

FROM LAGGARD TO LEADER?



**CANADA'S RENEWED FOCUS
ON PROTECTING NATURE
COULD DELIVER RESULTS**

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Front cover: Grand Lake, NS.

Photo: Irwin Barrett

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Kananaskis region, AB.

Photo: Jeni Foto

CANADA IS A COUNTRY DEEPLY CONNECTED TO NATURE. It underpins our sense of place, our well-being, and our economy. Maintaining the health of Canada's ecosystems to sustain wildlife and people requires the creation of an extensive network of protected natural areas as the foundation for effective nature conservation strategies. This report examines Canada's performance relative to other countries in protecting our land and freshwater, as well as progress made towards our international commitments.

Kelly River, NS.

Photo: Irwin Barrett



In 2010, as part of a worldwide effort to stem the tide of biodiversity loss, Canada committed under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to protect at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020 and to improve the quality of protected area systems so they conserve nature more effectively. Achieving this target is an important step towards the much larger-scale protection that is needed in the long-term to safeguard functioning ecosystems, healthy wildlife populations, and sustainable communities.

The report finds that Canada currently ranks last among G7 countries, with only 10.6% of our land and freshwater protected. It also finds that we lag behind other large countries, such as Brazil (29.5% protection), China (17.1%), and Australia (17%). With all Canadian ecosystems in declining health and Canada's list of endangered species growing each year largely due to habitat loss, urgent action is needed to protect much more of our land and inland waters.

Jurisdiction over land in Canada is shared among federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments. With 90% of Canada's land and 100% of inland waters managed by governments, all jurisdictions need to work together to achieve our conservation commitments. The report points to hopeful signs that Canadian governments are finally starting to do this. Canadian governments have taken positive steps over the past 18 months, including commitments by the Prime Minister, as well as by federal, provincial and territorial Ministers to work together to achieve the 2020 target. A new collaborative "Pathway to 2020" process struck by governments to deliver on this commitment, and growing recognition that partnerships with Indigenous peoples, through nation-to-nation and Inuit-to-Crown relationships, all offer an opportunity to protect more land, and to contribute to reconciliation.

There are many protected area proposals across Canada that are well-advanced, have significant support, and are ready for protection. The report concludes by highlighting 13 of these exciting proposals where CPAWS chapters across Canada are working with partners on-the-ground to protect important ecological and cultural landscapes. These are opportunities for governments to demonstrate early progress towards achieving the 2020 target, and to set the stage for the scaled-up action needed to conserve nature and demonstrate Canadian leadership.

Recommendations for Action

CPAWS' OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- 1** All governments should act immediately to implement their existing commitments to protect more land, starting with projects that are well underway, and where there is already clear support from Indigenous governments.
- 2** At the same time, governments need to plan for “beyond 2020” to complete protected area networks based on science and Indigenous knowledge that will conserve healthy, resilient ecosystems in the face of climate change.
- 3** The collaborative and respectful approach exemplified in the Pathway to Target One process should become a long-term collaboration in order to continue efforts to protect more land and waters to 2020 and beyond.
- 4** Jurisdictions should work with Indigenous governments to identify how to better establish and support Indigenous protected areas, including removing legislative and political barriers and creating new legislative tools where needed.
- 5** Provinces and territories should stop issuing permits for industrial development in areas identified for permanent protection by Indigenous governments.
- 6** Canada should apply the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas' and International Union for the Conservation of Nature's guidance on “Other Effective Conservation Measures.”
- 7** Recognizing that the goal is to reverse dramatic and on-going biodiversity loss, Canada should focus primarily on protecting more land and waters to achieve the 2020 target, rather than amending the accounting system to incorporate more existing conservation areas.
- 8** Jurisdictions should develop landscape scale ecological connectivity strategies to determine ways to link core protected areas together.
- 9** Recognizing the substantial economic value and return on investment of protected areas as well as their intrinsic value, governments should invest significant new resources to support the accelerated establishment and effective management of Canada's protected areas. The federal government should play a leadership role by investing in federal protected areas, and investing to support the establishment and management of protected areas by provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments.



Photo: Matthew Majer

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EARLY ACTION ON-THE-GROUND:

1. Peel River Watershed, Yukon
2. Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve and Territorial Park, Northwest Territories
3. South Okanagan–Similkameen National Park Reserve, British Columbia
4. Bighorn Backcountry, Alberta
5. Saskatchewan River Delta, Saskatchewan
6. Saskatchewan Grasslands
7. Ochiwasahow – The Fisher Bay region, Manitoba
8. North French River Watershed, Ontario
9. Three Wild Watersheds of Western Quebec
10. Mutehekau Shipu/Magpie River, Québec
11. Restigouche River Watershed, New Brunswick
12. Nova Scotia Parks and Protected Areas Plan
13. Newfoundland and Labrador Protected Areas

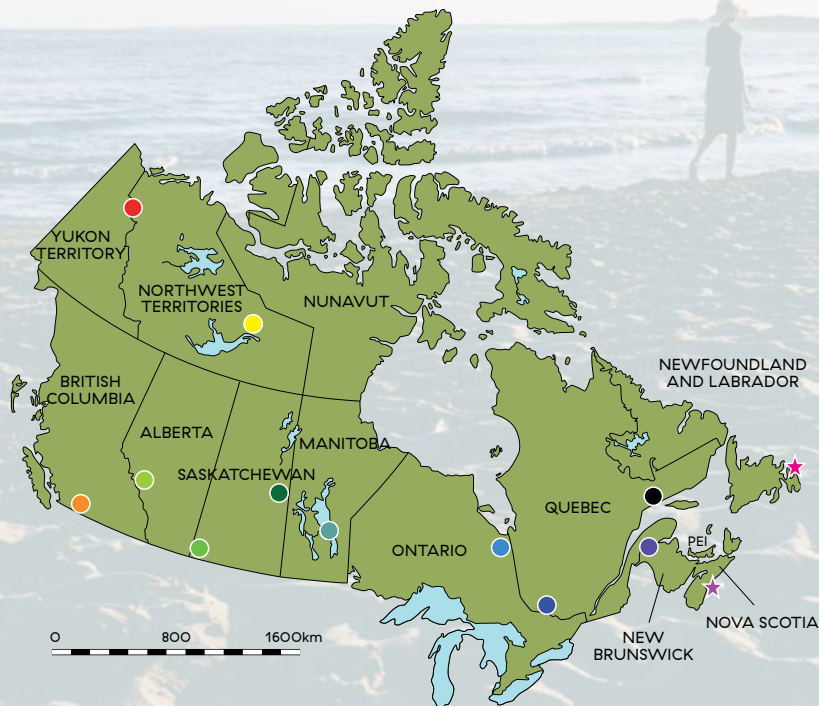


Photo: Scott Webb

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|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| ● The Peel Watershed | ● Saskatchewan Grasslands | ● Restigouche River Watershed |
| ● Thaidene Nene | ● Ochiwasahow – Fisher Bay | ★ Parks and Protected Areas Plan |
| ● South Okanagan–Similkameen | ● North French River Watershed | ★ Natural Areas System Plan |
| ● Bighorn Backcountry | ● Wild Rivers of Western Quebec | |
| ● Saskatchewan River Delta | ● Mutehekau Shipu/Magpie River Watershed | |



INTRODUCTION



Johnston Canyon, Banff National Park, AB.

Photo: Kalen Emsley



CANADA IS BLESSED WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY GIFT OF NATURE. As the second largest country in the world, we are stewards of 20% of the Earth's wild forests, 24% of its wetlands, and almost one third of its land-stored carbon. Our vast landscape is carved by the biggest remaining wild rivers in the world, supports the largest remaining natural mammal migration, and provides for billions of birds that nest in Canada's Boreal and temperate forests, tundra, wetlands and grasslands. The land, water and wildlife found in Canada have sustained Indigenous peoples for millennia and provide natural resources that continue to play an important part in Canada's economy.

