

HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE

A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION
AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19
RECOVERY STRATEGIES



CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	7
Part 1: Nature Conservation at the Heart of a Green Recovery	10
Protected areas provide a foundation to support all life on earth	11
COVID-19 and conservation	12
Destruction of nature is directly linked to the risk of pandemics	12
Parks and nature are integral to sustaining Canadians' mental and physical health	14
Healthy ecosystems, healthy people, healthy economy	15
Will Canada embrace global leadership on nature?	18
Progress in Canada has set the stage for more ambitious action	22
Overarching Recommendations	26
Part 2: Action by all governments is key to successful conservation outcomes	27
Yukon Territory	30
Northwest Territories	32
Nunavut	34
British Columbia	35
Alberta	37
Saskatchewan	40
Manitoba	42
Ontario	44
Quebec	46
New Brunswick	49
Nova Scotia	51
Newfoundland and Labrador	53
Prince Edward Island	55
References	56

Cover photo: Edward
Koorey



Executive Summary

Canada is a country deeply connected to nature. It underpins our sense of place, our well-being, and our economy. Yet there is ample evidence that nature in our country, like in the rest of the world, is in crisis.¹ Much more of our country's land and freshwater needs protecting to sustain the healthy ecosystems that all Canadians rely on and to tackle the climate change crisis.

In early 2020, momentum was building in Canada and around the world for more ambitious conservation action. The federal government committed in late 2019 to protecting 25% of Canada's land and ocean by 2025 and 30% by 2030 — a move that was welcomed by CPAWS and reaffirmed by the Prime Minister in recent public statements.^{2, 3, 4} Canada also promised to take on a global leadership role by encouraging other countries to support ambitious land and ocean protection targets in the new global biodiversity framework being negotiated under the mantle of the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UN CBD)*.⁵

Then the COVID-19 pandemic turned the world upside down in the span of a few weeks — devastating families, overwhelming some countries' health care systems, and shutting down the global economy. CPAWS continued our work to protect Canada's land and ocean, carefully heeding public health advice and working remotely, and began to explore what the pandemic could mean for conservation.

This report highlights what we have learned about the relationship between the



Photo: Terra Firma

HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE: A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES

pandemic and terrestrial conservation and presents a case for why **governments in Canada should put nature conservation at the heart of our country's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Destruction of nature is directly linked to the risk of pandemics

As the pandemic unfolded, scientists were quick to point out the linkages between disease transfer from wild species to humans and the human invasion and destruction of wild habitat.⁶ **Natural systems are weakened when industrial activities such as mining and logging, road building, or urban development expand into areas with limited previous human access.**^{7,8,9} When this happens, there is a greater possibility of people encountering a new pathogen from local wildlife and for this disease to “spillover” from wildlife to humans.¹⁰

Evidence for this connection between nature's destruction and pandemics is so compelling that the World Health Organization recently identified protecting “the source of human health: Nature” as the number one priority for COVID-19 recovery strategies.¹¹

Parks and nature provide essential mental and physical health services

Canadians have flocked to protected natural spaces seeking comfort, inspiration, and hope in the face of enormous stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent studies have shown there will likely be serious and lasting mental health implications from the pandemic over the next few years, which will likely impose growing costs and pressures on Canadians and on the health care system. Protected natural areas can play an important role in addressing these mental health challenges. A recent study estimated the mental health value of national parks worldwide at \$6 trillion USD per year based on avoided mental health care costs.¹²

Recognizing that protected nature is an essential service that supports Canadians' mental and physical health is yet another reason why investing in the protection and growth of Canada's parks and protected areas is integral to our future.

Healthy ecosystems, healthy economy

In January 2020, a World Economic Forum (WEF) report concluded that half of the global GDP (\$45 trillion USD) depends on nature and its services. The WEF's *Global Risk Report*¹³ also identified biodiversity loss as one of the top five global risks facing the world.

While the link between human health and economic health was recognized before the pandemic, COVID-19 has created the space to consider these important links and to re-think the future. As governments plan for recovery from COVID-19 they can choose to reinvest either in the *status quo* or in rebuilding societies and economies that are more healthy, equitable, and green — for the benefit of nature and humanity for generations to come.

