust bowl of the Central Plains in the 30's to the recent decline of the cod stocks in the Atlantic. Nature's resources get tapped for our 'common good' but someone failed to understand the ultimate limits and consequences. The contemporary language of the 90s---'sustainable resource development' and 'ecosystem management'--- seems to offer new and innovative answers to events like the dirty 30s, and the collapse of the cod fisheries. The basic concerns for issues like these, however, are more deeply rooted than the last couple of decades. The roots, indeed, provided many of the common threads that underpin the two sponsoring organizations here---the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA) and the Canadian Society for Landscape Ecology (CSLEM)

Organizations with Common Ties



The notion of sustainability is really a question about the future. What will be there tomorrow? The year after? The following generation?

Questions about the carrying capacity of land and water, the types and quantity of renewable resources, and the development of multiple land use plans were at the heart of the Canada's Resources for Tomorrow Conference in 1961 and this set a pathway for many innovations in ecosystem management and planning (Figure 2).

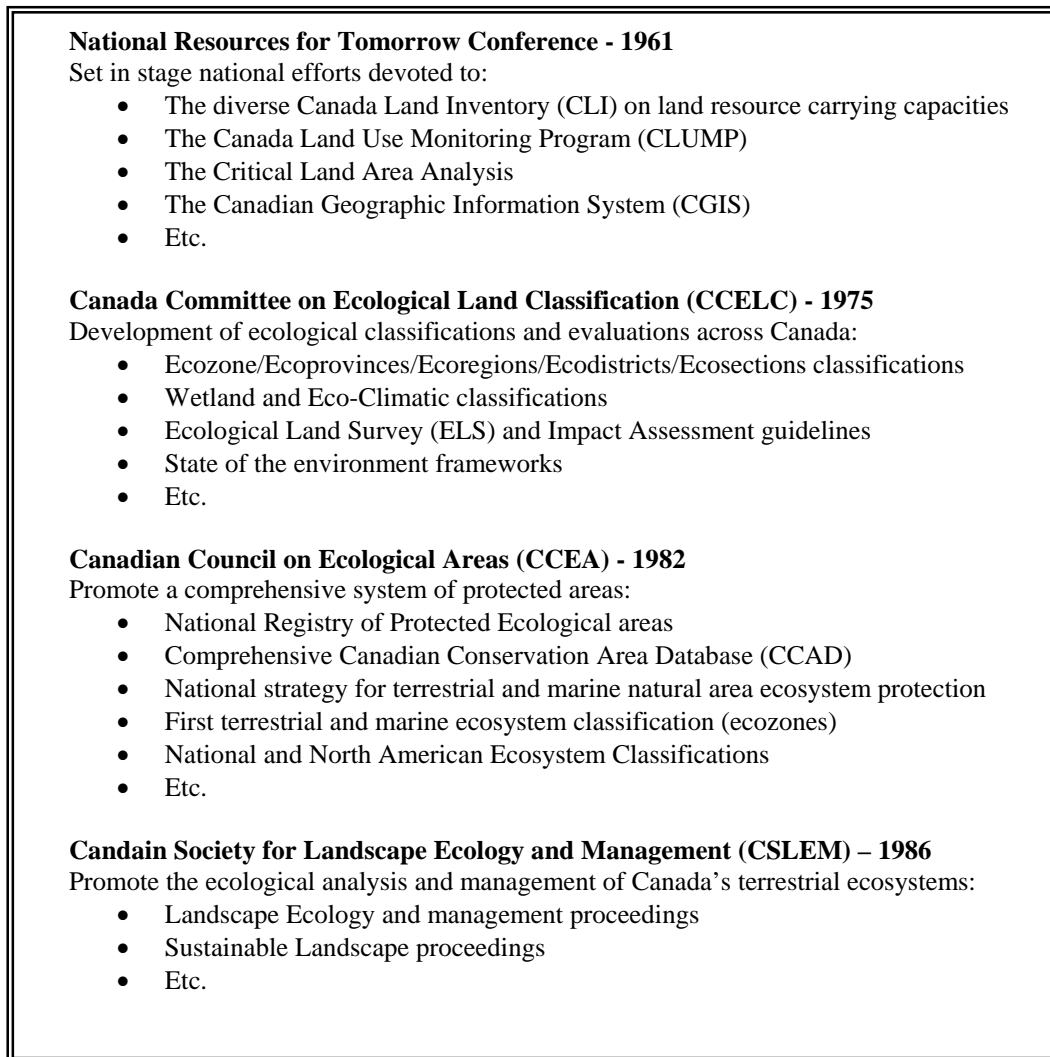


Figure 2: Some aspects of the evolution of three organizations following the Resources for Tomorrow Conference.