We are fortunate to still have large areas of wilderness, but Canada is not immune to the global biodiversity crisis. From the southern settled landscape where most Canadians live the wilderness seems to stretch endlessly northward; however, all ecosystem types in Canada are declining in health and the number of species at risk of extinction continues to grow each year. The main threat to biodiversity in Canada, like in the rest of the world, is the destruction and fragmentation of habitat. Therefore, protecting much more of our land and inland waters and ensuring these protected areas are well-connected and managed are critically important.

We have not done enough to conserve nature in Canada. In many ways, we have taken our gift of nature for granted.

In 2010, as part of a world-wide effort to stem the tide of biodiversity loss, Canada endorsed a new 10-year strategic plan under the auspices of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The plan includes a suite of 20 biodiversity targets, one of which commits countries to protecting at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020 and improving the quality of their protected area systems to more effectively conserve nature.



Aichi Targets

Aichi Target 11, part of the CBD Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, commits countries to improving and expanding their protected areas system:

By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well-connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascape.

In 2015 Canada embedded the goal of protecting at least 17% of land and inland waters into government policy when it released the *2020 Goals and Biodiversity Targets for Canada*. Canada's Biodiversity Target 1 echoes the CBD's Aichi Target 11:

By 2020, at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas and inland water, and 10 percent of coastal and marine areas, are conserved through networks of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.

Arctic wolf, NT.

Photo: Nadine Wagner

With a full 90% of Canada's land and all our inland waters in the public domain, governments – federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous – hold the primary responsibility for protecting and stewarding our landscape.

As revealed in this report, Canada is lagging well behind most countries in the world with only 10% of our landscape protected versus a global average of 15%. We rank last among G7 countries and well behind other large countries such as China, Brazil and Australia. Being at the back of the pack when it comes to protecting nature is embarrassing, especially given the wealth of nature we have inherited. Fortunately, the tide is starting to turn.



Canadian Rockies, AB.

Photo: Aaron Huang

In the past year, momentum has been building across the country. Governments have revealed a renewed commitment to achieve and exceed the 2020 target, demonstrated through the establishment of new intergovernmental processes to achieve the target and a growing interest in the opportunity for Indigenous protected areas.

Now we need political will for conservation action on the ground so Canada can protect and restore its amazing natural heritage to pass along to future generations, and so we can move towards being legitimate leaders in protecting nature.

This report highlights Canada’s current laggard status relative to other countries, provides an update on steps taken over the past year to set the stage for Canada to protect more land, and points to some opportunities to quickly protect places that have long been identified for conservation and which have broad support from Indigenous governments and other partners. These represent some potential “early wins” for making progress towards the target and protecting some of Canada’s most spectacular and cherished wild places.

Photo: Alain Wong



WHAT IS A PROTECTED AREA:

Parks and protected areas are recognized around the world as essential tools for conserving nature.

They permanently protect habitat from industrial development and other damaging activities, so species can survive and thrive. Virtually all countries in the world have established protected area systems, and global agencies such as the World Bank and the UN Development Program (UNDP) recognize effective protected area networks as the cornerstone of nature conservation strategies and essential to sustainable development.

Canada has adopted the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of a protected area:

A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.⁴

LOOKING BEYOND 2020



Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park, ON.

Photo: Kristopher Kinsinger



THE AICHI BIODIVERSITY TARGETS ARE POLITICALLY NEGOTIATED TARGETS, not based in science. In other words, they were designed to encourage countries to make ambitious but achievable progress by 2020 towards the goal of conserving biodiversity. There is a growing scientific consensus that conservation efforts need to be scaled up dramatically to achieve the CBD vision of “living in harmony with nature,” and discussions are underway to determine what these post-2020 targets should be.



Pine marten.
Photo: Lori Labatt

Scientists have described the 17% coverage target in Aichi target 11 as “woefully below what the results of most scientific studies show are necessary to meet widespread conservation goals such as maintaining viable populations of native species, representing ecosystems across their range of variation, and promoting resilience of ecosystems to environmental change.”¹

In recent years, numerous scientific papers have concluded that even if the Aichi target of 17% protected area coverage was fully implemented, this would not be nearly enough to stem the tide of biodiversity loss. Much more extensive and stronger protection is needed in the long run to protect the ecological health of the planet.²

CPAWS has long understood the need to think at a much bigger scale for conservation, which is why we set a goal of protecting at least half of Canada’s public land and water in 2005. This is the scale of protection needed to conserve the full diversity of nature and support long-term human well-being and prosperity.³



Black-footed ferret.
Photo: Brian Haggerty

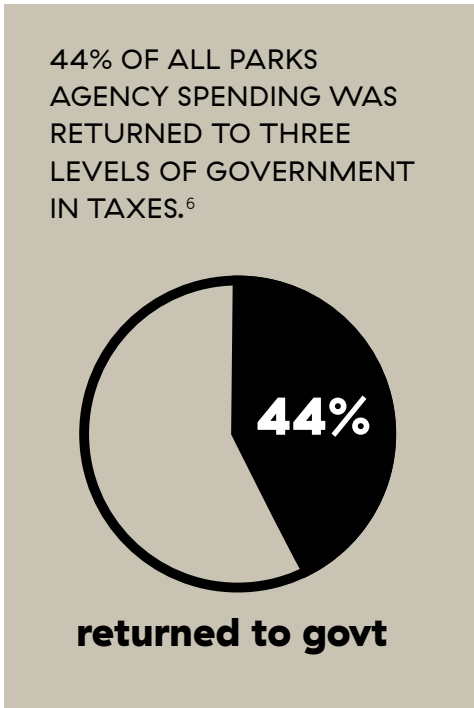
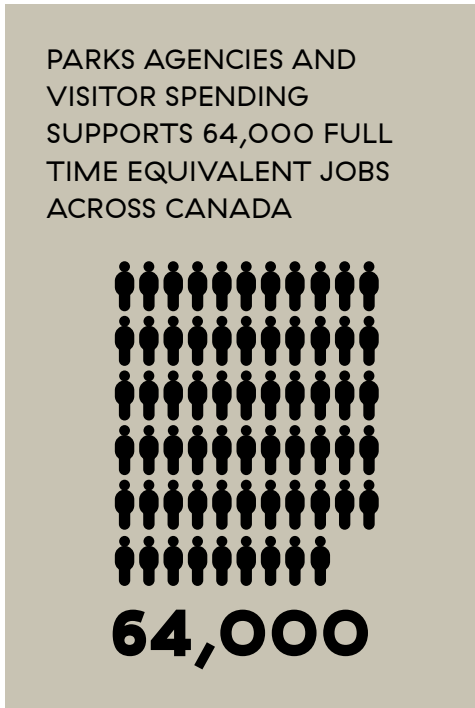
In the face of climate change, we need to scale up our protected areas network to conserve and restore Canada’s biodiversity – our life support system. Protected areas can also deliver on other important priorities, including:

- Species at risk critical habitat protection
- Adapting to climate change and storing carbon
- Providing clean water and air
- Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples
- Jobs and diversified economies in rural and remote communities
- Improved physical and mental health through outdoor recreation
- Learning about and connecting with nature

The Economic Value of Protected Areas

A 2015 global study found that protected areas around the world receive about 8 billion visits per year, generate US \$600 billion per year in direct in-country expenditures and over US \$250 billion per year in consumer surplus. With less than US \$10 billion spent each year globally to safeguard protected areas, this represents a significant return on investment!⁵

Similarly, a Canadian government study found that:





CANADA: LAGGING BEHIND



Hiker in the Rockies.

Photo: Kalen Emsley



WITH THE SECOND LARGEST LAND-MASS IN THE WORLD and the largest expanse of lakes and rivers, Canada has a significant global responsibility to lead the way in the protection of nature. However, Canada is lagging well behind most other countries with only 10.6% of our land and inland waters protected compared to the global average of 15% protection. By 2014, over half of the 196 countries that are Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity had already achieved the target of at least 17% protection.⁷



We compared the percentage of land and inland waters protected in Canada with other G7 countries and found that Canada is at the back of the pack. Among these countries, only the United States and Canada have not yet hit the target of 17% protection. Even the US, which is not a Party to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, surpasses Canada.