Protected areas have a proven track record in delivering significant direct and indirect economic benefits.¹⁴ For example, in 2009, Canada's federal, provincial, and



Photo: Braxton Stuntz

territorial parks supported 64,000 jobs and contributed \$6 to Canada's GDP for every \$1 invested by governments — an impressive return on investment.¹⁵ Protected areas also boost and diversify rural economies by attracting new residents and businesses to park “gateway” communities.¹⁶

Several countries and regions have already signalled they will put nature at the heart of their COVID-19 recovery plans. For example, the European Union (EU) has committed to incorporating their newly released *Biodiversity Strategy* into recovery plans.¹⁷ The EU *Biodiversity Strategy* will establish protected areas covering 30% of Europe's land and ocean by 2030, restore degraded ecosystems across Europe, and unlock €33 billion per year to conserve biodiversity.¹⁸ New Zealand has announced a \$1.1 billion (NZD) program to create 11,000 new regional jobs to help restore the country's natural environment.¹⁹

CANADA'S LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL

Canada stewards 20% of the Earth's wild forests, 24% of its wetlands, and almost one third of its land-stored carbon. The Prime Minister has reaffirmed the federal government's promise to protect 25% of Canada's land and ocean by 2025 and 30% by 2030 – a commitment that is overwhelmingly supported by Canadians.²⁰ **Building on this leadership, Canada should now join the EU, New Zealand, and other high ambition countries in putting nature and ecological transformation at the heart of strategies and investments, as we recover from the COVID-19 crisis.**

While all governments in Canada, and their partners, have a long way to go to complete an effective network of protected areas, Canada's progress on protecting land and ocean over the past four years provides a solid foundation for scaling up action over the next decade. **To achieve the new conservation targets, provincial and territorial governments will need to join the federal government and Indigenous governments in recognizing the value and importance of protecting significantly more of our landscape.**

The federal government has convened provinces, territories, Indigenous peoples, NGOs and other partners to work together to deliver on Canada's 2020 conservation commitments. Indigenous governments — First Nations, Inuit and Métis — have stepped forward with leading-edge landscape-level plans and initiatives to conserve their traditional territories, bringing together western science and Indigenous knowledge.

Provinces and territories vary in their enthusiasm for expanding protected area networks. Some, such as Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador have made political commitments to expand land protection in their jurisdictions and are working towards this goal; the Northwest Territories and the Yukon have defined Land Use Planning processes, which have the potential to result in new, expansive, co-managed protected areas and conservation zones. Other provinces are either slow or reluctant to respond or, in the case of Alberta, actively undermining and dismantling the existing protected areas system.

