

Progress on the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation in Canada*

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Abstract

Introduced in 2000 by Botanic Gardens Conservation International, the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation* has now been adopted by over 400 botanic gardens and networks around the world. The registration process developed by BGCI invites institutions to use the *International Agenda* as a flexible, non-binding framework for their activities in conservation and sustainable development. As of 2006, 27 institutions in Canada have registered their participation in the *International Agenda* with BGCI. The *International Agenda* has had important effects on the network and communities of botanic gardens in Canada, including helping to generate funding support for educational and conservation programmes, and in the development of the *Biodiversity Action Plan for Botanic Gardens in Canada* (2001), and in 2006 an update to the action plan and the nomination of Royal Botanical Gardens as the Canadian National Focal Point for the *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation*. In this presentation we will look at how the *International Agenda* has been used in Canada and the responses of individual institutions.

Introduction

The International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation (Wyse Jackson & Sutherland, 2000) was introduced to the botanical gardens community at the First Global Botanic Gardens Congress in Asheville, North Carolina, USA, in the summer of 2000.

Initially intended as an update for the 1989 *Botanic Gardens Conservation Strategy* (Peter Wyse Jackson, pers. comm.), months of consultations by Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) led to a completely different document and approach, which emphasizes the broad range of contributions that botanical gardens make to many issues. The *International Agenda* itself is a very lengthy set of recommendations for individual institutions, national networks and for BGCI as the global network. It makes reference to all relevant treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Immediately following the formal launch of the *International Agenda* in 2000, BGCI established a process called "Registration" through which institutions and networks could formally issue an endorsement of the document. While registrations were slow at first, by 2003 the pace had quickened. Royal Botanical Gardens became the first Canadian institution to register in the fall of 2001, through a resolution of the Board of Directors. By early 2007, 27 institutions in Canada and over 400 around the world have registered.

The purpose of this paper is to place the response to the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation* into context within Canada and make recommendations for effective use of the document by institutions and networks.

The Context of Botanical Gardens in Canada

The botanical gardens community within Canada is neither large nor old. The first botanical garden in Canada, at the medical school of what is now Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, existed only for about ten years in the middle of the 19th Century. The oldest and largest botanical gardens in Canada today trace their history to development in the first quarter of the 20th Century.

The exact number of institutions that could be classified as botanical gardens is not easy to ascertain. The largest reasonable number is 94 gardens, listed within Botanic Gardens Conservation International's PlantSearch Database. Of these, fewer than 30 could be classified as institutions open to the public with educational, research or plant conservation programmes. A study of educational needs and capacity conducted in 2005 identified 17 institutions with educational programmes or present capacity (McIvor, 2004).

Botanical gardens have not, until recently, been perceived as institutions with strong national relevance in Canada. Multiple attempts were made in the 20th Century to develop a national botanical garden under the auspices of the federal government, but none were successful (Chan, 1972). A national arboretum was developed in Ottawa, called the Dominion Arboretum, under the control of the federal agriculture ministry. This institution included a botanical garden section, but was not developed as a major institution. By the early 1990s, no paid staff were assigned to the Dominion Arboretum; functions of that institution which remain are provided by a volunteer group called the "Friends of the Farm."

Although there was not sufficient interest within the government to support a national botanical garden in the 20th Century, there have been multiple programmes undertaken to link and strengthen the programmes of botanical gardens in Canada.

Several issues lie behind the difficulties of linking and development botanical gardens capacity in Canada. Geographic distance and the resulting isolation are important but are only one element. Another is that each institution is very much an individual entity. Approximately half of the institutions in Canada are based in or operated by university departments of quite varying disciplines, ranging from departments of home economics to forestry and agriculture. For the most part the linkages between these institutions and traditional university botany departments is weak, especially as Canada now has only a handful of such departments. The remaining institutions are a mixed group of agencies reporting to municipal, provincial or federal government departments, or are self-governing not-for-profit organizations.