Recommendations from that federal-provincial sessions at the conference led to major multi-disciplinary projects like the Canada Land Inventory Program and integrated information systems like the Canadian Geographic Information System. These two projects provided a new wealth of knowledge and a new technology such as GIS to store



and analyze data. Equally, they also pointed out strategic gaps in our science and methods of operation. A poor understanding of the ecology of Canada's landscapes and proper means to manage/plan for the resources they contained were among the most prominent gaps to be identified.

To further capitalize on some of the successful outcomes of technical groups supporting the Canada Land Inventory, the Canada Committee on Ecological Land Classification (CCELC) was formed. The Committee was involved in many studies/activities to: improve the methods of ecological land classification; provide national profiles of ecosystems (e.g. Ecoregions of Canada, Wetland regions of Canada, Eco-Climatic regions of Canada,); and conduct various ecological assessments (e.g. impact assessments, resource planning, conservation, acid rain,). In 1983, the CCELC was invited to participate in the meeting of the International Association for Landscape Ecology in Eindhoven, Holland. Following that meeting, the CCELC executive (E. Wiken, J. Thie, C. Rubec, M. Phillippe and G. Ironside) organized the first regional landscape group in North America—the Canadian Society of Landscape Ecology and Management. CSLEM and the CCELC worked as sister organizations for several years. Financial, legal, secretarial and professional support were provided to CSLEM by the CCELC Secretariat for several years.

The CCELC was also a strong supporter of the conservation goals of the CCEA. The two organizations shared staff and Secretariats on several occasions in the 80's. The CCEA placed a special emphasis on the conservation theme of land/seascape ecology. The basic objective was to promote a protected area network that was representative of Canada's overall ecosystem diversity. The organization has been innovative: structuring the basis for the first Canadian Conservation Areas Database (CCAD); developing the first comprehensive national ecosystem conservation strategy; leading studies on gap analysis and representativity evaluations; promoting long term ecological monitoring and assessment initiatives; and developing a consensus amongst many groups to understand the nature of regional, national and continental ecosystems for protected area analysis, state of the environment reporting and other uses.

This brief reflection on the evolution of these three organizations reinforces some of the core reasons why each group still retains strong common links. The interaction of the CCEA, CSLEM & CCELC is historical evidence of the mutual ecological threads that have been woven through the fields of conservation, education, biodiversity and resource management. Today, that legacy of actions has positioned Canada better than most nations in understanding its home place and in fostering a basis for an ecological approach.

Places without a Past



In many places around the world and in some locations in Canada, we have depleted and threatened the existence of key resources. Native ecosystems have been threatened, even forfeited owing to human activities. By and large, this has been a self inflicted process---some of it inadvertent, some of it purposeful. In this process, we have lost and gained. When one ecosystem is drastically changed it is replaced by another. Forests burn and renew, grasslands are converted to agriculture landscapes, river systems are dammed and lakes are created. Some of the former elements of past ecosystems remain, some eventually return, some are lost and others are new. But why should we care since Canada is renowned for its wealth of wilderness?

Perhaps it is like watching the devastation of Alzheimer's disease. It is not enviable to loose your foothold in the past. Without the context of the past, the elemental aspects and tools of life become forgotten. By exercising some caution now on various forms of conservation, we are more able to abide by the principle of "anticipate and prevent" than to succumb to "react and cure". Protected areas are our mooring grounds. They are the sheltered and protected places that will avoid the hollowness of reminiscences about "what use to be" and "what could have been". They provide a safety net and the original home places. Without them, Canada would be like many European countries which have lost basic points of reference on ecosystem health and quality. The terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in some countries are so extensively transformed and impacted that there is no easy way to go back and to discover how to come home.

Their home place overseas, our home place here, they are all connected! Environmental issues and uncertain relationships between environment and people are the basis of questions which are increasingly being raised at the global level. Can the home place of Canada itself be sustainable in the context of the activities which are taking place in the global village? While we typically find it easier to reflect on global scale problems rather than what is happening in our backyard, we need to think, plan and act across a series of scales and from a range of different perspectives.