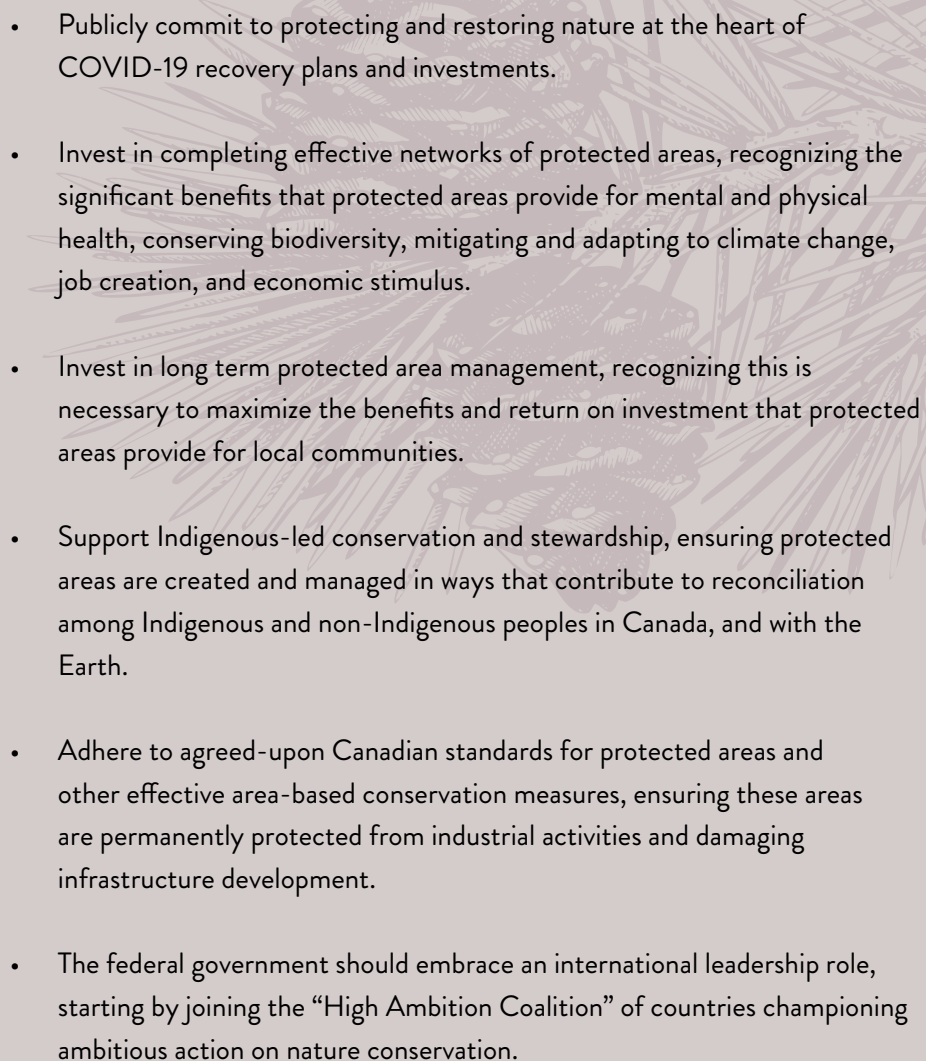


Photo: Pete Nuij

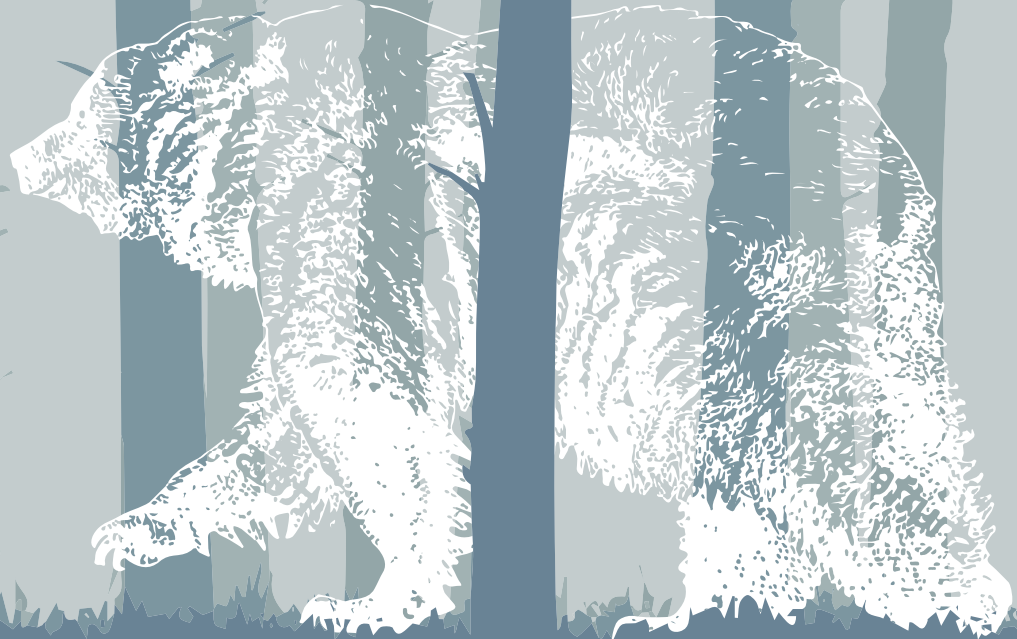
As Canadian governments consider measures to support recovery from COVID-19, conserving nature should be at the heart of their plans. This includes helping deliver on Canada's commitment to protect 25% of our landscape by 2025 and 30% by 2030. Below are overarching recommendations for how governments can advance conservation in the context of COVID-19 recovery. Part 2 of this report includes recommendations for each province and territory.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS:

CPAWS recommends that federal, provincial and territorial governments in Canada:

