



UNESCO WORLD BIOSPHERE RESERVE – A BALANCE BETWEEN PEOPLE AND NATURE  
A MODEL REGION OF RURAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

# Riding Mountain UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve

## Annual Report Year End 2015



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Riding Mountain  
Biosphere Reserve



## **2015 Board of Directors**

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Dwayne Blackbird (Keeseekowinen)

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## **Biosphere Reserves**

Biosphere reserves are designed to deal with these central questions: how can we reconcile the conservation of biodiversity and biological resources with their sustainable use?

An effective biosphere reserve involves natural and social scientists; conservation and development groups; management authorities and local communities -all working together on this complex issue.

The biosphere reserve network was launched in 1976 and has grown to include 631 reserves in 119 countries. The network is a key component in UNESCO's Man and Biosphere's objective for achieving a sustainable balance between the sometimes conflicting goals of conserving biological diversity, promoting economic development and maintaining associated cultural values. Biosphere reserves are sites where this objective is tested, refined, demonstrated and implemented.

Biosphere reserves are "areas of terrestrial and coastal/marine ecosystems, or a combination thereof, which are internationally recognized within the framework of UNESCO's Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB)". Reserves are nominated by national governments; each reserve must meet a minimal set of criteria and adhere to a minimal set of conditions before being admitted to the Network.

### **Vision**

Ensuring the brightest future for our communities and generations to come.

### **Mission**

Fostering sustainable communities throughout the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve

### **Mandate**

Three functions of a biosphere reserve – biodiversity conservation, economic and social development and logistical support.

Each biosphere reserve is intended to fulfill three complementary functions:

1. a conservation function, to preserve genetic resources, species, ecosystems and landscapes;
2. a development function, to foster sustainable economic and human development, and
3. a logistic support function, to support demonstration projects, environmental education and training, and research and monitoring related to local, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development.

## **Riding Mountain UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve**

### **Background**

We need to be reminded that we are part of a large and encompassing picture. There are many issues facing environment, agriculture, industry and society in both the rural and urban community. If we strive to create and maintain healthy ecosystems and communities, the economic side of things should then be able to take care of itself.

One of the issues facing the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve (RMBR) is that of a fairly low public profile. In the past we've worked primarily in the background on issues of concern within the Biosphere Reserve (BR). We've been involved in encouraging and supporting issues of beaver, Tb, elk movement, wolf research, species at risk, corridor establishment, invasive species, climate change and land change over time, educational outreach and eco and agri-tourism.

However many folks, who live in and around the BR, don't know what a BR is let alone that they live in or near one or what they are all about. Some people think that we are only about "tree hugging" and others believe that we are a regulatory body that will tell folks what they can or cannot do. Not true – Biosphere Reserves have no regulatory power. The RMBR is concerned about biodiversity, healthy sustainable ecosystems and healthy sustainable communities. We hope that through providing a safe and non-threatening place to speak and reliable information on both sides of the issue people will make good, informed decisions, whatever the issue.

The following is a brief background about the concept of Biosphere Reserves, how it got started and how, as we proceed into the future that while we are focused on our small part of the "biosphere"; we are part of a much broader picture.

### **Background - United Nations, UNESCO, Man and Biosphere, Biosphere Reserves, Goals, Strategies and Conventions**

#### **United Nations**

The United Nations is one of the world's most important intergovernmental organizations. It includes 192 sovereign countries or Member States, representing virtually every country in the world. Founded in 1945, just after the conclusion of World War II, the goal of the United Nations was to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations and promote social progress, better living standards and human rights.

## **What is UNESCO?**

Headquartered in Paris, France, UNESCO was founded in 1945, shortly after the U.N. came into existence. UNESCO is the U.N.'s lead agency on matters relating to education, the sciences, culture, and communications. UNESCO has the following functions with respect to its four areas of interest:

1. To serve as a laboratory of ideas" encouraging new thinking and continuing reappraisal of current international concerns;
2. To be a clearinghouse for information, especially by trying to identify the most successful solutions to problems;
3. To help set standards for international agreements (including treaties) and, in some cases, to act as the secretariat (executive body) for these international agreements and treaties; and
4. To provide technical expertise to the national governments that are members of the United Nations.

## **Man and Biosphere**

What is the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program?

The UNESCO Biosphere Conference in 1968 brought together representatives of government and non-governmental organizations to consider what should be done about threats to the biosphere that were being increasingly perceived by U.N. Member States. The delegates agreed that all governments should join in a broad, research-oriented program to reverse the trend. It was emphasized that establishment of reserves was important to meet scientific, educational, cultural and recreational needs. This came to be known as the biosphere reserve project.

MAB was launched in 1970, and was formally endorsed by Member States at the U.N. Conference on the Environment (the first Earth Summit) in 1972. The original aim of MAB was to establish protected areas representing the main ecosystems of the planet in which genetic resources could be protected and research and monitoring could be carried out. These protected areas were to be called Biosphere Reserves in reference to the MAB programs name.

Has the MAB program changed its objectives since it was formed?

Like all scientific programs, MAB has been refined over the years but still is committed to its original aims. Today, MAB is a set of related scientific research projects with three focuses:

- Minimizing the loss of biological diversity;
- Making people aware of how cultural diversity and biological diversity affect each other; and
- Promoting environmental sustainability through the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

## **Biosphere Reserves**

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An effective biosphere reserve involves natural and social scientists; conservation and development groups; management authorities and local communities - all working together on this complex issue.

The biosphere reserve network was launched in 1976 and, as of November 2013, had grown to include 621 reserves in 117 countries. The network is a key component in MAB's objective for achieving a sustainable balance between the sometimes conflicting goals of conserving biological diversity, promoting economic development and maintaining associated cultural values. Biosphere reserves are sites where this objective is tested, refined, demonstrated and implemented.

