

Appendix C. Application of Connectivity Planning Work: Summary of a Multi-party Stakeholder Workshop

Prepared by Rachel Holt (Independent)

Introduction

The Transboundary Connectivity Group jointly organized a workshop in November 2015 in the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO), BC, as part of an implementation strategy for the Transboundary Connectivity analysis work (see full report). This Appendix summarizes the process undertaken, and evaluates whether the workshop was effective and how such an event could be improved in the future. This appendix does not summarize all the substance of the workshop (e.g., the specific comments on potential connectivity corridors evaluated etc.). The workshop was organized by the OCCP (Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program), the Transboundary Connectivity Group, and the University of British Columbia Okanagan College (UBCO). Financial and product support for the workshop was provided by the Transboundary Connectivity Group (funding provided by the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative).

Partners and Participants

A wide diversity of people (29 invitees and 10 organizers) representing a range of organizations attended the event (see table of Participant Organizations below). The workshop was aimed primarily at decision makers in different capacities: First Nation, municipal and provincial government staff and members were present at the workshop, and also a range of forest and land management professionals and consultants who may apply knowledge about connectivity in their day-to-day work. Participants had a range of views about why they attended the workshop (Fig. C.1).

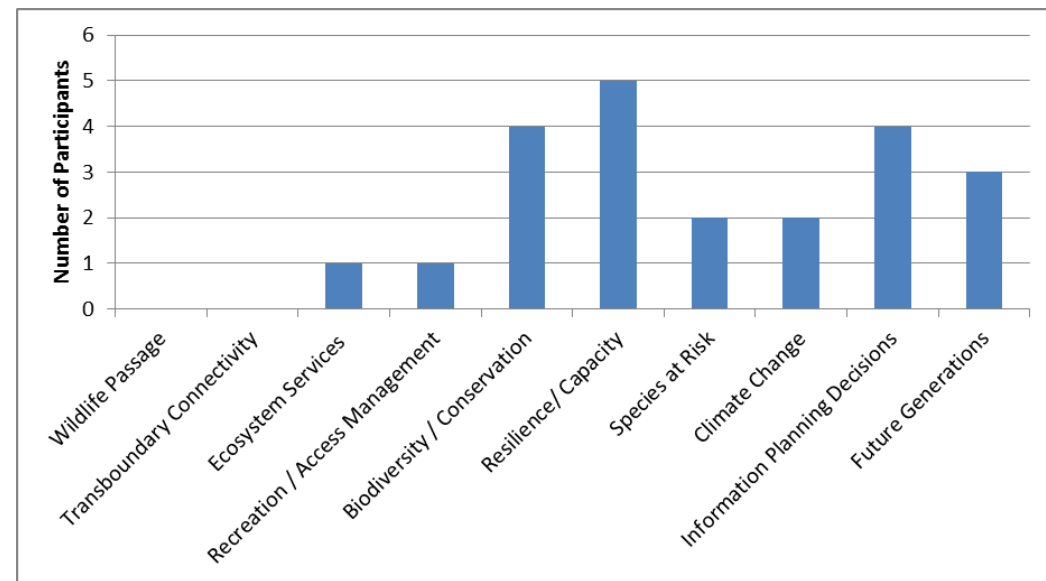


Figure C.1. Participant’s reasons for attending the workshop.

Workshop Goals and Structure

1. Learn about ecosystem connectivity planning tools.
2. Identify important potential wildlife habitat corridors in the Central Okanagan for further work.
3. Share knowledge about why the selected corridors should be prioritized for protection and/or restoration.
4. Propose an actionable strategy for on-the ground implementation of restoration/protection of the selected corridors.

An overview of relevant technical/analysis information from UBCO and the Transboundary Group was provided to participants in the form of presentations and “working” maps.