Figure 1. Comparison of protected area coverage in G7 countries

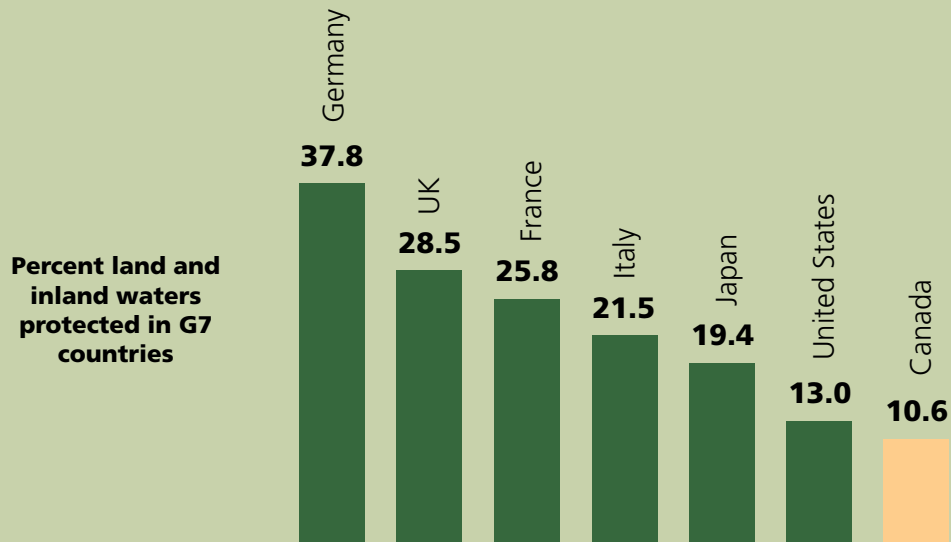
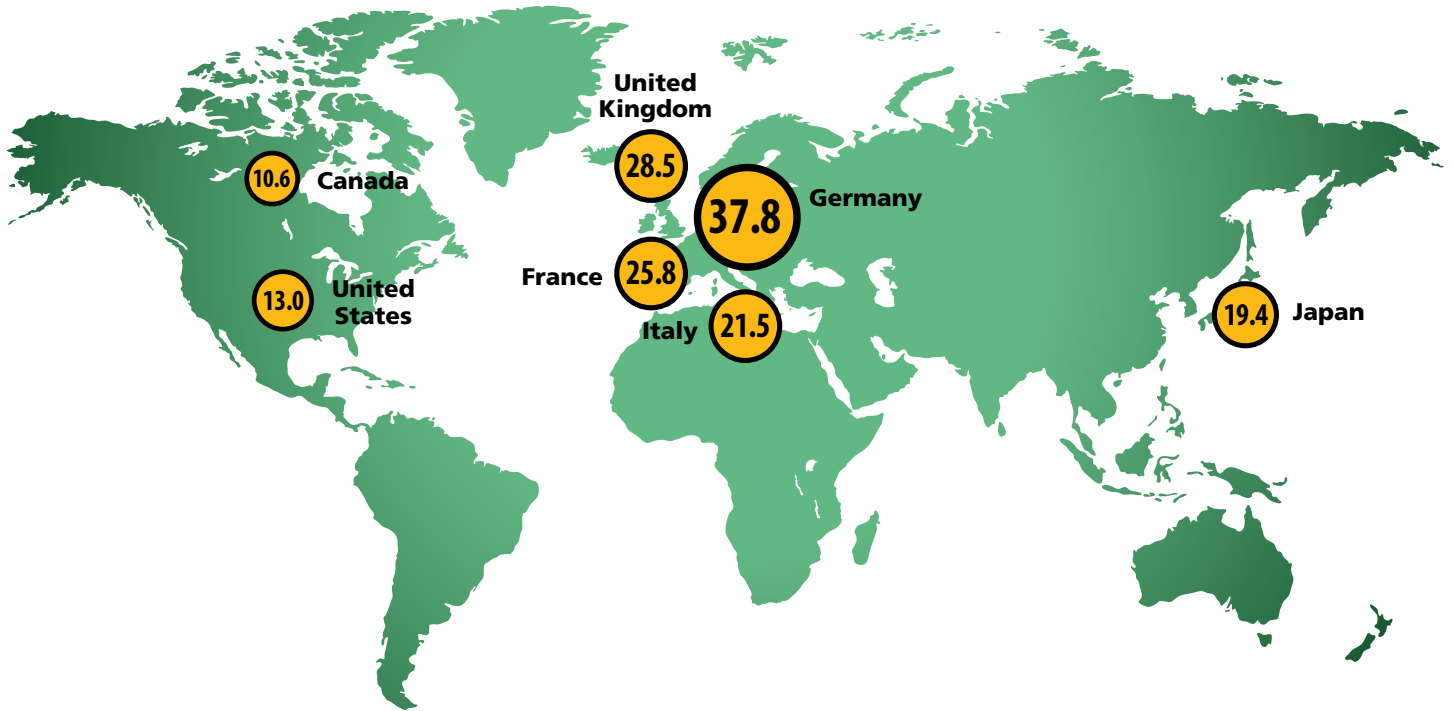


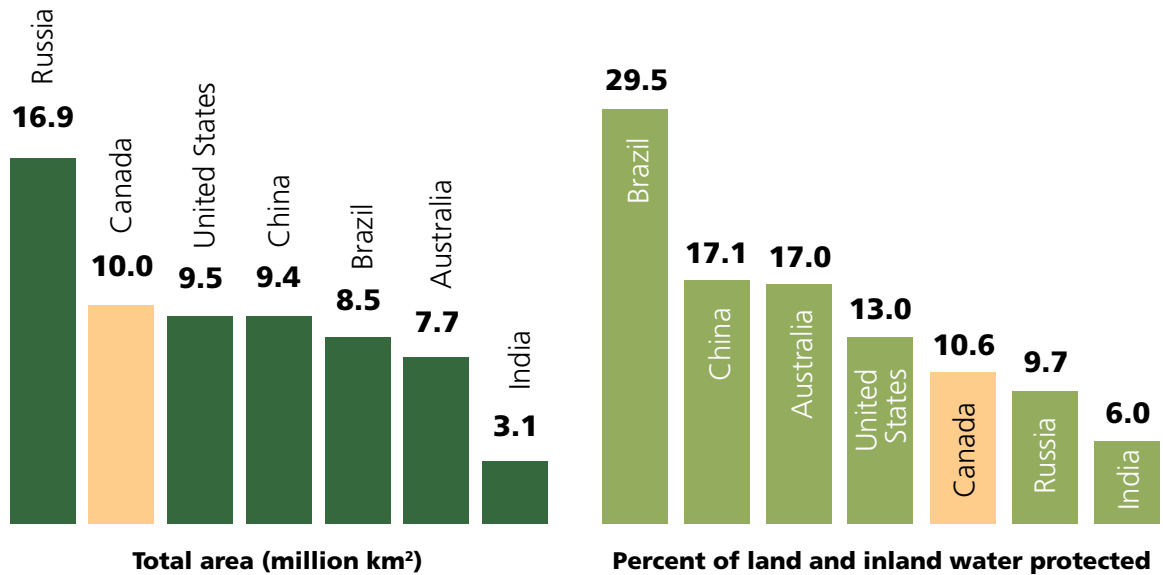
Photo: TJ Holowaychuk

Data source: UN Environment and IUCN, World Database on Protected Areas⁸, updated June 2017; for Canada data source is Conservation Areas Reporting and Tracking System (CARTS)⁹, updated Dec 2016

We then compared the percentage of land and inland waters protected by the seven countries in the world with the largest land-mass. While Canada ranks second in geographic area, we rank fifth in percent of land and inland water protected, only ahead of Russia and India and significantly behind Brazil, China and Australia.

