

GENERAL PROCESS TO NOMINATE AN AREA AS A BIOSPHERE RESERVE

November 2025

There is significant work required to be nominated and designated as a Biosphere Reserve (BR) and the whole process can take several years. The nomination process requires a rigorous collection of data and extensive public consultation (Table 1).

The following steps outline the general process to nominate an area as a BR.

- 1) **Familiarize yourself with the Biosphere nomination form** including understanding the data requirements for the application.
- 2) **Form a team** of committed individuals to gather data and develop the application.
- 3) **Contact the Program Officer - Natural Sciences at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO)** to let them know you are developing a BR proposal and to obtain advice and federal government support early in the process.
- 4) **Garner local support for designation** from the following:
 - a) First Nations - contact rights holders to explain the concept and garner their support. Note: Nominations must have the support of any Indigenous Nations within whose traditional territory(ies) the proposed BR are situated. This is considered foundational for BR's in Canada. Letters of support must form part of the nomination application.
 - b) Municipal, Provincial and Federal Government Agencies - contact government agencies to explain the concept and garner their support. Letters of support from these government agencies must form part of the nomination application.
 - c) Land Managers of the Proposed Core and Buffer Areas - contact managers of core and buffer areas early in the process to seek their cooperation and agreement
 - d) Stakeholders - Major stakeholders such as non-government organizations, local businesses, community groups, farming, forestry and fishing organizations and educational institutions of the region must generally agree with the idea of a BR before a nomination application is submitted.
 - e) General Public - Publish articles in the local press, hold "open houses" and public meetings, including visits to municipal councils, to involve the public in the dialogue and garner broad public support the designation of the area as a BR.
- 5) **Create a Coordinating Committee:** After rights holders, government agencies, key stakeholders, land managers and the public have given agreement to seek designation as a BR, a permanent coordinating committee should be formed that includes representation from First Nations, government agencies, key stakeholders and landowners, and the general public. It is important to create a strong organization from the start as this group normally coordinates the BR after designation is received. This will also involve consideration and co-determination of how best to include Indigenous peoples in the governance structure of the BR. A model of meaningful engagement must be established and demonstrated.
- 6) **Decide on a Governance Model:** There are a variety of governance models for BR's. BR's must have a corporate structure that fits within the regulatory framework set out by the federal and provincial government. Examples of governance models include:
 - a) Operate as a not-for-profit corporation with its own constitution and bylaws which operate within government regulations
 - b) Operate as a board of municipal representatives, right holders and interest groups
 - c) Operate as community foundations (e.g. Clayoquot Biosphere Trust)

- d) Governance Model based around university affiliation (e.g. Mount Arrowsmith)
- e) Adopt an entirely Indigenous-led governance model (e.g. Tsá-Tué)
- 7) **Define Boundaries and Zones:** Determine the geographic extent being proposed to determine the core, buffer and transition zones and to identify what natural and cultural features it contains. The extent of the area will depend on which groups, organizations, landowners and protected areas are committed to the idea. Defining the boundaries and zones may take some time and will involve extensive data gathering and public dialogue. Defining boundaries should be undertaken jointly with Indigenous peoples in the region.
- 8) **Define Objectives for Proposed Biosphere Reserve:** As stakeholder and public consultation progresses, input on objectives should be considered. Developing objectives will help determine priorities in conservation, sustainable development and capacity building and are a requirement of the application. Ensure they are matched appropriately with the Biosphere Reserve Strategic Framework and the Lima Action Plan.
- 9) **Initiate Projects in Proposed Biosphere Reserve:** A proposed area must already be carrying out some of the functions of a BR before the Canadian MAB Committee will recommend to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO that the nomination go forward to UNESCO. This functionality is demonstrated by the implementation of one or more biosphere projects, financial sufficiency and meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples. Applicants must also provide evidence of the area's willingness to participate actively in the national and international networks and initiatives, such as the Canadian Biosphere Regions Association (CBRA) and EuroMAP.
- 10) **Nominate your area:** The process of completing the nomination for could take a year or more. During that time, you should continue to build and strengthen public support for the BR.
 - a) A completed draft nomination form should be sent to the Program Officer of CCUNESCO for comments. CCUNESCO will request the Canadian MAB Committee to review and provide advice. Nominees should incorporate suggestions and revisions received and then send the completed final nomination to CCUNESCO for final review, along with all letters of support from key stakeholders, rights holders and signatures. The internal Canadian review process takes approximately six months so draft applications should be submitted by April of the year nominees hope to achieve designation
 - b) CCUNESCO submits nomination to UNESCO by September 30 of each year. UNESCO makes decisions on designations once a year, usually in late October.