One without the Other

Sustainability of resources, economic development, prosperity for people and a healthy environment are rather meaningless things in isolation. Common sense and the unfolding of worldwide issues have told us that they are connected. Dealing with the health and well being of people in exclusion of their associated environment, or dealing with industrial development in exclusion of the environments that produce resources ignores simple relationships. In one way or the other, everything is linked. It is increasingly in our own self-interest to acknowledge theses facts. This more embracing perspective has become known as the ecosystem perspective. Whether the focus is on a rustic wilderness or an urban community, they are all home. Ultimately, the net quality of any home place will not be judged by the health of the occupants (e.g. people, animals, plants,) alone. The enveloping physical setting (e.g. land, water, air,) will weigh into the equation as well. Biological and physical characteristics in combination are the critical basis of a life support system.

Creating an Ecosystem Perspective

How do we encourage a more integrated understanding of ecosystems? How do we protect representative samples of Canada's ecosystem diversity? Accepting the basic rationale of 'thinking in terms of ecosystems' does not mean that it will be followed by neither appropriate plans nor actions. There are many barriers (Figure 3) in applying an ecosystem approach for conservation or renewable resource purposes. It is typical to find that ecosystem science is lacking, integrated monitoring systems are inadequate, relevant information is wanting, and multi-disciplinary assessment capabilities are youthful.

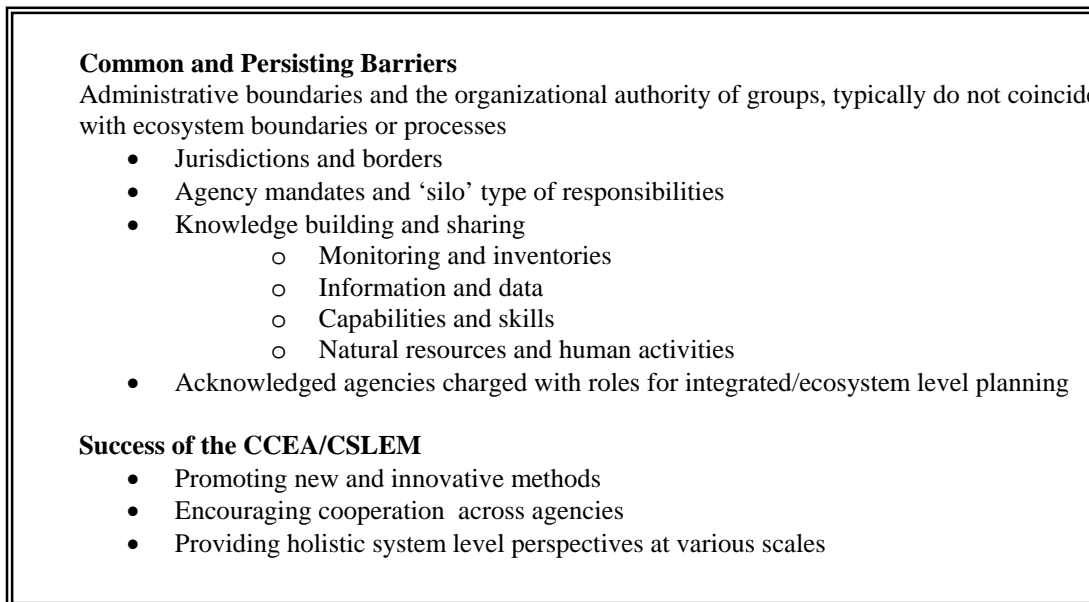


Figure 3: Common barriers to promoting and achieving an ecosystem perspective

Organizations like the CCEA and CSLEM have been effective in promoting a new type of synergy amongst professionals and agencies. Where mandates in government departments have been barriers, where many university disciplines have narrowed down the scope of thinking, where the artificial boundaries of jurisdictions have been impediments, and where effective strategies and policies have often been skin deep, the CCEA and CSLEM have been very effective. The two organizations have provided useful critiques, generated new approaches and methods, and promoted information sharing and public awareness.

The barriers which curtail the development on an ecological perspective have a long history. While many will acknowledge that having and using an ecosystem perspective are necessities, there has never been a lasting agency put into place that has the authority to work in and amongst the more regular line agencies and departments.

Ahead and Back



Both looking back to what has been, and forward to what we are coming to are critical in both ecosystem and resource management. This way of thinking is not an abstraction of thought but a reality of what is needed sustaining Canadian livelihoods and values. If we return to Bernice Morgan's novel, she describes the evolution of several generations of families in the setting of Newfoundland. She describes how by the actions of each generation by generation, everything we do is overshadowed by the past. Having and understanding protected places helps to ensure that there will not be a loss of future benefits from the country's inherent ecosystems, or will there be lost opportunities to understand the nature and carrying capacities of our home places.



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