We are lagging badly behind the rest of the world. It's time to step up our game.

Figure 2. Seven largest countries in the world by terrestrial area, and percentage of land and inland waters protected.



(Data source: UN Environment and IUCN, World Database on Protected Areas¹⁰, updated June 2017; for Canada data source is Conservation Areas Reporting and Tracking System (CARTS)¹¹, updated Dec 2016)

Nova Scotia ferns.

Photo: Irwin Barrett

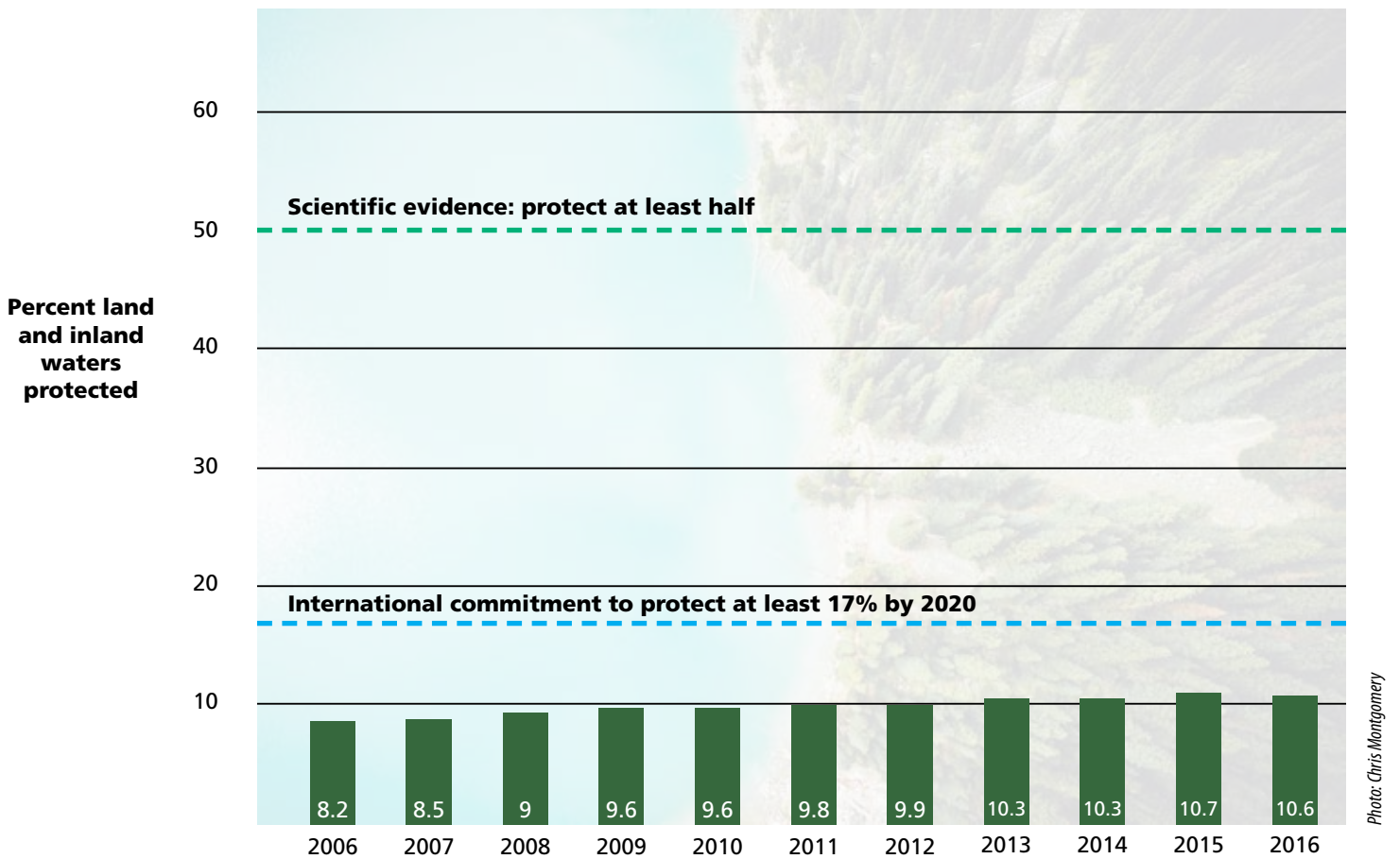


GLACIAL PROGRESS OVER THE PAST DECADE

Until last year, Canadian governments paid little attention to their international commitment to protect at least 17% of the landscape by 2020 and improve the quality of our protected areas system. While Canada released its own interpretation of the targets in 2015, there was no implementation plan developed.

The percentage of land and inland waters protected in Canada only increased by 2.4% in the decade between 2006 and 2016, and by 1% since Canada signed onto the CBD strategic plan in 2010. Currently, Canada is not on track to achieve its international commitment; however, in the past year we have seen renewed interest and commitment to getting there.

Figure 3: Growth in Canada’s protected area coverage 2006 to 2016 (terrestrial)



Data source: Conservation Areas Reporting and Tracking System (CARTS)¹², updated Dec 2016



RENEWED COMMITMENT BRINGS NEW HOPE



Glaciers in the Yukon Territory.

Photo: Kalen Emsley



DURING THE 2015 FEDERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, the current government committed to deliver on the 2020 target of protecting at least 17% of Canada's land and inland waters. The Alberta government also quickly stepped up to the plate and promised to get there too. These two governments have emerged as leaders in the Canadian effort to create new protected areas.¹³



Golden Ears Provincial Park,
BC.

Photo: Glen Jackson

In March 2016, in a statement released during the US–Canada State Dinner in Washington DC, the Prime Minister re–committed to at least 17% protection by 2020, and to going substantially beyond this target:

Canada and the U.S. re–affirm our national goals of protecting at least 17% of land areas and 10% of marine areas by 2020. We will take concrete steps to achieve and substantially surpass these national goals in the coming years.¹⁴

This has breathed new life into efforts to expand protection of Canada’s land and waters and sparked a new spirit of cooperation among governments.

Under Canada’s constitution, jurisdiction over land is shared between the federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments. With 90% of lands and all inland waters in Canada managed by governments, all jurisdictions need to work together to achieve the target. Yet for decades there had been little coordination on creating new protected areas in Canada.

In April 2016, the Canadian Parks Council (the intergovernmental body that brings together ministries responsible for parks in Canada) initiated a collaborative process to achieve the target, with Parks Canada and Alberta Parks stepping forward to lead the charge.

At about the same time, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development launched a comprehensive study looking at how Canada could achieve the protected area targets. Their report was tabled in early 2017 and contains 36 recommendations.¹⁵

In February 2017, Ministers responsible for parks and protected areas in all federal, provincial, and territorial governments publicly announced their commitment to work together with Indigenous governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), industry stakeholders, and the Canadian public to develop a “Pathway” to achieve the 2020 target and to set the stage for the work required beyond 2020 to complete an effective network of protected areas.¹⁶

Since February, an Indigenous Circle of Experts as well as a National Advisory Panel have been appointed to advise Ministers on the Pathway to 2020 and beyond. Work to determine the path to success is now underway.



Seal River watershed, MB.

Photo: Josh Pearlman

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP ON CONSERVATION

Partnering with Indigenous peoples to protect land through nation-to-nation and Inuit-to-Crown relationships, honouring Indigenous rights, interests and traditions, is an important part of reconciliation.

Across Canada Indigenous peoples are leading efforts to protect large areas of land from industrial development to safeguard both natural and cultural values. From Thaidene Nene in the Northwest Territories to tribal parks in BC to watershed declarations in northern Ontario, Indigenous approaches to conservation are gaining recognition and support across the country.



Haida Gwaii eagle, BC.

Photo: Marcus Thompson



Dancer in traditional regalia.
Fisher River Treaty Days
Celebrations, Fisher River
Cree Nation.