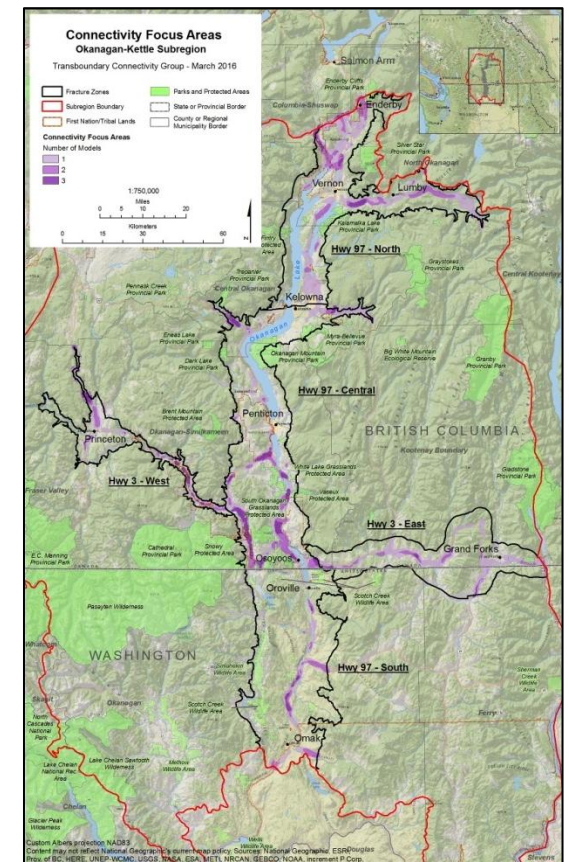
In the introductory session, an overview of why and how to plan for connectivity, in context of the regional importance of the Okanagan Valley was presented (UBCO and OCCP consultant). This was followed by a presentation of the results of the Transboundary analysis (see full report) which again put the Okanagan region into its broader landscape context. Our presentation was well received and was referred to throughout the remainder of the day’s discussion.

The key graphic that raised particular interest in this work was the summary figure that shows about 40 locations where Connectivity Focus Areas for all three perspectives (shrub-steppe species, montane species, and landscape integrity) overlapped within the Okanagan-Kettle study area (see inset map opposite and Fig. ES.1 in full report).

These broad regional overview presentations were followed by a more detailed examination of potential connectivity corridors within the Central Okanagan area of interest (primarily the eastern portion of the RDCO); this area having been identified as having a conservation focus in both sets of analysis. The workshop brought together the independent work of students and staff at UBCO, and combined these with the Transboundary Connectivity Focus Areas relevant to this smaller study area. The data were combined and used to identify six different potential corridors within the area of interest, which were then used to elicit comments from participants about the potential of each identified corridor for future connectivity actions.

The remainder of the workshop focused on encouraging participants to engage with all the data presented with an aim of adding operational realities to the data driven map products in order to gain insight into issues relevant for connectivity management within this small area of the Central Okanagan.

Breakout groups were used to (a) assess why people came to the workshop and what they considered the most important reason for protecting connectivity (see results above); and (b) examine the alternate potential



corridors identified within the Central Okanagan, and to prioritize and revise these options as the groups felt inclined. People were asked to consider a wide range of factors when drawing on maps and creating comment (Table C.1). Detailed notes were taken on maps from this exercise and can be used to inform next steps.

Table C.1. Factors break-out groups were asked to consider when evaluating connectivity maps.

Factors to consider when drawing on the maps and in discussions on corridor locations		
barriers	transportation corridors	corridor width
good linkages	utility corridors	seasonal / diurnal needs
other protected areas	habitat types	species life stage needs
locations or range of species at risk or of importance	range or forestry issues or benefits	known travel paths of species
riparian or wetlands that may be important	climate change (shifts, migration)	steep slopes or cliffs or elevations
multiple use areas	existing or future land uses	linkages to other jurisdictions
management options	undisturbed areas	valley bottom
gullies	farmland	other corridors not noted

Workshop Effectiveness: A Summary of Evaluation Sheets

What did participants find most interesting?

From the summary of responses (Fig. C.2), participants were primarily engaged by the discussions themselves, the consideration of the concepts (from the project overviews), and in discussing how these ideas could be implemented. This is clearly a necessary first step in the process of developing a potential actionable connectivity strategy, but needs follow-up to move the work forward.

The participants differed quite significantly in the extent to which they were willing to engage in the process of identifying priorities within the proposed connectivity corridors. Some participants were very keen to share their thoughts on priority areas within the proposed corridors. The results of these discussions were captured on maps and can be used to follow up from the workshop to further the process of developing a specific connectivity strategy in the RDCO. This was not true of all participants however, and building information on priority connections was of lower interest to others likely because people really didn't have enough time to engage in the details, and in some groups at least, a lack, or perceived lack of knowledge of what was on the ground made participants wary of prioritizing some areas over others. For example, one group in particular identified that they would like to see more ground-level information before prioritizing any potential corridor areas for action. For example, they wanted to see existing natural areas that could be built upon to increase permeability overall, and with all scales and types of management included (e.g., everything from forest management reserves—old growth management areas and riparian reserves—to regional parks and utility corridors). For these individuals, identifying individual corridors to focus on was not the most appropriate strategy.