Table 1. Summary of the information required for Biosphere Nomination Application and areas of alignment with the Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Service (BESS)

Information Required for Biosphere Reserve Nomination Application	Alignment with BESS
Part 1 Summary	
Fulfillment of Function	
Conservation Function – must contribute to conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation	X
Development Function – must foster socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable economic and human development	X
Logistic Support Function – support for demonstration projects, environmental education/training, research/monitoring for local, regional, national and global issues of conservation and sustainable development	X
Criteria for Designation as a Biosphere	

Information Required for Biosphere Reserve Nomination Application	Alignment with BESS
Encompass a mosaic of ecological systems representative of major biogeographic regions, including a grading of human intervention	X
Be of significance for biological diversity conservation	X
Provide an opportunity to explore and demonstrate approaches to sustainable development in region	X
Have an appropriate size to serve the three functions of BR's	X
Through appropriate zonation:	
- Legally constituted core area devoted to long-term protection	
- Buffer zones clearly identified and surrounding or contiguous to the core area, where only activities compatible with the conservation objectives can take place	X
- Transition areas where sustainable resource management practices are promoted and developed	
Organizational arrangements for the involvement and participation of a suitable range of public authorities, local communities and private interests in the design and carrying out of the functions of a BR	X
Cultural and social impact assessments, engagement with local First Nations	X
Mechanisms for Implementation	
Mechanisms to manage human use and activities in buffer zones	X
Management policy or plan	X
Designated authority to implement the plan	
Programs for research, monitoring, education and training	X
Part 2 Description	
Location, Area, Biogeographical Region	
Map of core, buffer and transition zones with total area of marine and terrestrial habitats	X
Rationale for zonation	
Land Use	
Summary of historical land uses, resource uses and landscape dynamics by zone	X
Main users of zones, including level of First Nations involvement	X
Rules (including customary or traditional) of land use in and access to each zone	X
Describe women's and men's different levels of access to and control over resources (do they use the resources differently?)	
Human Population	
Approximate number of people in each zone	X
Describe local communities living within or near	X
Names of major settlement areas	X
Cultural Significance, including written and spoken languages	X
Biophysical Characteristics	
General description of site characteristics, topography, altitude	X
General climate description	X
Meteorological station and data	X
Description of geology, geomorphology and soils	X
Biogeoclimatic zone	X
Main habitat types and land cover types,	
- Include all representative and unique habitats or land cover	X
- List characteristic species and describe important natural process or human impacts affecting the system	
Land cover and habitat type mapping	X
Ecosystem Service	

Information Required for Biosphere Reserve Nomination Application	Alignment with BESS
Identify ecosystem services provided by each ecosystem and beneficiaries of those services	X
Assessment of ecosystem services including indicators to evaluate, describe biodiversity involved in provision of ecosystem services	X
Main Objectives	
Describe objectives and their integration with biosphere functions, including components of biological and cultural diversity. Specify indirect pressures or organization issues	X
Describe sustainable development objectives	X
Indicate main stakeholders involved in management	X
Describe consultation procedure with stakeholders	X
How will stakeholder involvement in implementing and managing the BR be fostered?	X
Main sources of resources (financial, material and human) to implement the objectives of the biosphere and projects within it?	X
Conservation Function	
At the level of landscape and ecosystems:	
- Describe ecosystem and land cover types	
- Describe state and trends of ecosystem and/or land cover types and natural and human drivers of the trends	X
- Describe protection regimes for core areas and buffer zones	
- Which indicator or data are used to assess efficiency of actions/strategies used	
At the level of species and ecosystem diversity:	
- Identify main groups of species or species of interest for conservation objectives and describe where they occur	
- Identify threats or pressures on key species, their immediate causes, their underlying causes, and the main driving forces	X
- Identify measures and indicators to assess species group and the pressures on them	
- Who will undertake this work?	
- What actions are currently undertaken/intended to reduce these pressures?	
At the level of genetic diversity:	
- Indicate species or varieties that are of importance (conservation, medicine, food, cultural practices)	
- What ecological, economic, or social pressures or changes may threaten these species?	X
- What indicator will be used to assess the evolution of population status and associated use?	
- What measures will be used to conserve genetic diversity and practices associated with their conservation?	
Development Function	
Potential for fostering economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable:	
- Describe how/why the area has potential to serve as a site of excellence for promoting sustainable development	X
- How to assess changes and successes?	
Tourism	
- Describe types/locations of tourism and touristic facilities in the biosphere	
- Describe number of visitors and trends in visitation	
- How are tourism activities currently managed?	