Photo: Ron Thiessen

Over the past year several key Canadian reports have highlighted the importance of Indigenous protected areas, including a seminal report on new shared Arctic leadership¹⁷ authored by Ministerial Special Representative, Mary Simon, and the study on protected areas conducted by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.¹⁸ The federal government's financial support for a pilot project for a nation-wide Indigenous Guardians program also offers an opportunity to explore Indigenous approaches to protection and conservation.¹⁹ Finally, the new "Pathway to Target One" process incorporates Indigenous perspectives into all aspects of the work, further advancing the opportunity.²⁰

This growing momentum builds on longstanding partnerships, particularly in northern Canada, where many protected areas have been created through modern land claim agreements. These claims generally include chapters on creating and managing national parks and other protected areas. Most northern national parks have been formally enacted through land claim agreements and have cooperative management boards in place. Another positive example is on Haida Gwaii, an archipelago off the coast of British Columbia, where the Haida Nation and federal government are full partners in the establishment and management of the Gwaii Haanas protected area, which extends from the mountain tops to the bottom of the sea.

By recognizing and supporting Indigenous protected areas Canada can contribute to reconciliation, and make significant advances in conserving nature.



ACHIEVING EFFECTIVE CONSERVATION OUTCOMES: QUANTITY AND QUALITY MATTER



Polar bears, MB.

Photo: Ron Thiessen



TO EFFECTIVELY CONSERVE HEALTHY ECOSYSTEMS, particularly in the face of climate change, it is clear that we need to dramatically scale up our efforts. Aichi Target 11 is also clear that the quality of what is protected and how is critical to success. Protected area networks must include examples of all ecosystem types, protect the most important areas for biodiversity and ecosystem services, be well-connected so wildlife can move through the land and waterscape, and be effectively managed.

Aichi Target 11 also states that at least 17% of land and inland waters should be conserved by 2020 through protected areas and “other effective area-based conservation measures” (OECMs). The Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA), and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are developing the guidance to interpret and apply this concept in Canada and internationally. This guidance is close to completion.

The key requirement of OECMs is that they must be effective in conserving nature. They need to provide long-term protection from industrial development, focus on protecting whole ecosystems rather than single species, and demonstrate real conservation outcomes. Temporary conservation measures, or those aimed at conserving only a few species do not qualify as OECMs, for example forest deferrals and fisheries closures. These measures may be valuable tools in the broader conservation toolbox, but are most appropriately counted under the other Aichi Targets that focus specifically on sustainable forest and fisheries management.

LET'S NOT GET CREATIVE WITH THE ACCOUNTING

As we strive to achieve Aichi Target 11, and plan for larger scale conservation beyond 2020, it is important to keep our eyes fixed firmly on the goal of biodiversity conservation. It is tempting to look for what other existing measures could count towards the target if we just re-jigged the accounting system. However, this will make no progress towards resolving the crisis of biodiversity loss. With less than three years left to 2020, we need to stay focused on protecting more area and improving the quality of protection – because that's what is needed to conserve nature.

Canada's formal database for tracking protected areas coverage is called the Conservation Areas Reporting and Tracking System (CARTS). This partnership between the not-for-profit Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA) and Environment and Climate Change Canada is endorsed by all Canadian jurisdictions as the authoritative database for protected areas in Canada. It applies the IUCN protected area definition, categories, and governance types, and will incorporate OECMs once the definition and guidance are complete. The database for Quebec protected areas is managed separately but based on equivalent criteria.

CCEA is a science-based organization that plays a critical role in developing Canadian and international guidance and standards for conservation. For example, in recent years, the organization has convened government protected area experts, academics, NGOs and others to determine how to best enhance consistency and rigour of reporting; define OECMs in the Canadian and international context; and assess and track quality measures in Aichi Target 11.

Photo: Bill Allen



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Great grey owl.
Photo: S. Duben



DESPITE CANADA'S CURRENT LAGGARD STATUS, we believe that it is still possible to achieve the 2020 target of at least 17% protection, and in the longer term to become legitimate global conservation leaders.²¹ Getting there requires political will by all governments to drive accelerated and coordinated action on the ground. It requires quick action to protect areas where there has already been considerable groundwork done, while at the same time planning for what is needed in the long term.

Working in partnership with Indigenous governments in ways that honour Indigenous rights, interests, and knowledge is essential to achieving success and reconciliation. The Pathway to Target 1 process will help provide guidance on how best to advance these conservation models.

There are many protected area proposals across Canada that have been underway for many years and which, with political will and resources, can quickly get over the finish line. In the next section of our report we describe a selection of these potential “early wins” where CPAWS chapters across Canada are working with partners on-the-ground.

Looking beyond 2020, Canada should build on the significant commitments and actions that have been taken by public governments and Indigenous peoples. Effective planning and a commitment to much longer-term and larger-scale thinking now will allow governments to protect what nature and people need in the future. Successful implementation will require systematic conservation planning grounded in science and Indigenous knowledge in every region of Canada, along with adequate resources to implement the plans.

Jasper National Park, AB.

Photo: Robert Berdan



TO SUMMARIZE, WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1** All governments should act immediately to implement their existing commitments to protect more land, starting with projects that are well underway, and where there is already clear support from Indigenous governments.
- 2** At the same time, governments need to plan for “beyond 2020” to complete protected area networks based on science and Indigenous knowledge that will conserve healthy, resilient ecosystems in the face of climate change.
- 3** The collaborative and respectful approach exemplified in the Pathway to Target One process should become a long-term collaboration in order to continue efforts to protect more land and waters to 2020 and beyond.
- 4** Jurisdictions should work with Indigenous governments to identify how to better establish and support Indigenous protected areas, including removing legislative and political barriers and creating new legislative tools where needed.
- 5** Provinces and territories should stop issuing permits for industrial development in areas identified for permanent protection by Indigenous governments.
- 6** Canada should apply the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas’ and International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s guidance on “Other Effective Conservation Measures.”
- 7** Recognizing that the goal is to reverse dramatic and on-going biodiversity loss, Canada should focus primarily on protecting more land and waters to achieve the 2020 target, rather than amending the accounting system to incorporate more existing conservation areas.
- 8** Jurisdictions should develop landscape scale ecological connectivity strategies to determine ways to link core protected areas together.
- 9** Recognizing the substantial economic value and return on investment of protected areas as well as their intrinsic value, governments should invest significant new resources to support the accelerated establishment and effective management of Canada’s protected areas. The federal government should play a leadership role by investing in federal protected areas, and investing to support the establishment and management of protected areas by provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments.