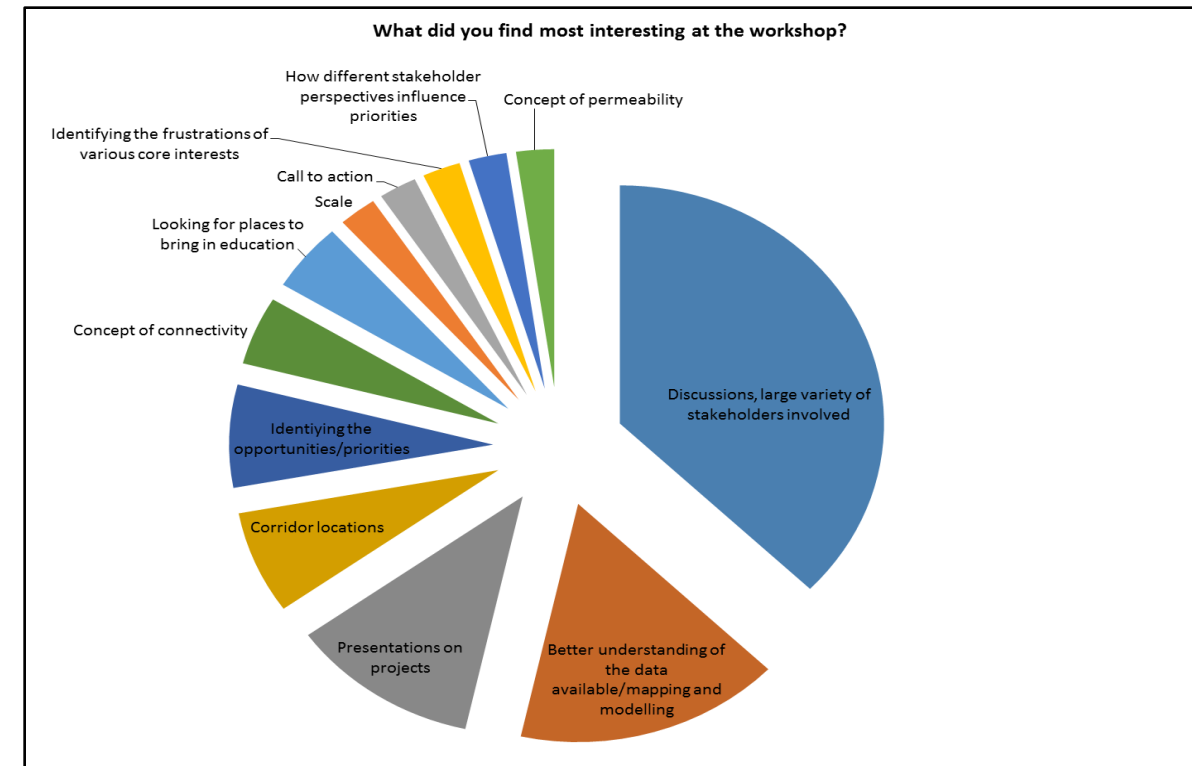


Figure C.2. Aspects of the workshop participants found most interesting.

Workshop Evaluation

The workshop was considered an overall success by participants, with 81% of the respondents noting that the knowledge presented at the workshop had met their expectations (Fig. C.3). Participants gave the workshop an overall 3, 4 or 5 star rating (Fig. C.4).

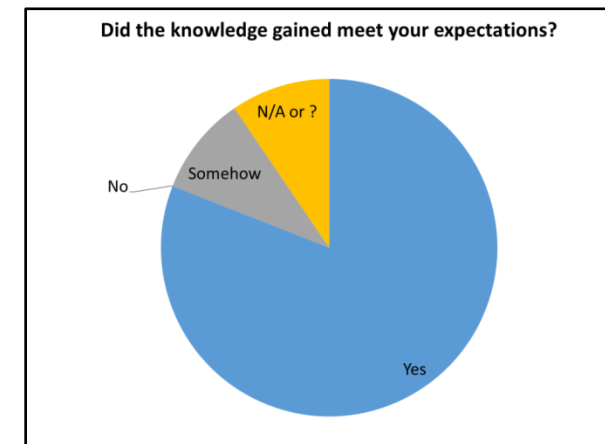


Figure C.3. Participant's evaluation of workshop expectations.