- 
- Publicly commit to protecting and restoring nature at the heart of COVID-19 recovery plans and investments.
 - Invest in completing effective networks of protected areas, recognizing the significant benefits that protected areas provide for mental and physical health, conserving biodiversity, mitigating and adapting to climate change, job creation, and economic stimulus.
 - Invest in long term protected area management, recognizing this is necessary to maximize the benefits and return on investment that protected areas provide for local communities.
 - Support Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship, ensuring protected areas are created and managed in ways that contribute to reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, and with the Earth.
 - Adhere to agreed-upon Canadian standards for protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, ensuring these areas are permanently protected from industrial activities and damaging infrastructure development.
 - The federal government should embrace an international leadership role, starting by joining the “High Ambition Coalition” of countries championing ambitious action on nature conservation.

Introduction



HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE: A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Momentum was building for nature conservation at the beginning of 2020. Media headlines in 2019 had featured a series of prestigious global scientific reports documenting the shocking and unprecedented collapse of nature, as well as the enormous negative impacts this will have on humanity if we do not transform our relationship with nature.^{21,22} In January 2020, the World Economic Forum identified biodiversity loss among the top five risks the world faces,²³ and in February, countries gathered in Rome to discuss an ambitious draft of a new global biodiversity strategy for the next decade under the UN *Convention on Biological Diversity* (UN CBD).²⁴

In Canada, the federal government had signalled its interest in international leadership on nature conservation and committed to protecting 25% of Canada's land and ocean by 2025, and 30% by 2030, and to implementing nature-based solutions to climate change.

Then, everything changed. In the span of a few weeks, the world as we knew it turned upside down as the COVID-19 virus spread around the planet, devastating families, overwhelming some health care systems, and generating an unprecedented economic shutdown as governments struggled to contain its horrifying impacts.

Four months later, Canada has flattened the curve of the pandemic to the point where many services are beginning to re-open. While the acute phase of the crisis continues, discussions in some countries, including Canada, are now also turning to the question of how to best "recover" from this unprecedented health crisis and economic shut down, recognizing COVID-19 will likely impact us for at least several more years, if not much longer.

*Prairie Dog in Grasslands
National Park. Photo: Matt
Jacques, @mattjacques*





Photo: Evi Zik

As the pandemic unfolded, CPAWS staff continued their conservation work, albeit virtually, recognizing that the biodiversity and climate change crises were as urgent and important as ever. Moreover, the pandemic has triggered an exploration of what COVID-19 could mean for our mission to protect at least half of Canada's public lands and oceans, and to ensure parks are managed to protect the nature within them. This report highlights some of what we have learned about the relationship between the pandemic and terrestrial conservation and reinforces that investing in **completing effective networks of protected areas on land and freshwater across Canada is more important and urgent than ever.**

The report highlights the **importance of working with partners, in particular with Indigenous governments: First Nations, Inuit and Métis.** It also stresses how investing in the **effective long-term management of protected areas is essential to maximize the return on investment and deliver the full suite of economic, social, cultural, and environmental** benefits that protected areas can provide to communities.

Finally, the report highlights **specific opportunities and challenges facing the creation and effective management of protected areas in each region of the country,** based on discussions with CPAWS experts across the country, **and provides recommendations for priority actions to address these.**

Our hope is that this report will **encourage all governments in Canada to put nature at the heart of our country's recovery from the COVID 19 pandemic,** including by **accelerating actions to complete an effective network of protected landscapes from coast to coast to coast, focusing on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and recognizing the enormous economic, health, and other benefits this will provide for all Canadians, now and in the future.**

“Protecting nature and tackling climate change is the challenge of our generation... on ne peut parler de l'un sans l'autre.”

– Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada



Source : Trudeau, J. (2019). Nature Champions Summit, Montreal, April 2019.

Part 1

Nature Conservation at the Heart of a Green Recovery



PROTECTED AREAS PROVIDE A FOUNDATION TO SUPPORT ALL LIFE ON EARTH

Habitat loss due to human activities remains the primary driver of nature's steep decline, which means that protecting and restoring habitat must be at the heart of any strategy to conserve nature.²⁵

Establishing and effectively managing networks of permanently protected natural areas has long been recognized as essential for safeguarding healthy ecosystems and conserving healthy wildlife populations. Healthy ecosystems provide essential services for people, including clean air, fresh water, fertile soil, food and medicine and support our mental and physical health. Scientists have also highlighted the important role protected areas can play in tackling climate change by securing carbon stored in ecosystems and by helping people and wildlife adapt to changing climatic conditions.