Photo: Sebastien Marchand



GETTING STARTED ON THE RIGHT FOOT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EARLY ACTION

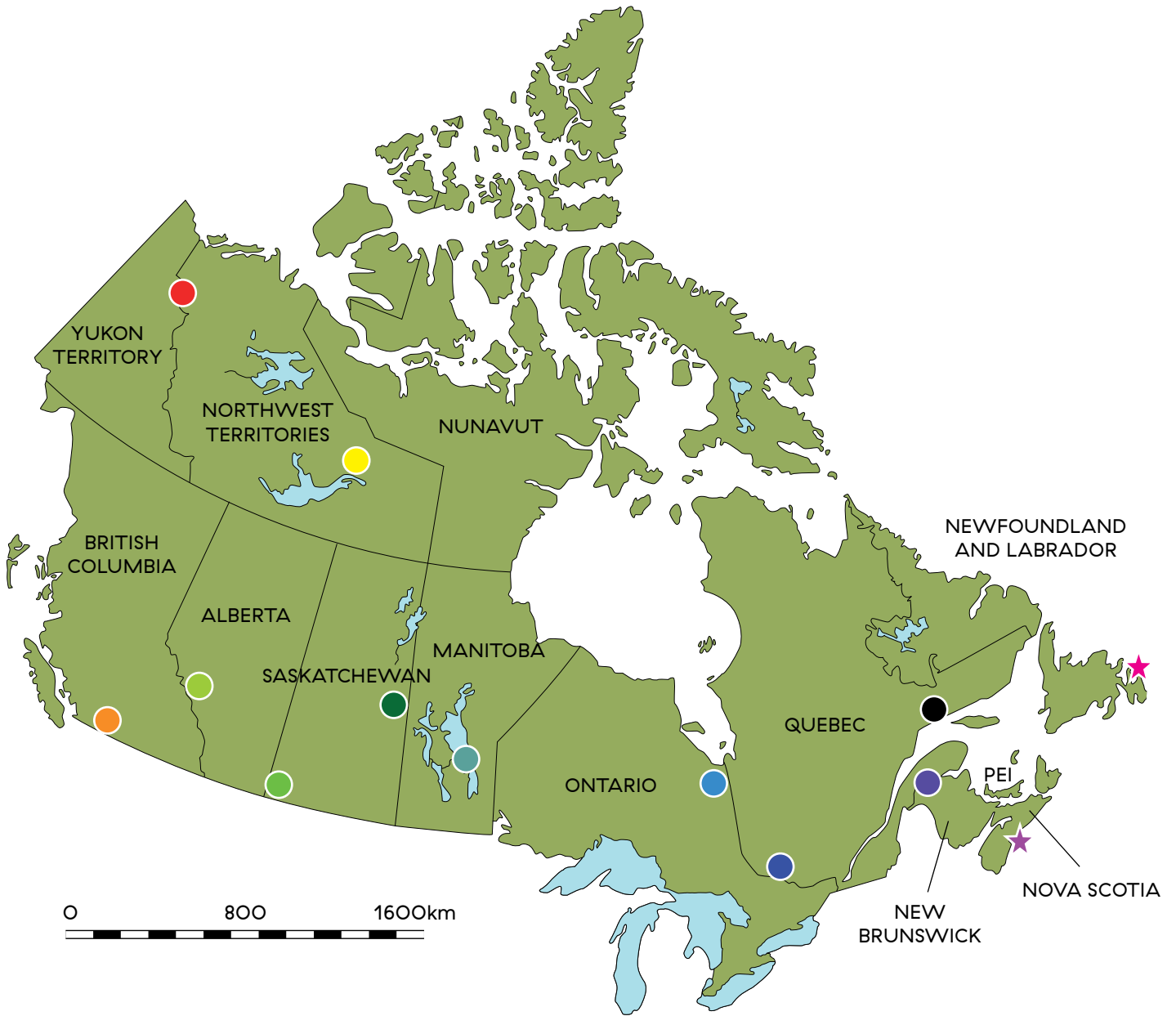


Kusawa, YT.

Photo: Bruce Downie



IN THIS SECTION, we describe 13 special areas of Canada where CPAWS is working in partnership with Indigenous and other governments, industry, and other NGOs on protected area proposals, all of which are well advanced, have significant support, and are ready for quick action. Protecting these areas would help demonstrate early progress towards achieving the 2020 target and setting the stage for the scaled-up action needed to conserve nature and demonstrate Canadian leadership in the long term.



- The Peel Watershed
- Thaidene Nene
- South Okanagan-Similkameen
- Bighorn Backcountry
- Saskatchewan River Delta
- Saskatchewan Grasslands
- Ochiwasahow – Fisher Bay
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- Restigouche River Watershed
- ★ Parks and Protected Areas Plan
- ★ Natural Areas System Plan



The Peel Watershed, Yukon



The Peel River Watershed is a vast northern wilderness encompassing stunning mountains, sweeping sub-Arctic tundra and alpine meadows, and pristine boreal forest. Dissected by seven wild rivers, including some of the world's greatest wilderness paddling rivers, the Peel is home to iconic wildlife like grizzly bears, wolves, moose and caribou. Expansive wetlands host millions of migratory birds on their bi-annual journeys. The Porcupine Caribou herd winters in the Peel before undertaking its long migration to calving grounds in Alaska. With its vast and varied landscape and rich wildlife, the Peel offers a globally significant opportunity to protect an intact northern boreal river watershed.

The Peel watershed is located within the traditional territories of three Yukon First Nations (Na-Cho Nyak Dun, Tr'ondek Hwech'in and Vuntut Gwich'in) as well as the Tetlit Gwich'in of the neighbouring Northwest Territories. The Final Agreements these First Nations signed with the Yukon and federal governments guarantees them a decision-making role in their traditional territories.

For seven years, a Commission composed of representatives appointed by these First Nations and the federal and territorial governments worked to create a land-use plan for the Peel. Their final recommendation was that 80% of the region (68,000 km²) be kept off-limits to roads and industry – a proposal that was supported by a large majority of Yukoners. Unfortunately, the former Yukon Government rejected the Commission's recommendations, and tried to push through its own plan which would allow over 70% of the Peel watershed to be industrialized. This reversal sparked legal action by First Nations, CPAWS Yukon and Yukon Conservation Society to defend the Peel, which went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada in March of this year.

A decision by the Supreme Court is expected in the coming months. Meanwhile, a newly elected territorial government has committed to implementing the original Land Use Planning Commission's recommendation. This offers an opportunity to finally protect this iconic northern wilderness and homeland within the near future.



Above: Hart River, YT.

Photo: Juri Peepre

Right: Snake River, YT.

Photo: Peter Mather





Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve and Territorial Park, Northwest Territories



The deep, clear waters of the East Arm of Great Slave Lake and the vast Boreal forest and tundra that surround it form **Thaidene Nene** – the “Land of the Ancestors” – which is the heart of the homeland of the Lutsel k’e Dene First Nation. Lutsel k’e Dene are leading an innovative proposal to permanently protect this vast northern landscape as partners in Treaty, creating adjacent national and territorial parks through a nation-to-nation relationship with the federal and territorial Crown governments.

Since 2011 CPAWS has worked with Lutsel k’e to support their vision for Thaidene Nene, encouraging thousands of Canadians to speak up for the area’s protection, and urging the federal and territorial governments to act. After years of work, Lutsel k’e Dene First Nation is in the final stages of negotiating agreements to create these protected areas, and legislation is being developed.

Completing this work will permanently protect approximately 26,000 km² of land and water in the NWT, helping to sustain Lutsel k’e Dene culture, and providing a foundation for the community to develop a conservation economy based on ecological and cultural tourism. It will also provide a successful example of how protecting land as partnerships between Indigenous and Crown governments can contribute to conservation, reconciliation and economic development.



Above: Thaidene Nene kids fishing, NT.

Photo: Stephen Ellis

Right: Aurora borealis, Thaidene Nene, NT.

Photo: Tessa Macintosh





South Okanagan–Similkameen National Park Reserve, British Columbia



The grasslands of the **South Okanagan–Similkameen** region, nestled in the southern interior of BC within Syilx/Okanagan Nation territory, are among the most unique ecosystems in Canada. The region is home to more threatened and rare species than anywhere else in BC: over one-third of all provincially-listed species and a staggering 57 federally-listed species at risk live in the South Okanagan–Similkameen. This desert ecosystem is incredibly fragile and faces enormous pressure from an expanding human footprint, made worse by the compounding effects of climate change.

For nearly two decades, work has been underway to establish a national park reserve in the area. Initially identified as an area of interest by Parks Canada in the 1970s, the area became a formal priority for protection by the agency in 2003. In 2012, a joint federal-provincial feasibility study recommended that a national park reserve be established. In 2013 a study led by local First Nations also supported the pursuit of federal protection for these lands. With a groundswell of support from local communities and renewed commitments from governments to move ahead with establishing this national park reserve, there is an immediate opportunity to finally advance the process towards completion, and safeguard this small but critically important and endangered grasslands ecosystem.



Above: Badger.

Photo: Tom Tietz

Right: Kilpoola-Chopaka, BC.

Photo: Graham Osborne





Bighorn Backcountry, Alberta



The **Bighorn Backcountry** is the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River and provides Edmonton and other downstream communities with nearly 90% of their drinking water. As one of Alberta's last intact forests, the Bighorn provides important habitat for bighorn sheep, wolverine, grizzly bears, cougars, lynx, moose, elk, and threatened fish species such as bull trout. The Bighorn has a relatively small footprint of disturbance from roads, seismic lines, pipelines, and forestry compared to other areas in Alberta. While Alberta is renowned for its natural beauty, the sad reality is that there are few remaining intact landscapes with ecosystem integrity in the province.