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1. a conservation function, to preserve genetic resources, species, ecosystems and landscapes;
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3. a logistic support function, to support demonstration projects, environmental education and training, and research and monitoring related to local, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development.

Physically, each biosphere reserve should contain three elements: one or more core areas, which are securely protected sites for conserving biological diversity, monitoring minimally disturbed ecosystems, and undertaking non-destructive research and other low-impact uses (such as education); a clearly identified buffer zone, which usually surrounds or adjoins the core areas and is used for co-operative activities compatible with sound ecological practices, including environmental education, recreation, ecotourism, and applied and basic research; and a flexible transition area, or area of co-operation, which may contain a variety of agricultural activities, settlements and other uses, and in which local communities, management agencies, scientists, non-governmental organizations (NGO), cultural groups, economic interests and other stakeholders work together to manage and sustainably develop the area's resources.

### **Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve - overview**

- Designated in 1986 through application from three levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal – to UNESCO in Paris

- only 1 Biosphere Reserve in Manitoba, 16 Biosphere Reserves in Canada, 610 in 117 countries world-wide
- core protected area is Riding Mountain National Park (3000 sq km), zone of cooperation (12,000 sq km) includes 15 Rural Municipalities that surround the park
- 28,000 people live in Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve
- Important land feature is that it is a confluence of three ecozones – boreal forest, mixedwood forest and prairie grasslands

In light of the background just noted, Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve, while seemingly a relatively small area for our concerns regarding knowledge and research, is actually part of a much broader network of people and organizations with similar interests in many parts of the world. The research and monitoring that is done within this Biosphere Reserve feeds into a much larger body of work that is disseminated nationally and internationally and in many cases is used as a template for similar studies throughout the world.

In order to guide all Biosphere Reserves in the type of research that is imperative to reach their goals, several strategies have been put into practice over the years – In 1983, UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) convened in Minsk (Belarus). The Congress's activities gave rise in 1984 to an "Action Plan for Biosphere Reserves". In 1995 at the International Conference on Biosphere Reserve in Seville (Spain) the Seville Strategy was developed and in 2008 at the 3rd World Congress of Biosphere Reserves in Madrid (Spain) came the document known as the Madrid Action Plan (MAP).

### **The Madrid Action Plan (MAP)**

The MAP aims to raise BRs to be the principal, internationally designated areas dedicated to sustainable development in the early 21st century. The focus is on developing models for global, national and local sustainability, and for BRs to serve as learning laboratories and platforms for policy professionals, research and scientific communities, management practitioners and stakeholder communities to work together to translate global principles of sustainable development into local relevant practices.

The biosphere reserve (BR) concept has proved its value beyond protected areas and is increasingly embraced by scientists, planners, policy makers and local communities to bring a variety of knowledge, scientific investigations and experiences to link biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development for human well-being.

During the years since the adoption of the Seville Strategy, global issues and problems have emerged or intensified, making it an imperative for the MAB Programme to adapt and change so as to effectively respond to these emerging challenges.

These major challenges seriously further exacerbate poverty and inequality and include:

- Accelerated climate change with consequences for societies and ecosystems;
- Accelerated loss of biological and cultural diversity with unexpected consequences that impact the ability of ecosystems to continue to provide services critical for human wellbeing;
- Rapid urbanization as a driver of environmental change.

The Madrid Action Plan (MAP) articulates actions, targets and success indicators, partnerships and other implementation strategies, and an evaluation framework for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) for the period of 2008 to 2013.

## **Goals**

### **MAP's overall goals are to:**

- a) anchor the research, training, capacity building and demonstration agendas of MAB at the interface between the interlinked issues of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and socio-economic and cultural well-being of human communities;
- b) enable the active use of places included in the WNBR as learning sites for sustainable development, i.e. demonstrating approaches to enhance co-operation amongst epistemic (academic), political, practitioner and stakeholder communities to address and solve context specific problems to improve environmental, economic and social conditions for human and ecosystem well-being;
- c) collect, collate, synthesize and disseminate lessons learnt from more than 30 years of the work of the MAB Programme and the WNBR as well as their planned actions during 2008-2013 to benefit international, national and local efforts to meet global targets, significantly reducing the current rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 that are linked to mitigating and adapting to global climatic change; and) contribute to the emergence of a new generation of professionals and practitioners who can serve as ambassadors and managers/ coordinators for linking global environmental agendas to national and local development aspirations.

### **The major challenges tackled by MAP are:**

#### ***1) Ecosystem-wide pressures from global urbanization***

- a. Rapidly changing and spatially shifting population densities, e.g. half of the world's population today lives in urban landscapes, a proportion projected to increase to 66% over the next 50 years
- b. Urbanization as a most complex mosaic of land cover and multiple land uses which creates significant knowledge gaps
- c. Sustainable urban planning is vital

#### ***2) Impacts of climate change on societies and ecosystems***

a. UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and its scientific panel IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) is confident that the accelerated changes to our climate are anthropogenic – caused by humans

b. A rise in mean global temperature greater than 2 degree Celsius will mean that two billion people across the globe will face water shortages and at least 40 million more people will be exposed to malaria in Africa. – who would have thought that West Nile would be an issue in Manitoba 20 years ago

c. 30% of species will be put at risk of extinction, desertification will increase, positive feedback mechanisms in the climate will further reduce tropical forests

***3) Accelerated loss of biological and cultural diversity with system shifts and unexpected consequences that impact the ability of ecosystems to provide services critical for human well-being.***

a. Support by ecosystems will become more critical, e.g. nutrient cycling, soil formation and primary production

b. Provision of ecosystem services is not guaranteed, e.g. food, fresh water, wood and fiber and fuel

c. Regulation is changing, e.g. climate, flood and disease, water purification

d. Cultural function is put at risk, e.g. aesthetics, spirituality, education and recreation

**ACTIONS**

**1. COOPERATION, MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION**

Biosphere reserves are the principal means for achieving the objectives of the MAB Programme and the visible instrument through which UNESCO as a whole could demonstrate its commitment to sustainability through policy-relevant site-based research, capacity enhancement and demonstration.