Evidence shows that at least 30% and up to 70% of land and ocean ecosystems need to be protected to sustain a healthy planet and secure essential ecosystem services for people, which means Canada and the global community need to significantly scale up efforts to protect and restore nature.^{26,27,28} There is also clear evidence that **focusing only on how much area should be protected is not enough** to deliver conservation outcomes and other societal benefits. Protected area networks also need to be designed and effectively managed based on science and Indigenous knowledge.^{29,30}



Photo: James Wheeler

Photo: photerrestrial

COVID-19 AND CONSERVATION

Destruction of nature is directly linked to the risk of pandemics

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced how human health is directly tied to our relationship with the natural world. It has also emphasized, yet again, the critical importance of protecting wild places to human well-being.

The United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 75% of "new or emerging" diseases that infect humans originate in nonhuman animals.³¹ Scientists have been quick to point out the links between zoonotic disease transfer from wild species to humans and the human invasion and destruction of wild habitat.³² **Natural systems are weakened when industrial activities such as mining and logging, or urban developments, such as roads, expand into areas with limited previous human access.**^{33,34,35} When this happens, there is a greater possibility of people encountering a new pathogen from exposure to local wildlife.³⁶ This can become an even greater problem if those pathogens find new vectors to spread more broadly, or when infected wild animals are traded, thus helping the diseases expand into new areas.³⁷

A recent editorial in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) PARKS journal concluded that: "**Maintaining the ecological integrity of nature through protected and conserved areas is critical to halting biodiversity loss and can contribute to reducing the risk of zoonotic spillover.**"³⁸ Mapping the link between human, animal, and ecosystem health is known as the "One Health"

Gaspésie. Photo: Mélissa Vaitilingame



NATURE CONSERVATION AT THE HEART OF A GREEN RECOVERY

approach.³⁹ This approach recognizes that human, other animals (both wild and domestic), and environmental health are interconnected and must be considered together.⁴⁰ Proponents of this approach, which now include the CDC, World Health Organization (WHO), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and others, have long argued that our current and future health and well-being are directly connected to our ability to successfully steward the natural world.⁴¹

The pandemic has reinforced this message. In the WHO's recently released "Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19", the number one "prescription" described is to "**protect and preserve the source of human health: Nature.**"⁴²

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that maintenance of the ecological integrity of ecosystems is essential not only to prevent biodiversity loss and help reduce climate change, but also to reduce the risk of emerging diseases. The tools and solutions for maintaining ecological integrity are well known and include the **establishment of well-designed, well-managed networks of protected areas, support for Indigenous protected areas and Indigenous stewardship, land use planning, and support for policies that reduce the impact from harmful industrial activities and infrastructure.**⁴³ Acknowledging the connection between the health of wild places and human health is an important stepping stone towards a transformational green recovery for Canada⁴⁴. Canada can also play an important international leadership role by bringing this concept to the forefront of global recovery efforts.



"We only have one Earth, and that's what's on the line. Our environment is our future. We're going to fight for it, for all of us."

– Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada



Source : Trudeau, J. (2019). Statement by the Prime Minister on Earth Day. Government of Canada. Accessed June 26, 2020. <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2019/04/22/statement-prime-minister-earth-day>.

Pronghorn in Grasslands

National Park. Photo:

Matt Jacques

@mattjacques

PARKS AND NATURE ARE INTEGRAL TO SUSTAINING CANADIANS' MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

During the pandemic Canadians have flocked to parks seeking comfort, inspiration, and hope in the face of enormous stress. So many people crowded into parks when the pandemic began that many were closed due to a lack of physical distancing. As parks have gradually re-opened, demand for camping reservations has been so intense that online reservation systems in both British Columbia and Alberta crashed on the first day reservations were being taken, despite only being available to in-province residents.