Nature enthusiasts, wildlife advocates, rural constituents, and Edmonton area residents have expressed deep concern for the health of the Bighorn Backcountry and support its protection as a Wildland Provincial Park. The government of Alberta has a great opportunity over the next year to protect 6717 km² of this exemplary symbol of Alberta wilderness for its wildlife, ecosystem services, and recreational values.



Above: Bighorn Backcountry, AB.

Photo: Marcus Becker

Right: Cline River, AB.

Photo: Tara Russell





Saskatchewan River Delta, Saskatchewan



One of the largest inland deltas in North America, and one of the most biologically rich landscapes in Canada, the **Saskatchewan River Delta** is a 10,000 km² network of waterways, wetlands and low-lying forests, and an internationally recognized “Important Bird Area.” The land and waters of the Delta provide habitat for millions of waterfowl and other migratory birds, including white pelicans, while the area’s forests sustain lynx, wolf, black bear, moose, and elk. The Delta’s ecosystems store billions of tonnes of carbon in a vast peatland and boreal forest ecosystem, acting as a critical natural storehouse for carbon and a buffer against climate change.

The Delta is the traditional territory of the Cumberland House Cree Nation and Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation who continue to rely on its rich ecosystems for sustenance and economic opportunities offered by hunting, fishing and ecotourism. For several years, CPAWS has been working with Cumberland House and Peter Ballantyne Cree Nations, as well as Weyerhaeuser Forest Products and the Saskatchewan government, to identify a large protected area in the Suggi Lowlands/Mossy River Watershed at the heart of the Delta to help safeguard this remarkable place. An almost 4000 km² area of interest has been identified and is now being considered for permanent protection. This would not only help deliver on Saskatchewan’s protected areas commitment, but also on its responsibilities to protect critical boreal caribou habitat and to contribute to Canada’s pan Canadian climate change plan.



Above: White pelicans, SK.

Photo: Garth Lenz

Right: Saskatchewan River Delta, SK.

Photo: Chris Miller





Saskatchewan Grasslands



While there are many opportunities to create new protected areas in Canada, in Saskatchewan we are at risk of losing ground. In the 1930s, during the “dustbowl” drought years, about 7000 km² of Saskatchewan’s grassland habitat became Community Pastures, managed by the federal government for conservation in collaboration with ranchers. In 2012, Agriculture and Agri–food Canada disbanded the “Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act” (PFRA) program and announced that the lands would be divested to provincial governments. The Government of Saskatchewan then said it intended to transfer the land into private management with no requirement to conserve their precious grassland ecosystems.

In June 2017, the federal government confirmed it will seek to maintain ownership and conservation–focused management for the **Nashlyn and Battle Creek community pastures**, in addition to the **Govenlock Pasture**, which include the best remaining habitat in Canada for the endangered greater sage grouse and many other grassland species at risk. This is a welcome step that would secure 850 km² of critically important endangered grassland habitat. However, the remaining 6400 km² of land that was part of the PFRA program remains at risk. If the conservation designations for these areas are lost, Saskatchewan would move further away from the international target of 17% protection by 2020. More importantly, divesting the remaining pastures in this way could further endanger species that rely on healthy grassland ecosystems, pushing them closer to extinction.

The federal government should continue to work with ranchers/pasture patrons to finalize permanent protection of Govenlock, Nashlyn and Battle Creek with a focus on conservation–based management, including grazing. The federal and provincial governments should also work together to find solutions that will ensure conservation–based management continues for the remaining divested pastures in Saskatchewan.



Above: Sage grouse, SK.

Photo: Branimir Gjetvaj

Right: Battle Creek Community Pasture, SK.

Photo: Branimir Gjetvaj





Ochiwasahow – The Fisher Bay Region, Manitoba



On the west side of Lake Winnipeg, the land surrounding **Fisher Bay** is remarkably undisturbed despite its relatively short distance from urban, industrial and agricultural development. Every shoreline provides glimpses of thriving biodiversity. Expansive beaches yield fresh tracks of wolves, moose, foxes and bears passing in and out of old growth forests. Water birds wing by, traveling from nesting colonies to feeding grounds, while songbirds bring the canopy to life with their calls. The lands and waters offer habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species including little brown bats, piping plover, golden-winged warbler and shortjaw cisco.

The ecological health of the region is important to the health of Lake Winnipeg as forests and wetlands surrounding the lake filter excess nutrients from surface water runoff. With Lake Winnipeg plagued by harmful algal blooms caused by excess nutrient inputs, securing the persistence of these natural filtration services will help prevent the problem from worsening.

For centuries, Indigenous people have utilized Fisher Bay's resources while maintaining its well-being. The area has provided a home and livelihood to members of Fisher River Cree Nation (FRCN) for many generations. Adequate landscape protection in this region, according to the best combination of ecological and cultural considerations, will ensure the lands and waters can continue to provide, while safeguarding the tremendous potential to create community-driven sustainable economies reliant on a healthy environment.

Through the leadership of FRCN and CPAWS Manitoba, Fisher Bay provincial park was established in 2011. With core protection of the region achieved, we are continuing our partnership by working to establish additional protected areas with the goal of sufficiently protecting nature, culture, and sustainable economic opportunities in the area. The next step is to implement a community and stakeholder engagement process, recently designed by FRCN, CPAWS, and the Manitoba government, to explore the opportunity for securing a healthy and sustainable future for people and wildlife of the Fisher Bay region.



Above: Green tree frog,
Manigotagan River, MB.

Photo: Josh Pearlman

Right: Fisher Bay, MB.

Photo: Ron Thiessen





North French River Watershed, Ontario



The intact boreal forest, wetlands, and waters that make up the 6660 km² **North French River watershed** in Northeastern Ontario are in the heart of the Moose Cree homeland. Protection of this watershed is central to guaranteeing the survival of the Moose Cree people. The North French is one of last watersheds that remains untouched by industrial development and one of the last sources of clean drinking water in this part of the province. It is also home to threatened boreal caribou as well as an abundance of migratory birds and fish. Its wetlands store massive amounts of carbon that will need to be maintained to meet the world's emissions targets under the historic Paris climate change agreement.

The preservation of this area is of paramount importance to the Moose Cree people and to us all. Moose Cree declared the North French River watershed permanently protected in 2002 and reaffirmed this in a 2015 letter to the Premier of Ontario. In 2017, the community noted that after more than two years the Government of Ontario still had not withdrawn the lands from potential mining exploration and development, meaning 5080 km² of the watershed remains vulnerable to industrial development. A conservation reserve already protects 1583 km² of the watershed.

By working with Moose Cree, and applying provincial legal tools to respect the community's declaration that the North French watershed be protected forever, the province could make important progress towards the 2020 target of at least 17% protection. This would generate new momentum on Indigenous protected areas in the province and demonstrate Ontario's commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. This would also safeguard the vast and deep stores of carbon in the boreal forest and help deliver on the province's responsibility under the *Species at Risk Act (SARA)* to protect boreal caribou critical habitat.



Above: Bull moose.

Photo: Deborah Freeman

Right: North French River,
ON.

Photo: Ernie McLeod





Three Wild Watersheds of Western Quebec



Three spectacular wild rivers – **the Dumoine, the Noire and the Coulonge** – rush south through the Boreal forest of northwestern Quebec, into mixed-wood forests, and out into the Ottawa River a few hours upstream from the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau.

Located just north of Algonquin Park, these watersheds provide a critical ecological connection between the mixed-wood forests of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence region and the vast Boreal forest in Quebec. Maintaining this natural connection is essential so wild plants and animals can move northward and adapt to climate change.