**2. ZONATION – LINKING FUNCTIONS TO SPACE**

While we know that biosphere reserves should contain one or more core areas, buffer zones, and a transition area (area of cooperation) to accommodate their multiple functions with new challenges, it is important to shift towards a more integrated zoning. The transition area – area of cooperation, in addition to the development function, can also consider conservation/environmental goals and elements. Equally the core area, in addition to its conservation function, contributes to a range of ecosystem services which, in terms of the development functions, can be calculated in economic terms (e.g. carbon sequestration, soil stabilization, supply of clean water and air, etc.).

**3. SCIENCE AND CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT**

Ecosystems provide goods and services to all humanity, but the sustainable use of these benefits is challenging in the face of rapid climatic, environmental, social, and political changes.

To cope with these changes, biosphere reserves play a crucial role in generating knowledge on how natural systems work and how to maintain ecosystem services and resilient ecosystems while at the same time using these systems to create income, employment and wealth.

Wide cooperation from institutions and stakeholders is needed within biosphere reserves to foster communication among scientists, policy makers, private companies and others. In order to achieve this, there is a need for a significant strengthening of both science and capacity in the WNBR also with a view to applying scientific expertise to global biodiversity management and conservation.

Both scientific as well as traditional knowledge from local and indigenous people is needed for adaptation to change and building resilience.

Biosphere reserves provide an excellent opportunity to play an active role as learning sites for sustainable development in order to implement national policies and strategies for the Decade for Education on Sustainable Development.

Relevant national, regional and global authorities should be encouraged to use biosphere reserve management issues and problems as research questions for multi-disciplinary institutes of higher learning.

#### **4. PARTNERSHIPS**

At all times, the strength and opportunity of partnerships should be drawn upon to cooperatively develop the functions of a biosphere reserve. There is a need to focus efforts on building and improving upon existing partnerships and alliances, championing new initiatives, and creating new partnerships and projects that involve many stakeholder groups. Cooperative activities range from biodiversity conservation to ecosystem management and sustainable use of environmental goods and services.

The 'added value' of partnerships is improved effectiveness of management strategies, change of attitude within the stakeholders themselves, better mutual understanding, more informed decision making, increased awareness, and technical and financial support of the management of a biosphere reserve.

**The Riding Mountain UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve**

**is part of a world of good people doing a world of good.**

## Looking to the Future

During the past year of 2015 the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve moved forward despite the challenges of having very little funds. Regardless of this, we continued to take an on the advisory role for building sustainable practices and consensus in a number of initiatives taken throughout the year.

The Riding Mountain UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve continued to make strides during the past year as we moved forward with our goals for 2015 which included:

- Fund Development initiative to create a more sustainable organization.
- Building relationships with municipal and provincial government
- Reply to the Periodic Review
- Reviewing and Establishing Zonation for the RMBR
- Creating opportunities for local and regional residents and tourists to reach local producers, artisans and agri-tourism groups.
- Flagship Programs. – At the Farm Gate, Native Species Gardens, Tb Stakeholders Advisory Committee, RM Invasive Species Network
- Educational programs/presentations focusing on native species, invasive species and water stewardship.
- Strategic planning
- New Projects: Community Gardens, Endangered Species Monitoring, Social Media, GPS Adventure Quest – RMBR 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event

Going into another year of limited funding in 2015, the board of the RMBR continued to strategize how to find sustainable non-project related funding. Considerable effort was put into Municipal Council visits and Ministerial visits to discuss the value of having an internationally designated UNESCO site within the province of Manitoba. While the main focus was on finding sustainable funding, flagship projects of the RMBR such as At the Farm Gate, Native Species Garden, Bovine Tb Stakeholders Advisory Committee, Living by the Waters' Edge, Education Programming, and Invasive Species Network continued and a few new projects were initiated including a Weed Spotters Workshop program and a Community Gardens project.

The majority of our work in 2015 included approaching the Provincial Government to request on going non- project related funding, to complete our reply to the Periodic Review and to develop the strategy for a community-wide strategic planning session that would help to develop the future path of the RMBR.

We continued to work at forging new partnerships, gathering ideas and generating new projects with both new and long-standing partners attended a number of meetings, conferences and symposiums.

## **BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND EFFECTIVENESS**

### Charitable Tax Status

The RMBR continues to maintain its charitable tax status and has received a number of donations in-kind and on behalf of others. While the amount received this is small the significance the ability to be able to receive these donations and be able to issue a charitable tax receipt is invaluable to this organization.

### Government Agency Representation –

After several visits and numerous letters of inquiry to provincial government ministers a representative from the provincial government, namely the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship has been appointed to the RMBR Board. We are very appreciative for their role and their contribution to the discussions and planning for the future of the RMBR.

### Funding

Funding through Grants - Work continued with the representative from the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship to create a proposal for funding for the RMBR. Letters were written to other provincial government representatives to highlight the issues facing the RMBR resulting from a lack of funding and acknowledgement and understanding within the Province of the already established UNESCO site in Manitoba.

Provincial Grant - As a result of this work the RMBR found itself in a line in the provincial government budget. Unfortunately, due to elections and a delay in the budget being passed we did not know the amount of the grant until shortly before it was received at the end of October. The RMBR was fortunate and is very grateful to have received a \$50,000 grant from the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship. It remains unclear if this funding will be ongoing or a one-time grant. Work continues in enhancing the engagement of municipal, provincial and federal government departments through meetings, discussions and other forms of communication.