Recent polling information published by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada reported that physical distancing has resulted in almost a third of Canadians having a renewed appreciation for spending time outdoors.⁴⁵ This is not surprising considering the scientific evidence supporting the link between the exposure to nature and improved mental health and wellbeing.⁴⁶ These health-related benefits include improved attention, cognition, sleep, and stress recovery.⁴⁷ On average, people who take part in nature tourism have better mental health than those who do not.⁴⁸ This differential in mental wellbeing and its associated costs in those who visit national parks provides an additional economic value estimated at \$6 trillion USD per year worldwide.⁴⁹

Photo: Abben Lak



Recent studies have shown that there will likely be serious and lasting mental health implications from the COVID-19 pandemic.^{50,51,52} The number of individuals experiencing anxiety, depression and loneliness is expected to significantly increase.⁵³ In a recent interview, Margaret Eaton, CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), explained that the “mental health impacts are going to be severe” post COVID-19, pointing to CMHA mental health hotlines in Nova Scotia, which experienced a 2,700% increase in calls within a single 24-hour period.⁵⁴

These mental health challenges will likely impose growing costs and pressures on Canadians and on the Canadian economy in the coming years. Parks and protected areas can help to mitigate these costs and pressures by supporting improved mental health for visitors.⁵⁵ Recognizing that protected nature is an essential service that supports Canadians’ mental and physical health, particularly in times of crisis, is yet another reason why investing in the protection and growth of Canada’s parks and protected areas is integral to our future.

Healthy ecosystems, healthy people, healthy economy

COVID-19 is a stark wake-up call highlighting the link between healthy ecosystems, healthy people, and a healthy economy. However, the need to better recognize the link between ecosystems and our wellbeing was known long before the current pandemic. In 2015 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 70/1 *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* where all countries committed “...to heal and secure our planet... and to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path.”⁵⁶ In January of 2020, a new report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) found that \$63 trillion (CAD) — **half of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP) — is moderately or highly dependent on nature** and its services. The WEF’s 2020 Global Risk Report further placed **biodiversity loss in the top five risks to the global economy.**⁵⁷

The global economy is already straining under the weight of the ongoing pandemic with **over \$10 trillion invested in immediate support over the course of two months.**⁵⁸ These unprecedented investments in support and stimulus measures are already more than three times those made during the 2008-2009 global economic recession in some countries, and as much as 10 times in others.⁵⁹ **COVID-19 has shattered the existing status quo, offering us space to re-think the future we want and need.** We can choose to reinvest in the status quo, or we can rebuild a society with an economy that is more healthy, equitable, and green - for the benefit of both nature and humanity for generations to come.

Protected areas have a proven track record in delivering impressive and tangible economic benefits.⁶⁰ Investing in more and better managed protected areas, including Indigenous protected areas, will support short and long-term jobs across the country, build a long-term foundation for nature-based and culture-based tourism, and contribute to stable and diverse community economies.



Photo: Ali Kazal

ENHANCING NATURE AND CULTURE-BASED TOURISM OFFERS

As we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, Canadians are likely to focus their travel on places closer to home so they can physically distance en route and at their destination. Many will be looking for opportunities to spend time in nature. Parks and protected areas will likely become more important destinations than ever.

Many communities, including Indigenous communities, are interested in developing nature and culture-based tourism opportunities, based on protected areas, to support community economic development. During this period of reduced travel, there is a window to invest in developing these opportunities linked to new and less well-known parks and protected areas. This would support a struggling tourism sector in the short-term, and help near-urban, rural and remote communities build more resilient and diversified economies in the longer-term.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PARKS

In addition to their role in nature conservation, protected areas deliver significant economic benefits:

- In 2017-18, the economic impact of visitor spending at Parks Canada sites included a \$2.8 billion contribution to Canada's Gross Domestic Product, supported 36,453 full-time jobs across the country, and generated \$486 million dollars in tax revenues across multiple levels of government.⁶¹**
- In 2009, federal, provincial and territorial parks (terrestrial) and associated visitor spending supported 64,000 jobs and contributed \$6 to Canada's GDP for every dollar invested by governments.⁶²**
- Protected natural areas boost and diversify rural economies by attracting new businesses and residents to park "gateway" communities.⁶³**

Protecting and restoring nature offers short, medium and long-term job opportunities for Canadians with a range of backgrounds and education and could support highly impacted and vulnerable sectors like tourism, which relies significantly on small- to medium-sized businesses. Investing in protected areas would particularly support rural and remote communities, including many Indigenous communities, offering a chance to diversify economies to help buffer inevitable downturns in resource sectors. It would also support the charitable and non-profit sector which