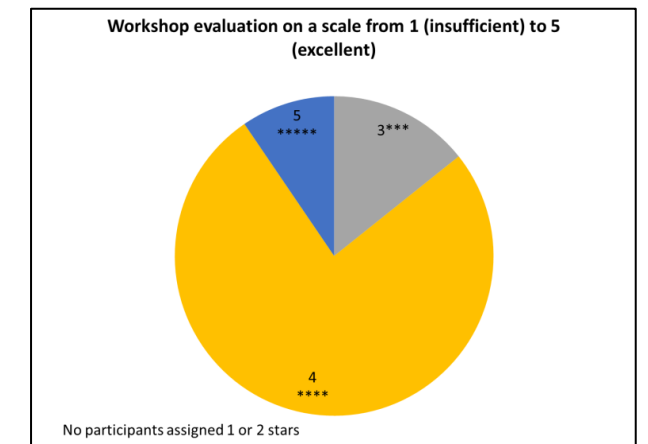


Figure C.4. Participant's rating of workshop.

Were Workshop Goals Met?

Based on the workshop evaluation results, the organizing team could assess how effectively the stated goals had been met.

Goal 1. *Learn about ecosystem connectivity planning tools.* Goal 1 appears to have been met successfully, and the workshop evaluation results above reflect this.

Goal 2. *Identify important potential wildlife habitat corridors in the Central Okanagan for further work.* For Goal 2, there was a hope that people present would augment the mapped knowledge and make the modeled information reflect a more realistic landbase and set of criteria. Some detailed information was gathered during the workshop—in the form of comments on the draft maps—and this could be further built upon by the proposed local action team. This goal was therefore somewhat met, but there was insufficient time in the workshop to more fully meet this goal. In addition, many participants provided direction that they wanted decisions to be built on additional information, and did not want to prioritize solely within the options given. This general advice is also of use to the group moving forward.

Goal 3. *Share knowledge about why the selected corridors should be prioritized for protection and/or restoration.* Goal 3 was reasonably well met. The overview presentations, followed by detailed examination of potential corridors moved towards this goal. However, there remains some disagreement about whether single corridor areas should be managed for, rather than working to increase overall permeability of the landscape where opportunities arise to do so.

Goal 4. *Propose an actionable strategy for on-the ground implementation of restoration/protection of the selected corridors.* Goal 4 was not met during the workshop. In retrospect, this was an unachievable goal and this workshop was very much a first step. The proposed Connectivity Action Team concept (which was an outcome of the workshop driven by the regional district staff) will be a key step in moving towards an actionable strategy in the future. Having individual “champions” is key to moving the concept of connectivity forward within the variety of organizations present.

It is interesting to note that although the organizers may view the workshop goals as being only partly met, the participants were largely very positive about the effectiveness and utility of the workshop (see figures above).

Insights and Next Steps

Gaining trust and understanding. The introductory sessions provided a relatively high-level overview of the concepts of connectivity both regionally and locally. Both groups (Transboundary and UBCO) provided an overview of the technical work that underpins the various maps presented to the groups. Given the nature of a one day workshop, this summary was relatively cursory however, and one of the difficulties raised within the breakout groups was a lack of deep understanding of what was captured within the mapping layers. This superficial overview tended to create, at least for some of the more technically minded participants, some level of distrust of the products.

- Provide the detailed reports and maps to participants, to increase the level of understanding. Where an organization likely to have capacity to implement this work is identified (e.g., Nature Trust, see below), it may be useful to take a more targeted approach and spend more time explaining and

engaging on a technical level with individuals in order to increase uptake and implementation of the mapping analyses.

- Explain more clearly the concept of scale and what the maps do, and do not promote. For example, the fact that one of the potential corridors presented ran through the Kelowna airport was sufficient to send one group into a long debate about the base information used in the mapping.

Consider current management and ecosystem context more explicitly. A number of participants commented that the detailed connectivity maps did not reflect current management on the ground (e.g., Old Growth Management Areas, Wildlife Habitat Areas, Ungulate Winter Range etc.), and that this was a missed opportunity to anchor future connectivity corridors onto existing natural areas. Similarly, the ecosystem context (e.g., natural disturbance types and climate change effects) were identified as important input for decision-making going forward but was not presented as background information at the workshop.