Canada Summer Jobs - The RMBR also applied for and was successful in receiving a Canada Summer Jobs grant for one student. This student was hired as a communications assistant and helped in research, development and updating information on the website and social media. This student also produced three interactive web based educational programs regarding the RMBR, Native Plant Species and Biodiversity. As well the student also helped to deliver environmental educational programs to youth and adults throughout the summer.

Funding through Membership – While last year's engagement of our municipal partners through new approaches for financial support including contribution support based on roll numbers was a success this year the amalgamation of Municipalities led to a many changes in municipal councils. The amalgamation changed the number of municipalities in the RMBR from 16 to 12 and the contribution based on roll number was not picked up by any of the 12 new municipalities.

Fundraising Strategies - Fundraising activities undertaken raised funds as well as public awareness of the RMBR. These events included Trivia Nights, Meat Draws, Lunches and the "At the Farm Gate" markets.

Donations – Funding through donation was up slightly this year however the RMBR is not ready at this time to do medium to large scale donation acquisition at this time.

### Strategic Planning

Strategic Regional Community Planning - The Board of Directors has launched a strategic planning process for the Riding Mountain UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve (RMBR). This endeavour will bring our communities together to discuss the future potential for the RMBR and to establish our direction so we can achieve lasting sustainability.

This new planning effort follows naturally from our work during the last several years and is timely as the Man and Biosphere (MAB) Reserve programme under UNESCO has recently released an evaluation of the Man and Biosphere Reserve Madrid Action Plan and the final draft MAB Strategy – 2015-2025. These are an important guiding documents that will help us reposition ourselves to adapt to a rapidly changing economic environment.

Some key themes that keep emerging and will drive our focus are: Cooperation within the Biosphere, Partnerships, Tourism and Economic Development, Science and Research, Climate Change and Rural Adaptation, Urbanization and its implications for the region.

Another aspect of strategic planning that will be covered is a new and revitalized governance structure that will review the mandate of the RMBR.

This Strategic Planning Session was held January 2016.

### Updated Progress Report in Response to the Periodic Review Recommendations

The final updated progress report to the UNESCO-MAB Periodic Review was compiled and sent August 20, 2015. We await UNESCO's International Coordinating Council of the Programme on Man and the Biosphere response and feel ensured that with this extensive body of work that it will be positive.

Three main areas were considered lacking and they included:

- reinforce the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve Management Committee by extending its membership to include in particular provincial government agencies and First Nations;*
- elaborate guidelines to help this management committee to progress towards making a coordination plan for the biosphere reserve;*
- provide a clear zonation map.*

### Extending Membership

### Provincial Government Representation

Since the Periodic Review 2012 membership has expanded to include permanent representation from the Province of Manitoba through the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship.

The RMBR has worked extensively with the Department of Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on Bovine Tuberculosis issues within the cooperation area and on the “At the Farm Gate” program. This work is expected to continue as the program expands and new projects are being explored.

### First Nations Representation

The Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve has two First Nations members on the board of directors. The first is the Coordinator of the Coalition of First Nations with Interests in Riding Mountain. They represent seven Anishinaabe communities in the Riding Mountain Region, four of which have lands within the RMBR. The Coordinator chairs the Riding Mountain Forum, a regular meeting with Chiefs of each community, other First Nations dignitaries and representatives of Parks Canada. The Coordinator also chairs the Wildlife Council which, as mentioned in the zoning discussion, deals with wildlife management issues within the Cooperation Area (buffer zone). This includes traditional First Nations practices.

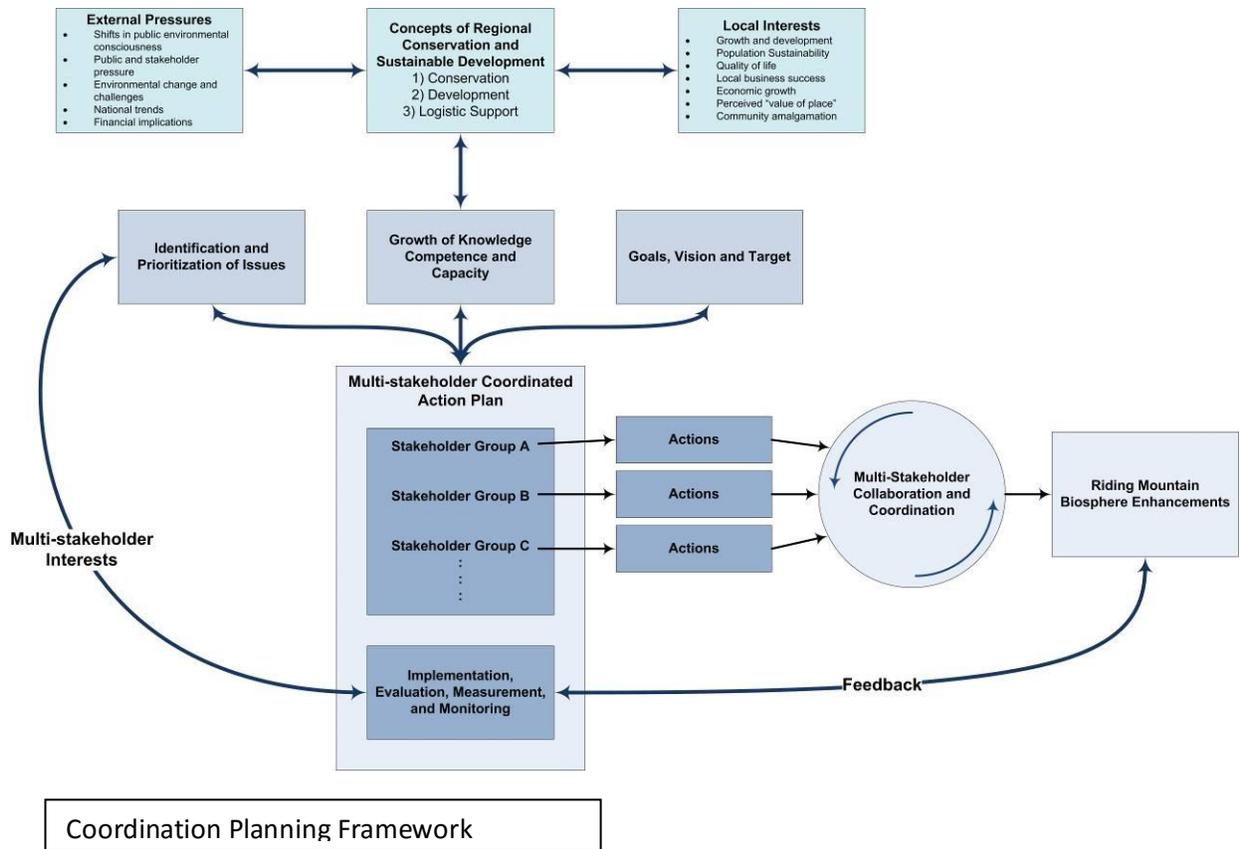
The second First Nations representative on the RMBR Board of Directors is the First Nations Liaison from Parks Canada. The Liaison is responsible for facilitating a collaborative dialogue between First Nations and Parks Canada. This includes supporting effective communication, meeting consultation requirements, both legal and informal, and encouraging active participation on projects by First Nations community members.