Development of the Planning Framework in Canada

In 1995, following consultations which led to the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy, the Canadian Botanical Conservation Network (CBCN) was launched as a project of Royal Botanical Gardens, with funding support from Environment Canada, McMaster University and two corporate sponsors, in addition to funds provided by RBG itself. The premise of CBCN is that botanical gardens and arboreta have a great relevance to the conservation of biological diversity and its sustainable use. Since founding, the network achieved incorporation as a charitable organization in 1998, and presently has about 20 institutional members.

In 1997 discussions with Environment Canada and BGCI led to the idea of an action plan on biodiversity issues specifically directed at the botanical gardens in Canada. A new project to complete the plan was launched in 1998. Following more than two years of consultations and editing, the *Biodiversity Action Plan for Botanic Gardens and Arboreta in Canada* (Galbraith, 2001) was published by Royal Botanical Gardens and CBCN. The text of the Action Plan actually predates the release of the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation*. The intent of the *Action Plan* was to bring together the national aspirations of the *Canadian Biodiversity Strategy* (http://www.eman-rese.ca/eman/reports/publications/rt_biostrat/intro.html) with the

programmes that could be delivered by the botanical gardens sector. The project itself was largely funded through Environment Canada, by a three year contribution agreement. The *Canadian Biodiversity Action Plan* was developed with the *International Agenda* in mind.

In an effort to provide an explicit linkage between the targets of the *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation* (GSPC) (CBD Secretariat, 2003) and the work of botanical gardens, BGCI held global and regional workshops at the Second World Botanic Gardens Congress in Barcelona in 2004. The global workshop resulted in a set of specific targets linked to the GSPC but appropriate to the botanical gardens sector. These targets were published in the first issue of BGCI's new publication, *BGjournal* (No. 1(1) July 2004).

By 2005 it was clear that the 2001 *Canadian Action Plan* was already behind the times. The publication of the 2001 plan preceded the completion of the GSPC, and several other relevant developments. Under the auspices of the Investing in Nature: A Partnership for Plants in Canada project, funded by Botanic Gardens Conservation International and its partner HSBC, a global financial services firm, and with support from the Museum Assistance Program of the Canadian Department of Heritage, Royal Botanical Gardens and BGCI-Canada undertook an update of the 2001 *Action Plan*. This document, published in both English and French, showcases plant conservation and education projects across Canada in addition to making a coherent set of recommendations that align with international recommendations and the ideas in the 2001 *Action Plan*. Environment Canada kindly provided support for translation of the document into French.

They were also used in developing the 2006 update to the *Biodiversity Action Plan for Botanical Gardens and Arboreta in Canada*. The update is entitled *Conserving Plant Diversity: the 2010 Challenge for Canadian Botanical Gardens* (Galbraith & McIvor, 2006). This document is subtitled *the 2010 Challenge for Botanic Gardens in Canada* because 2010 is widely recognized as a watershed year. It is the year that the targets of the GSPC are to be achieved; it is also the year in which a series of other important targets related to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development are to be completed or reviewed by the UN.

Progress since 2001

The strong linkages among all of these documents have at their heart the central role of the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation*. They form a deliberate and coherent set of recommendations stretching from the global to the local. Every botanical garden, regardless of its size or present capacity, can make use of these documents to indicate their relevance to their stakeholders, funders, governing agencies and the visiting public.

Despite the complete framework which now exists linking Canadian institutions to the North American and global situations and the many ways that botanical gardens can be relevant to conservation issues, the basic action plans that provide the relevance are at times daunting documents. The *International Agenda* itself contains over 180 individual recommendations, which would be impossible for any individual institution to implement. Instead, individual institutions can scan the many recommendations within these documents and select those which best fit their own capacities and plans, or which may provide guidance in the development of future programmes.

As of 2007, a total of 27 institutions across Canada have registered with BGCI as being in support of the International Agenda. This is the largest single expression of interest in the conservation and biodiversity mission of botanical institutions within Canada. The list of registrants includes several museums and major parks in addition to more conventional botanical gardens. Indeed, it has been suggested registration with BGCI in the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation* provides a self-selection process defining botanical gardens (Galbraith & Rapley, 2005), complementing and expanding an earlier definition by Wyse Jackson (1999) included in the text of *International Agenda* itself.

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