Information Required for Biosphere Reserve Nomination Application	Alignment with BESS
- Indicate possible positive/negative impacts and how they will be assessed/managed	
Agricultural	
- Describe the types/location of agriculture and the people involved	
- Indicate possible positive/negative impacts and how they will be assessed/managed	
- What actions are currently undertaken, and which measures will be applied to strengthen positive impacts or reduce negative impacts on the BR objectives?	
Other Activities (i.e. Forestry, Urban Development)	
- Describe the types/locations of other activities and the people involved	
- Indicate possible positive/negative impacts of other activities and how they will be assessed and managed	X
- What actions are currently undertaken, and which measures will be applied to strengthen positive impacts or reduce negative impacts on the BR objectives?	
Benefits of Economic Activities to Local People	
- For the activities above, what income or benefits do local communities derive directly from the site proposed as a BR and how?	
- What indicators are used to measure such income or other benefits?	
Spiritual and Cultural Values and Customary Practices	
- Describe cultural and spiritual values and customary practices including languages, rituals and traditional livelihoods. Are any of these endangered or declining?	X
- Indicate activities aimed at identifying, safeguarding, promoting and/or revitalizing such values and practices	
- How should cultural values be integrated into the development process: elements of identity, traditional knowledge, social organization, etc.?	
Logistical Support Function	
Research and Monitoring	
- Describe existing and planned research programs and projects as well as monitoring activities, and the areas in which they are undertaken to address specific questions related to BR management and for the implementation of a management plan	X
- Summarize past research and monitoring activities related to BR management	
- Indicate what research infrastructure is available in the proposed BR and what role the biosphere will play in supporting such infrastructure	
Education for sustainable development and public awareness	
- Describe existing and planned activities, indicating the target group(s) and numbers of people involved and the area concerned	X
- What facilities and financial resources are (or will be) available for these activities?	
Contribution to the World Network of BR's	
- How will the proposed Biosphere Reserve contribute to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, its Regional and Thematic Networks?	
- What are the expected benefits of international cooperation for the BR?	
Internal and external communications channels and media	
- Will there be a Biosphere Reserve website?	
- Will there be an electronic newsletter?	X
- Will the Biosphere belong to a social network?	
Governance	
Management and Coordination Structure	

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Information Required for Biosphere Reserve Nomination Application	Alignment with BESS
- Is there a management/cooperation plan/policy for the BR as a whole? - Which actors are involved in preparing the management/cooperation plan? How are they involved? - Do local authorities formally adopt the management/cooperation plan? Are local authorities making reference to it in other policies or plans? If so, provide details. - What is the direction of the management/cooperation plan? How often is it revised or negotiated? - Describe the contents of the management/cooperation plan. Does it consist of detailed measures or detailed guidelines? Give some examples of measures or guidelines advocated by the plan. - Indicate how this management/cooperation addresses the objectives of the proposed Biosphere Reserve - Is the plan binding? Is it based on consensus? What will ensure that both the functioning of the BR and the structures in place will be satisfactory? Explain why and how, especially regarding fulfillment of the three functions of BR's (conservation, development, logistics) and the participation of local communities.	