### Future Board Expansion

It has been recognized that one of the major needs on the RMBR is an expansion to include board members with business interests in key areas of the RMBR. A list of potential candidates has been assembled with the intention of recruiting two to three new board members before January 2016. This will help improve the perceived value of the RMBR to residents within the region.

### Coordination Plan

The RMBR includes twelve rural municipalities, forty two towns and villages, four First Nation communities, Duck Mountain Provincial Park and Riding Mountain National Park. This represents an enormous number of varied stakeholder groups and interests. Great progress has been made on issues within the biosphere reserve over a number of years. The recommendation that improved guidelines be developed to assist the RMBR in a broader coordination of communication and strategic planning amongst these many stakeholders has been welcomed. The RMBR has chosen to adopt an integrated model as a framework for our future enhancements to our coordination efforts (Annex III). This model will be the basis for our coordination plan and will ensure we have a more comprehensive approach to stakeholder participation.



### Providing Clear Zonation

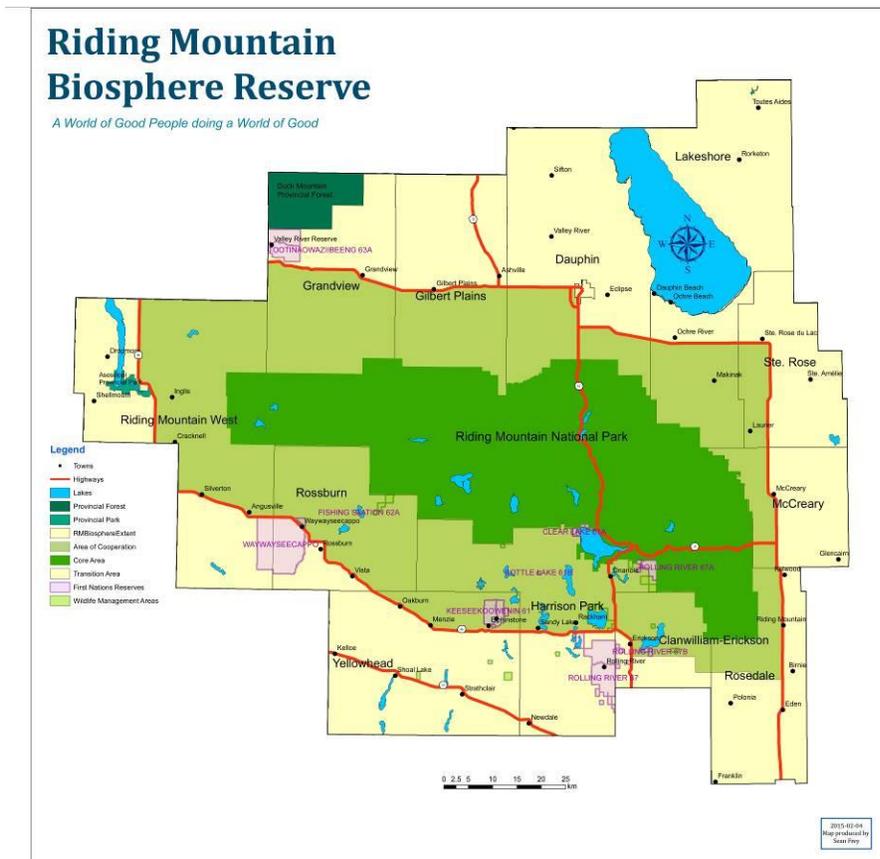
With the amalgamation of municipalities in the biosphere reserve the RMBR now has twelve municipalities therefore names have had to be revised and boundaries shifted. Since inception the extent of area included in the RMBR has been identified via Riding Mountain National Park (RMNP) (core) and municipal boundaries (area of cooperation). UNESCO MAB has indicated that they would like to see three areas of zonation including core, buffer and transition. A number of options had been researched.

