

**Richard R. Schneider,
Biodiversity Conservation
in Canada: From Theory
to Practice. (Edmonton:
Canadian Centre for
Translational Ecology, 2019.)**

Reviewed by Carolyn Campbell

Know a young person who dreams of applying knowledge and passion to help save wildlife from the many threats facing them? Know an angler, scrambler, hunter, skier, or birder who wants to help champion 'protection' for a special place? Know someone in mid-career or retirement who wants to apply their skills to make a difference in the conservation world? If you do, give them this book.

At first glance, *Biodiversity Conservation in Canada* looks like a course textbook, which could discourage you from opening it if you're looking for a good read in your free time. Yes, it can be used as a textbook, but I see it as an accessible primer for conservation-minded Canadians, especially Albertans, to appreciate and apply. There are clear, useful summaries of current ecological and conservation science, from species to landscape. Even better are the insights on the complex stew of social and political realities in which our conservation decisions have occurred and will continue to occur. Alberta issues are often the examples.

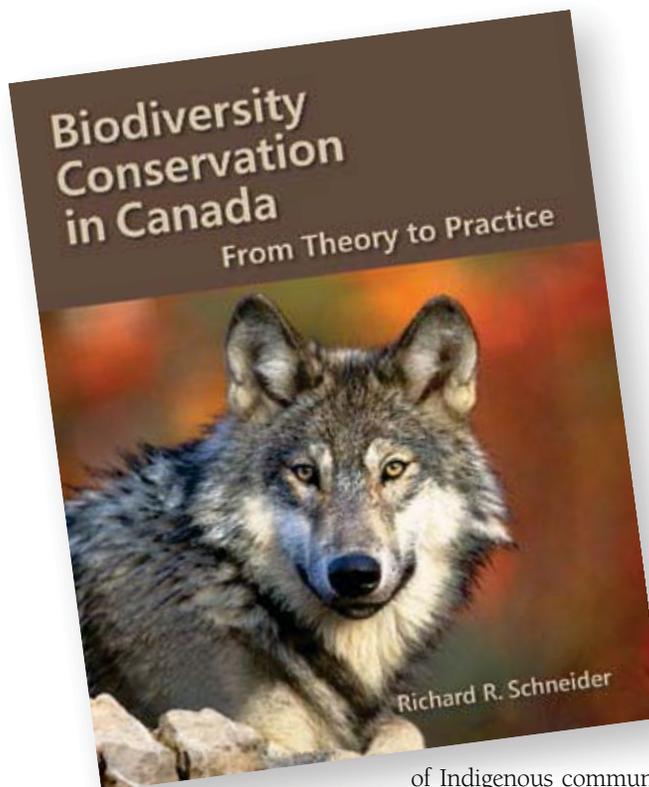
Author Richard Schneider's career has been about bridging the worlds of conservation science, policy and action. As a research associate with University of Alberta's Biological Sciences department, Rick's recent research has focused on adapting conservation decisions for the anticipated impacts and uncertainties of climate change. He also is a seasoned environmental advocate, having worked as Executive Director for CPAWS Northern Alberta; in that role he was deeply engaged in land use planning and protected areas advocacy. Early in his career, he worked as a consultant on various wildlife conservation projects across Canada for industry and governments. The voice he gives this book is that of a fair-minded and pragmatic mentor.

I was hooked from the second chapter, History of Conservation. "Ohhhh, that's how

come" I found myself saying many times, as Schneider describes how North American game management and forest management evolved, the tipping points of the 1960s and 1990s, and the political struggles behind major American and Canadian environmental laws.

Later chapters dig further into the evolving roles of industries, indigenous communities, and environmental groups in conservation decisions. Schneider's portrayal of the dynamics within government is particularly useful for those seeking to become more effective activists. He describes the 'aspirations' of laws and analyzes why it is so difficult to break free of the strong 'gravitational pull' of policy inertia. He provides some clear perspectives on the conditions under which historic conservation gains have occurred, and what to look for to make further gains, though there are no hard rules.

Another aspect I really enjoyed was a guide to current debates in the conservation biology field, and good references to follow up on. There's also a chapter on the critically important issue of adapting conservation decisions to climate change. My one regret about the book is that it doesn't give enough space, in my opinion, to the emerging role



of Indigenous communities and Aboriginal rights in conservation decisions.

The Alberta-based case studies take us deeper into big conservation challenges. For broad land-use planning, we learn of Al-Pac's notable forestry management approaches over its huge northern tenure area and of attempts in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan processes to deal with oil sands and other cumulative industrial impacts. Wildlife habitat conservation cases include swift fox re-establishment, the collapse and recovery of walleye in Alberta lakes, and up-to-date insights on the ongoing saga of Alberta woodland caribou management challenges.

Above all, this book conveys how and why conservation is fundamentally a "trade-off" land-use process, not a matter of ecological evidence. So I was pleased to see a good overview about some best practices for considering such trade-offs, including a whole chapter on 'structured decision making' to involve diverse stakeholder groups.

The exceptional value of Schneider's book is spotlighting the practical challenges and messiness of Canadian conservation, here and now. For Albertans interested in improving wildlife and wilderness outcomes, this is a great guide.

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