- In future work, identify areas with the potential to add to connectivity or permeability and include as background information for potential conservation / connectivity anchors. Include the wide range of information from existing forest management reserves to semi-natural areas such as utility corridors.

Identify and capitalize on actual opportunities. Within the group there was significant support for focusing the mapping on areas that are not only potentially interesting from a mapped connectivity perspective, but which also represent specific opportunities today. A number of participants noted that many opportunities have been lost in the last 20 years, even while there has been generic discussion on connectivity but no action. Opportunities for action are increasingly limited and focusing on these even if the actual connectivity values are relatively low was deemed important.

Build upon, or create political will. The organizations present at the workshop had a diverse set of needs and wants in terms of connectivity information. Some organizations (such as the regional district and provincial MFLNRO) have staff who are very keen to apply concepts of connectivity and who expressed significant frustration over 20 years of planning not being implemented (e.g., the Forest Ecosystem Networks that were initiated in 1995). These potential adopters of the connectivity modeling and analysis information have no internal frameworks or mechanisms within which to apply the ideas.

- There is an urgent need to search for opportunities to create political will to support connectivity planning. Linking this to climate adaptation is one current opportunity within BC as the province announces “adaptation” funding (March 2016).

Identify existing champions. Within the Regional District of Central Okanagan the presence of a local champion has already moved the connectivity conversation forward (e.g., they helped organize this workshop). Their advocacy to create a local Connectivity Action Team is a crucial factor in moving connectivity work from the abstract to implementation in the RDCO. Identifying similar individuals to become champions in adjacent regional districts, and directly engaging with them with the results of connectivity analysis could help managers embrace and more effectively implement connectivity assessment products across a wider area within the Transboundary Region.

Identify action-ready audiences. The regional district is currently working on ways to include connectivity work in their planning and decision making process. Other organizations, such as the Nature Trust of BC, already have a decision-making framework into which connectivity results could be incorporated. Targeting

of this particular organization, as well as other similar groups who make land management or acquisition decisions may be an effective strategy for increased uptake of the connectivity analysis results.

Review the Transboundary results. The Transboundary Connectivity Group has disseminated the draft results of their work through various venues (WildLinks, webinars, this workshop), but the final map that identifies Connectivity Focus Areas has not been systematically reviewed. This map was the focus of much interest at the Central Okanagan workshop – but areas outside of the Central Okanagan were not discussed in detail. Future steps for the Transboundary Group should include a more thorough review of the areas identified with on-the-ground staff (e.g., MFLNRO or local conservation organizations and individuals) to assess the extent to which the areas identified resonate with these groups.

Identify threats, opportunities and new audiences for the information. After the Connectivity Focus Area maps are reviewed, a more specific analysis of threats and opportunities could be undertaken. For example, overlaying the Connectivity Focus Areas with current land management (ownership, usage, etc.) would help identify threats, conservation opportunities, and target audiences for action. These could include looking for potential areas for acquisition of private land, identifying potential land owners who may have an interest in managing for connectivity (e.g., targeted “selling” of the connectivity/biodiversity concepts to vineyards or other land owners interested in their public image, or promoting the use of conservation easements), and raising awareness about potential loss of opportunities within these areas to regional or provincial staff or potential industrial partners.

Organizations Attending the Workshop

<i>Organization/Company</i>	<i>Job Title (where available)</i>
BC Forests and Range	
BC Parks	Conservation Specialist
BC Wildlife Federation	BCWF IFC - INTERIOR Representative; BCWF Region 8
Bearfoot Resources Ltd.	
District of Lake Country	Planner
District of Peachland	Planning Administrator
Ecoscape Environmental	Natural Resource Biologist
Environment Canada	
MFLNRO	Ecosystems biologist
Geostream Environmental Consulting	Geoscientist
Ministry of Agriculture	Agroforestry Specialist
Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program	
Okanagan Nation Alliance	Senior Wildlife Biologist
Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship	Executive Director
RDCO Env'tl Advisory Commission	Chair
RDCO Parks Services	Manager - Park Planning/Capital Projects/
Regional District of Central Okanagan	Director - Parks Services Department
Regional District North Okanagan	Manager, Parks
SeedsCo Conservation Community	
The Nature Trust of British Columbia	Ecosystem Specialist
Tolko	Manager, Stewardship and Tenures, BC and Manitoba
Transboundary Connectivity Group	
UBCO	
UBCO Centre for Culture and Technology	
UBCO/COLT	Associate Professor
University of British Columbia	
Westbank First Nations	