The Quebec government protected 1445 km² of the Dumoine River watershed in 2008 in response to a CPAWS-led campaign and has since committed to expanding this protected area by 400 km². In recent years CPAWS has also built strong support for protecting 1000 km² of the neighbouring Noire and Coulonge River watersheds.



By formally announcing the expansion of the Dumoine protected area and committing to protecting parts of the Noire and Coulonge watersheds, the province of Quebec could expand its protected areas network by 1400 km². This would be a good next step towards the larger interconnected complex of parks and protected areas needed to conserve nature in the region, and would also support economic development opportunities for western Quebec based on outdoor recreation and ecotourism.

Above: Red fox.

Photo: Ron Thiessen

Right: Dumoine River, QC.

Photo: Marie-Eve Marchand





Mutehekau Shipu/Magpie River, Québec



Identified by *National Geographic* as one of the top 10 white water rivers in the world, **Mutehekau Shipu**, also known as the **Magpie River**, is a world class destination for adventure tourism. Recognized for its dramatic waterfalls, challenging rapids, and magnificent boreal forest landscape, the region is rich in wildlife including Barrow's goldeneye and golden eagle, both of which are endangered species, and dozens of species of fish. The river is located on the Nitassinan (ancestral land) of the Innu Nation in northeastern Québec and is one of the last major rivers in Québec to remain free-flowing, unimpeded by large hydroelectric dams.

Protecting this river for present and future generations has long been supported by both the Ekuanitshit Innu and local communities. In 2014 regional mayors submitted a proposal for new protected areas to the provincial government that included protection of 55% of the Magpie River watershed (2630 km²), including a protective corridor along the entire 290 km length of the river. Although 99% of the watershed remains intact for now, the river is still at risk from major hydroelectric development proposals.

SNAP Québec (CPAWS' Québec Chapter) has been working with a diversified suite of partners including paddlers associations, academics, businesses, and elected representatives, to encourage a local economic development model based on conservation and tourism. This would help diversify the region's economy, which is currently dependent on natural resource extraction activities.

The Magpie River watershed offers an opportunity for the Québec government to make progress toward its protection goals, and to respond to the interests of First Nation and local communities.



Above: Magpie River, QC.

Photo: Yann Troutet

Right: Magpie River, QC.

Photo: Boreal River





Restigouche River Watershed, New Brunswick



New Brunswick lags well behind most other Canadian provinces in protecting its land and waters, with only 4.7% protected. The provincial government has a responsibility to conserve New Brunswick's natural heritage and maintain its resilience in the face of climate change. To achieve this, they urgently need to develop an action plan to 2020 and beyond, to expand New Brunswick's protected areas system and safeguard the province's last remaining old growth forests, significant wetlands, rivers, lakes and spectacular coastlines.

In the short term, New Brunswick has an opportunity to protect one of Eastern Canada's most spectacular and threatened wild watersheds – the **Restigouche** – which spans the border between northwestern New Brunswick and Quebec's Gaspé region. Part of the traditional territory of the Mi'gmaq, the watershed of this Canadian Heritage River sustains moose, bald eagles, barred owls, Canada lynx, and migratory birds that rely on the ecological integrity of its forests and rivers. The river and its streams support some of the healthiest Atlantic salmon populations in Eastern Canada, making it a world-renowned destination for angling, paddling, and other outdoor adventures, with lots of untapped potential.

Currently, less than 3% of the New Brunswick portion of the Restigouche watershed is protected and industrial development is eating away at the region's wild forests and rivers year by year. The government could create a world-class wilderness tourism destination by establishing the Restigouche Wilderness Waterway – a wide protected corridor along the river, on Crown land. By conserving this area's special nature, promising ecotourism businesses could reliably promote a quality wilderness destination to nature-seeking tourists around the world. It would help protect the million-dollar salmon angling economy. It would also safeguard one of the province's most beloved rivers for future generations of New Brunswickers to enjoy.



Above: Canada lynx.

Photo: Erni Photography

Right: Restigouche River.

Photo: Dave Godin





Nova Scotia Parks and Protected Areas Plan



The Nova Scotia government has made a strong commitment to protect natural biodiversity in the province, through the implementation of the *Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan*. That plan includes 205 new protected areas, totaling a quarter million hectares, and contains some of the best remaining natural areas in the province, including large intact forests, long stretches of wilderness coastline, species-at-risk habitat, significant wetlands, and important waterways.

Good progress has been made so far, but implementation is stalling. Since approved in 2013, about half of the sites within the *Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* are still awaiting legal protection with a total combined area of 83,500 hectares.

Some of the sites still requiring legal protection include the St. Mary's River Conservation Lands, Wentworth Valley, Mabou Highlands, Sackville River, Giants Lake, McGowan Lake, Shingle Lake, and Pleasant River. The Nova Scotia government needs to follow through on its commitments to protect these areas and fully implement the *Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan*.



Above: White-tailed deer.

Photo: Nadine Wagner

Right: St. Mary's River, NS.

Photo: Irwin Barrett





Newfoundland and Labrador Protected Areas



With spectacular and rugged coastlines, expansive boreal forests, arctic tundra and globally significant geological features, **Newfoundland and Labrador** represents a unique environment in Canada. The province's land and inland waters are a haven for woodland caribou, many species of migratory birds, wild Atlantic salmon and black bears. The natural beauty of Newfoundland and Labrador is the foundation of the province's billion-dollar tourism economy.

After decades of work, the Mealy Mountains national park reserve in Labrador is now in the final stages of legal establishment and has added 10,700 km² to the province's protected areas system. Yet, despite this progress, Newfoundland and Labrador still lags most of the country in percentage of protected land with only 6.9% of its landscape protected.

In 2015 the newly elected provincial government committed to creating multiple new protected areas by publicly releasing the *Natural Areas System Plan*. This long overdue system of protected areas has been promised for several decades, but has never officially been announced or released publicly. Implementing the *Natural Areas System Plan*, as well as the 3000 km² Eagle River provincial waterway park in Labrador, represents the best opportunity to expand protection in the province in the next few years.



Above: Atlantic puffin.

Photo: Targn Pleiades

Right: Eagle River, NL.

Photo: Valerie Courtois



ENDNOTES

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- 13 While this report does not address the marine component of Aichi Target 11, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is leading a parallel process to achieve at least 10% protection of Canada's marine and coastal areas. CPAWS has published a series of "Dare to be Deep" reports related to this target that can be found at <http://cpaws.org/campaigns/oceans>.
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Boreal landscape.

Photo: Lori Labatt





Photo: Laterjay Photography

About CPAWS

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) is Canada's only nationwide charity dedicated solely to the protection of our public land and water, and ensuring our parks are managed to protect the nature within them. Since 1963 we've played a lead role in protecting over half a million square kilometres – an area bigger than the entire Yukon Territory! Our vision is that Canada will protect at least half of our public land and water so that future generations can benefit from Canada's irreplaceable wilderness.



CPAWS National Office

613-569-7226 | 1-800-333-WILD (9453)
Info@cpaws.org | www.cpaws.org

CPAWS British Columbia

604-685-7445
www.cpawsbc.org

CPAWS Northern Alberta

780-328-3780
www.cpawsnab.org

CPAWS Southern Alberta

403-232-6686
www.cpaws-southernalberta.org

CPAWS Saskatchewan

306-469-7876
www.cpaws-sask.org

CPAWS Manitoba

204-949-0782
www.cpawsmb.org

CPAWS Wildlands League

416-971-9453
www.wildlandsleague.org

CPAWS Ottawa Valley

819-778-3355
www.cpaws-ov-vo.org

SNAP (CPAWS) Québec

514-278-7627
www.snapqc.org

CPAWS New Brunswick

506-452-9902
www.cpawsnb.org

CPAWS Nova Scotia

902-446-4155
www.cpawsns.org

CPAWS Newfoundland and Labrador

709-726-5800
www.cpawsnl.org

CPAWS Yukon

867-393-8080
www.cpawsyukon.org

CPAWS Northwest Territories

867-873-9893
www.cpawsnwt.org

Photo: Priscilla Du Preez