A decision has been made, with the support of Parks Canada, to continue to have Riding Mountain National Park be the core protected area of the RMBR and to further adopt the Riding Mountain Eradication Zone (RMEA) as the buffer, locally known as the "cooperation area". This area encompasses a buffer area of 465,354 hectares which completely surrounds the core area. The RMEA was established in federal legislation January 1, 2003 within the Health of Animals Regulations. The area was originally defined for the management and eradication of Bovine Tuberculosis within the Core Area and surrounding lands with the collaboration of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), Parks Canada, the Province of Manitoba, agricultural producers and numerous other stakeholders. Currently activities within the area are largely coordinated by Parks Canada with close cooperation with the CFIA.

The RMEA is managed through a network of committees beginning with a Policy Steering Committee, Scientific Review Committee and Stakeholder Advisory Committee which is chaired by the RMBR under the authority of Parks Canada. In addition, First Nations collaboration occurs through the Coalition of First Nations with an interest in Riding Mountain and their Wildlife Council. Parks Canada sits on both the RMBR board and the Wildlife Council and acts as liaison between the groups. Future membership on for RMBR executive on the Wildlife Council is in discussion. Currently the coordinator of the Coalition of First Nations is an RMBR board member.

Within this framework discussions within the cooperation area (buffer zone) can now expand to a broader range of issues beyond bovine tuberculosis and provides a means for the RMBR to further its work in the area.

The outer transition area has existed since the beginning of the RMBR and is defined by the outside limits of each municipality adjacent to the core area and amounts to a total of 737356 hectares. This area has expanded slightly due to a recent change in provincial legislation enacting the amalgamation of some municipalities effective January 1, 2015. This represents a total increase to the RMBR of 78,181 hectares bringing the total area of the RMBR to 1,511,634 hectares (figure 3).



Zonation for the RMBR - 2016

## **CONSERVE NATURAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

### RMBR and the Manitoba Invasive Species Council

The RMBR continues to have representation on the Manitoba Invasive Species Council. One Weed Spotter presentation and a **Weed Spotter Workshop** were hosted in partnership with Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Manitoba Invasive Species Council. It is important that we have people in the RMBR that are able to identify these invasive plants and know what to do when they spot them. We hope that we can host a number of these around the biosphere reserve. There are only two weed districts, Dauphin and Gilbert Plains, in the RMBR at this time but there is interest in having more. A number of RMs have weed inspectors but are not part of a weed district.

### At the Farm Gate

The RMBR created and further developed and facilitated "At the Farm Gate", a project that highlights local sustainably-managed producers and local artisans and promotes locally made products, organic and non-organic, to both visitors to the RMBR and locals alike.

Two "At the Farm Gate" markets were organized this year bringing over 1400 people to view and purchase these local products. The "At the Farm Gate" web page continues to be updated on our website to help promote the participants to the program, highlight their products and allow for easier connections between the vendors and potential customers. We also promote the "At the Farm Gate" Markets and programs throughout the year at a variety of venues, and Festivals and Fairs in the Region. This project also helps to highlight the RMBR as an area that promotes the "buy local" concept and especially buy "Made in the Biosphere" concept.

The end result is the formation of a group of local entrepreneurial producers and artisans from around the RMBR who are in closer contact with each other and are more knowledgeable about each other's product. These people have become ambassadors for the Biosphere Reserve concept as well as for the region in which they live and work. The people who are their customers have come to learn about the RMBR and biosphere concept and are making the choice to purchase their goods locally from sustainably managed producers and local artisans time and again. The "At the Farm Gate" project helps to support and encourage environmentally sustainable, local farm entrepreneurs and artisans which in turn helps to create economically sustainable communities within the RMBR.

## **LAND MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### TbSAC – Local Group

The RMBR Chairs, facilitates and organizes the Bovine Tuberculosis Stakeholders Advisory Committee (TbSAC), a group of local stakeholders from within the RMBR, who are committed to finding workable, sustainable and environmentally conscious solutions to the issue of Bovine Tb in elk and cattle within the Riding Mountain Eradication Area (RMEA). The group discusses the issue from a user standpoint, be it cattle producer, hunter, guide, or tourism operator. The results and recommendations of the TbSAC go directly to the Superintendent of Riding Mountain National Park. As Chair of this group the RMBR

hosts informational workshops and open house meetings to disseminate information regarding work being done by Parks Canada and other organizations in regard to Bovine Tb in the RMEA. The end result of this endeavor is more feedback from local stakeholders who are being impacted by Bovine Tb.

This year the TbSAC – Local Group met in December. Meeting with representatives of MAFRI, CFIA, Mantioba Conservation, the Tb Task Group and RMNP has given the group valuable information as to how the Tb program is going in each of these agencies. The Tb Task Group has indicated that they would welcome a representative of the group to attend their meetings to make presentation or recommendations as they do value the advice of the group.

This year CFIA has determined that if there are no further Tb-positives in cattle they will discontinue testing in the core area of the RMEA. CFIA will continue to test cattle at slaughter for Bovine Tb as well as other diseases. As well RMNP will be discontinuing testing in wildlife. Hunter surveillance will continue so that the disease will be caught if it become prevalent again.

## **RESEARCH, MONITORING, EDUCATION, OUTREACH AND TRAINING**

### Native Species Garden

The native species gardens project that was implemented a number of years ago as a research project to determine the viability and encourage the utilization of native plant species in both rural and urban home landscaping rather than more exotic species.

This project continues to be a success, seeds and seedlings from the gardens are sold through the “At the Farm Gate” markets and through the Friends of RMNP Learning Centre in Wasagaming. Educational programs that have students (aged 5-12) get to know native species of plants of the RMBR and why we should care about them and their importance in the biodiversity of the landscape have been developed. This year we prepared the site for planting a satellite child friendly native species garden in the core protected area of the RMBR in the town site of Wasagaming in Riding Mountain National Park. This project will not only help to encourage local cottagers and cabin owners the importance of utilizing native plant species in their landscape within the national park but will continue to build awareness of the RMBR and its projects through signage regarding the RMBR and its mandated concept at these gardens.

