

## Executive Summary

In Britain, the National Trust is the country's largest landowner after the State and the Crown, protecting over half a million acres (200,000 hectares) with a paid staff of 6,000, and serving as an umbrella organization for a variety of environmental, heritage, and social initiatives (Wolinsky, 49; Nation Trust, 1999). The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) is the largest of these initiatives, supporting local action through education, advocacy, and the training of volunteers with practical conservation skills. The basic tenets of conservation are combined within a marketable product, as volunteers pay to participate in projects, and indirectly foster awareness, community involvement, and economic self-sufficiency. Despite the financial success of the BTCV and the popularity of programs with both British citizens and international visitors, no other country has adopted this unique approach to conservation on a similar scale. This report will contrast current Canadian conservation mechanisms with the objectives, structure, advantages, and disadvantages of the BTCV, as a framework to examine the suitability of the organization as a potential model for an effective and financially self-sufficient conservation agency in Canada.

### *Method and Scope of Study*

The report is essentially based on secondary research, and two features of the BTCV serve as the central focus: the concept of volunteers as a direct source of revenue, and the role of land trusts in protecting natural and cultural heritage. Volunteers are an essential component of the BTCV, but the connection with land trusts is less direct. The combination of volunteers and land trusts within the BTCV contributes to the self-sufficiency of the organization, and if the BTCV is to serve as a potential model for a Canadian agency, a similar structure may be necessary. Therefore, the scope of study for this report concentrates on the conditions that support this structure.

### *The Role of Conservation*

A brief discussion on the theoretical background of conservation is provided to explain and legitimize the role of organizations like the BTCV. Regardless of any ethical arguments over the merits of specific conservation strategies, "the obligation to endure" (Carson, 13; Livingston, 28) demands a degree of environmental protection to ensure that the necessary resources are available for future generations to survive. In 1987, the United Nations (UN) Brundtland Commission Report extended the ideals of conservation to the global arena through the concept of sustainable development, defined as "...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs..." (World Commission on Environment and Development, 43). At the UN Conference on Environment and

Development in 1992, known as the Earth Summit, 172 governments agreed to establish a series of laws, principles, and goals that would move the world toward sustainable development. Among the most significant of these was Agenda 21 (WETV, 1999), an international plan of action for achieving a balance between economic development and environmental protection. The significance of Agenda 21 stemmed from the spirit of international commitment, emphasis on local action, and overwhelming optimism for positive change (WETV, 1999).

Agenda 21 “invoked a new perspective of an interconnected human and natural world that could only be corrected if treated as a unified whole” (WETV, 1999), and emphasized the power of individuals and local communities to initiate change. Through political will, social discipline, and education, these local forces could cumulatively mobilize change on a global scale (WETV, 1999). Most conservation organizations, and the BTCV in particular, embody the principles of sustainable development and Agenda 21, with the underlying objective of empowering individuals as agents for change.

#### *Canadian Mechanisms for Protecting Natural and Cultural Heritage*

A variety of conservation measures to protect natural and cultural heritage may be enacted by different layers of government, self-imposed by private landowners, operated through private-public partnerships, or regulated by a non-government organization (NGO), and more than one mechanism may apply to a particular site (Endicott, 3-4). Given the range of available measures, a conservation program can be designed to suit specific environmental, social, and economic needs, and a new model should only be introduced if it fills a void in the existing system and offers benefits that are otherwise unavailable. The various measures to protect natural and cultural heritage in Canada are compared to demonstrate the benefits of land trusts and the BTCV model. This comparison reveals several key weaknesses in the existing measures, including:

- a critical lack of funding;
- a tendency for government policies to reflect competing mandates and jurisdictions;
- a history of inadequate implementation;
- an inability to simultaneously protect both environmental and cultural heritage sites;
- a lack of community opportunities for participation and education; and
- a failure to initiate and maintain conservation partnerships among the government, local communities, NGOs, First Nations, and industry.

These issues were considered when selecting a potential model for an effective and financially self-sufficient conservation agency in Canada. Besides addressing the existing weaknesses in Canadian conservation efforts, the BTCV capitalizes on the growing interest in

land trusts, offers the economic benefits of ecotourism, has experienced tremendous success in the UK, and provides the opportunity to discuss the challenges of applying a British conservation model to Canada.

#### *The BTCV and Application of the Model to Canada*

The BTCV began in 1959 as an offshoot of the National Trust, “to provide a volunteer workforce for the management of nature reserves” (BTCV, 1998). In September 1995, following consultation with partners, staff, and volunteers, the organization adopted a four-year strategy with objectives in seven key areas, as follows.

1. Practical Conservation
2. Creating Volunteering Opportunities
3. Supporting Local Action
4. Training and Education
5. Advocacy
6. Leading by Example
7. Organizational Capacity

The BTCV has continually evolved to reflect the changing values and needs of British society, but to be successfully implemented outside of Britain, the BTCV model must be adapted to the unique characteristics of each country. For Canada, a truly national conservation agency would have to address four major obstacles: market demands, geography, Canadian perceptions of community and the environment, and existing policies. Given the integral role of land trusts and the National Trust in the BTCV, the opportunities and constraints for land trusts in Canada are examined, with particular emphasis on current policy structure.

#### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

The obstacles suggest that while the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers serves as an example for a unique approach to conservation, the specific approach of the organization is ideally suited to Britain, but perhaps not to the physical and political characteristics of Canada. A successful application of the BTCV model to Canada would require modifications to the model itself and several broad institutional changes to government policies and programs. The recommended modifications are outlined below.

#### *Modifications of the Model:*

Like the BTCV, a conservation organization offering working holidays in Canada would work in conjunction with the efforts of government agencies and accept any federal, provincial, or municipal funding available, but would ultimately function as an independent NGO, with the

following considerations:

- Centralize standards but decentralize implementation
- Cooperate with existing conservation agencies
- Acknowledge the geographical limits
- Evolve from a regional to national level
- Establish private-public partnerships

Broad Institutional Changes:

While a Canadian BTCV-style organization would ideally operate as an NGO, the government still plays an important role in regards to copnservation, and several broad changes could improve conditions for both government agencies and NGOs.

- Harmonize and enforce existing policies
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Evaluate the current funding structure for environmental initiatives
- Reflect federal environment policy in the taxation system
- Encourage the growth of land trusts as a conservation mechanism

These recommendations represent beneficial changes not just for the hypothetical application of the BTCV model to Canada, but for the general application of conservation principles. While the geographic and political constraints of the Canadian landscape may make a BTCV-style agency impractical, the underlying limitations of current protection mechanisms must ultimately be addressed. To truly succeed, the creation of an effective and financially self-sufficient conservation agency must stem from a comprehensive change in the approach to protecting natural and cultural heritage in Canada.