### Community Gardens

RMBR in partnership with Service to Seniors for Erickson, Onanole and Sandy Lake received a \$19,500 grant to set up a model community garden. The funding allowed for the building of ten raised beds suitable for seniors and those with mobility issues utilizing the empty lot next to the RMBR office along with the garage as tool storage. This year the gardens were available to seniors at no cost to them other than to have 10% of their harvest go to local food banks or other seniors or families in need. The intent has been to utilize otherwise unproductive green space in a way that will benefit the local senior community in regards to connecting with each other and with the young people of the community This

project will encourage workshops and events that will inspire both young and old to transfer information regarding food production and to support other local food growers in the RMBR.

Connections have been made with other Municipalities to create similar projects in their communities and the RMBR will help to develop the grant applications, hire the local contractor to build the boxes and supervise the creation of the gardens. As well the RMBR will share all the experience gained through the creation of the Erickson Community Gardens.

#### Parkwest School Division

The RMBR maintained its involvement with two 2.5-day outdoor classroom experiences with the Parkwest School Division, ongoing since 2008. RMBR along with Friends of RMNP staff offered RMBR, GPS, Archaeology programs to the 156 Grade 6 students that take part from the Parkwest School Division. Intakes took place Camp Wannakumbac – May 25th to 28<sup>th</sup>.

Dissemination of Scientific Research - the RMBR has begun the process of making available the scientific research that has been conducted within the core protected area of the RMBR in conjunction with Riding Mountain National Park. This information which is not accessible to the general public in any fashion at this time will be made available online via the RMBR Website. This project will continue into 2016.

Small Grants for Scientific Research - two grants were approved - \$3000.00 to Lynnea Parker for her research The Effectiveness of Educational Messaging Strategies in Reducing Human-Black Bear Conflicts and \$1000.00 to Maureen Twovoice for her research on Bison distribution in the RMNP region and FN relations with the bison.

Outreach and Public Awareness - working in collaboration with Assiniboine Community College Media Arts Program the RMBR produced a number of short videos promoting the environmentally sustainable projects of and in the RMBR including the At the Farm Gate project. These videos were posted on the RMBR website and Facebook pages. These short videos will help to convey the concept of what the biosphere is, why it is important and what it is doing. Continuing along the vein of public awareness the RMBR has continued to update the website and its social media sites to move toward becoming more of a hub of information for the entire region.

#### Other Partnerships

The Lake Group - Along with other stakeholder groups, the RMBR is a member of the Clear Lake Watershed Working Group (*Lake Group*). The Lake Group was formed to be an ongoing forum for discussion specific to Clear Lake in Riding Mountain National Park, the core protected area of the RMBR, and its watershed and to develop broad commitments towards actions which will assist in attaining a vision for the Lake. While the RMBR participates in this group there were no meetings this past year.

## 2016/2017 Projects

### 1. Conserve Biodiversity, Maintain Ecosystem Services and Foster the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

Native Species Garden in RMNP – The site for the native species gardens project has been prepared and over the summer the first of a number of plantings will be installed. The project will highlight the native species plants of the RMBR that can be utilized in both rural and urban home landscaping. This project will not only help to encourage local cottagers and cabin owners the importance of utilizing native plant species in their landscape within the national park but will continue to build awareness of the RMBR and its projects through signage regarding the RMBR and its mandated concept at these gardens. Furthermore, education programs will be designed to be delivered inside the national park along this theme.

ALUS project - Working with the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District on highlighting Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) projects in the RMBR

Tb Stakeholders Advisory Committee - as necessary the RMBR will continue to work with local stakeholders to find finding workable, sustainable and environmentally conscious solutions to the issue of Bovine Tb in elk and cattle within the Riding Mountain Eradication Area (RMEA) through meetings and the dissemination of information.

### 2. Support Mitigation and Adaptation to Global Environmental Change, including Climate Change

Bat Monitoring Program in conjunction with Friends of RMNP the RMBR has developed a citizen science program for it's two ASPnet candidate schools – Onanole Elementary and Rossburn Elementary. This program will inform students about the benefits of bats to the environment and how they may be affected by climate change. The school will receive a bat roosting box that will be set up in or near the school so that the students can participate in monitoring the numbers of bats seen as well as looking for evidence of disease, specifically White Nose Syndrome. We will be applying for further funding for equipment to be able to monitor bat roosting areas remotely.

### 3. Facilitate Sustainability Science and Education for Sustainable Development

Dissemination of Scientific Research - Over the next year the RMBR will be making available the scientific research that has been conducted within the core protected area of the RMBR in conjunction with Riding Mountain National Park. This information which is not accessible to the general public in any fashion at this time will be made available. TbSAC, water stewardship, Invasive species, wolf management meetings, making the science accessible to the general public on the RMBR website.

Small Grants for Scientific Research in the RMBR – we hope to continue to promote scientific research in the RMBR by distributing at least two small grants in the upcoming year.

#### 4. Contribute to Building Thriving Societies, Economies, and Human Settlements

Strategic Regional Community Planning - The Board of Directors has launched its strategic planning process for the Riding Mountain UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve (RMBR). This endeavour has brought our communities, business and education professionals together to discuss the future potential for the RMBR and to establish our direction so we can achieve lasting sustainability.

This planning effort follows naturally from our work during the last several years and is timely as the Man and Biosphere (MAB) Reserve programme under UNESCO has recently released an evaluation of the Man and Biosphere Reserve Madrid Action Plan and the final draft MAB Strategy – 2015-2025. These are an important guiding documents that will help us reposition ourselves to adapt to a rapidly changing economic environment.

Some key themes that keep emerging and drive our focus are: Cooperation within the Biosphere, Partnerships, Tourism and Economic Development, Science and Research, Climate Change and Rural Adaptation, Urbanization and its implications for the region.

Another aspect of strategic planning covered is a new and revitalized governance structure that will review the mandate of the RMBR

At the Farm Gate - a buy local initiative highlighting local producers and artisans and supporting important sustainable food system networks. The RMBR will continue to host these events in the upcoming year. Two markets are held in the spring and fall of the year and the website will be updated to include a video of the market to promote a higher awareness of the projects of the RMBR.

Community Gardens - working in partnership with a local seniors community group the RMBR will be turning the green space adjacent to the RMBR Erickson Office into a community garden. Funding has been received to build, easy to access, raised bed garden boxes for seniors and those that may have mobility issues as well as lower income families. Ten of these garden boxes will be ready for the 2015 garden season.

The intent is to utilize otherwise unproductive green space in a way that will benefit the local senior community in regards to connecting with each other and with the young people of the community. This project will encourage workshops and events that will inspire both young and old to transfer information regarding food production and to support other local food growers in the RMBR.

Local high school students will be involved in growing transplants for the gardens, getting the beds ready for planting and helping in the harvest activities. The gardeners will be encouraged to purchase their transplants from the local high school or local green houses as well as transfer their knowledge to those who may not be as knowledgeable about gardening or growing their own food in this region. The gardeners are also requested to give 10% of their harvest to local food banks. This pilot project has gained interest from a number of other communities throughout the RMBR to help with similar projects.

Developing further relationships with Provincial Government, other agencies, non-governmental agencies and organizations - over the last year members of the Board have met with the Minister of the Department of Conservation and Water Stewardship in regards to receiving sustainable funding as well as continuing to work with various environmental and agricultural agencies to collaborate on projects,

workshops and events. We will also concentrate our efforts to partner with other groups and agencies such as conservation districts, Nature Conservancy of Canada as well as local groups such as Friends of RMNP, educational institutions and seniors organizations. Connecting with First Nations of the RMBR is also a priority to determine where we can collaborate on issues or projects.

Ongoing projects include continued facilitation of the Tb Stakeholders Advisory Committee, hosting GPS Events and numerous GPS education programs, presenting education programs for over 800 students and adults on topics relating to native and invasive species, cultural and geological history and pre-history of the region, water stewardship and human impact on ecosystems. We continue to promote local farmers and artisans through our “At the Farm Gate” project through workshops on “Sustainable Food Networks” and “At the Farm Gate” Markets all of which help to develop sustainable tourism opportunities. As well we continue to review different approaches to the recommendations to the 2012 Periodic Review.

## Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve Work Plan 2016-17

### CONSERVATION

Contribution to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation.

Strategic Thrusts	Action/Initiative	Measurable	Calendar
Education and Outreach	At the Farm Gate	Complete one At the Farm Gate workshop and two successful At the Farm Gate public markets	Annually
	Community Gardens Initiative	Complete installation of gardens and successful crop production with local community participation	Annually
		Initiate similar program in one other community	2017
Scientific Research Collaboration and Communication	Invasive Species Network	Continued involvement with the Manitoba Invasive Species Council, Increased participation in Parks Canada Invasive Species Management, Development of Citizen Science Program	2016
	Wildlife Council	Increase involvement in the Wildlife Council and engagement with First Nations	2016
	Stakeholder Advisory Committee – Riding Mountain Eradication Area	Expansion of dialogue to include collaboration on conservation management issues beyond Bovine Tuberculosis	2016
	Publish the inventory of past and current research within the RMBR in partnership with Parks Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada	Capture the inventory of past and current research within the RMBR and publish on the RMBR website	2016

and post-secondary  
institutions

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**DEVELOPMENT**

Foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable.

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<b>Strategic Thrusts</b>	<b>Action/Initiative</b>	<b>Measurable</b>	<b>Calendar</b>
Eco tourism Initiative	Initiate discussions with regional tourism associations	Completed strategy for Ecotourism growth and promotion within the Biosphere Reserve	2017
Best Practice Identification and Dissemination	Collaborate with the Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association, its members and educational institutions to identify and share best practices in sustainable development	At least four identified best practices communicated through the various committees and networks and posted on the website	2017
Brand Development and Public Relations	Reintroduce the word “World” into the RMBR	Rebrand the Riding Mountain Biosphere Reserve as the “Riding Mountain UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve” for all public branding and promotion	2016
	Social Media	Regular Social Media updates to promote the RMBR and more active collaboration on social media with Parks Canada	2016
	Wikipedia page	Updated Wikipedia page	2016
	Information sessions	Complete at least six info sessions in collaboration with Parks Canada in various communities within the RMBR	Annually
	Formal presentations to Municipal Councils, Chambers of Commerce	Complete at least four formal presentations to key	Annually

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and other stakeholder groups within the RMBR

stakeholder groups

**LOGISTIC SUPPORT**

Support for Demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to local, regional, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development.

<b>Strategic Thrusts</b>	<b>Action/Initiative</b>	<b>Measurable</b>	<b>Calendar</b>
Organizational Renewal and Strategic Planning	Expansion of the Board of Directors	Addition of at least three new board members from the business community	2016
	Strategic Planning		
	Enhanced Annual General Meeting	Enhance AGM's with seminars and workshops	2017
Coordination Planning and Regional Sustainability Planning	Develop implementation plan for Coordination Planning Framework	Completion of a coordinated implementation plan with partner commitment	2017
Fund Development	Leverage Provincial Funding with partners	Engagement of at least one other funding partner	2017
	Fundraising initiatives	Completion of at least two fundraising initiatives	Annually