Photo: Daniel Wallace



contributes more than 8% to Canada's GDP⁶⁴, and engages many Canadians in urban and near-urban areas in nature and conservation.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF GATINEAU PARK, QC

Gatineau Park – a short 10 km drive from downtown Ottawa – receives some 2.65 million visits annually according to the National Capital Commission (NCC), the federal Crown corporation charged with managing the park. In addition to providing habitat for countless species, including many species at risk, the park's extensive network of trails contributes to making Ottawa–Gatineau one of the most livable urban areas in North America. In 2016 Gatineau Park contributed \$241.5 million to the regional economy, park visitors spent \$184 million on food, activities and shopping in municipalities surrounding the park, and the park supported over 4700 full-time jobs. Gatineau Park is a major economic driver for the Outaouais region and an important source of happiness and enjoyment to its visitors.⁶⁵

Numerous proposals are being provided to Canadian governments on how to guide recovery during and after the pandemic to build a healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable future. **To be effective in maintaining the life support system of our planet, recovery strategies should include investments in the establishment and effective management of networks of protected areas, including by supporting Indigenous protected areas and stewardship, and inclusive science and Indigenous knowledge-based land use planning.**

Furthermore, investments should actively discourage harmful and outdated industrial practices and policies that harm nature, as well as downgrading of environmental policies like impact assessments and ecological monitoring.

WILL CANADA EMBRACE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ON NATURE?

According to the United Nations, 2020 was to be the “super year” for nature.⁶⁶ New global biodiversity targets for the next decade were being negotiated for approval at a major UN Biodiversity conference in China in October. The IUCN World Conservation Congress was scheduled for June in France. A “High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People” was forming, made up of countries willing to champion “ambitious, science-driven global action to safeguard nature and humanity’s future,” including by protecting 30% of Earth’s land and ocean by 2030.⁶⁷ Important UN climate talks were scheduled for Glasgow in November. Biodiversity was in the spotlight, countries were stepping forward to champion ambitious conservation targets, and hope was building that the world might soon agree to ambitious action to tackle the interrelated crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

“Decisions made in the coming months can either “lock in” economic development patterns that will do permanent and escalating damage to the ecological systems that sustain all human health and livelihoods, or, if wisely taken, can promote a healthier, fairer, and greener world.”

– World Health Organization Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19, May 26, 2020



Source : World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/who-manifesto-for-a-healthy-recovery-from-covid-19>.

Photo: Celine Poncet



Photo: Tom Gainor

In Canada, the federal government signalled its interest in stepping up as a global leader on nature conservation, hosting an international Nature Champions' Summit in Montreal in April 2019, and committing to advocate at international gatherings that countries around the world set a 30 per cent conservation goal for 2030 in addition to their domestic commitment to protect 25% of land and ocean by 2025 and 30% by 2030.⁶⁸

Then COVID-19 hit. Within weeks, 2020 became a year of unprecedented global crisis, bringing suffering and uncertainty to billions of citizens around the world. Nature's super year was delayed until at least 2021. As countries shut down and trillions of dollars of public funds were appropriately deployed to battle the virus, conservationists worried that momentum for action on nature and climate change would be lost.

However, as weeks passed, scientists began to highlight the links between society's destruction of nature and pandemics like COVID-19. Many people had a chance to slow down and reflect on their priorities. Stories of birdwatching and nature viewing exploded on social media, and public opinion polls highlighted people's desire for fundamental change, in their lives and in the world. The inequities and vulnerabilities of the world's existing economic system became even more evident, triggering massive protests against racism and systemic discrimination. We are in an historic moment of turmoil, and momentum is growing for countries to embrace transformational change in our relationship with nature and with each other.

Several governments have already signalled they will put nature at the heart of their COVID-19 recovery plans. For example, the European Union (EU) has committed to incorporating their newly released *Biodiversity Strategy* into recovery plans, recognizing that half of global GDP (US\$45 trillion) depends on nature.⁶⁹ The EU *Biodiversity Strategy* will establish protected areas covering 30% of Europe's land and ocean by 2030, restore degraded ecosystems across Europe, and unlock €33 billion per year to conserve biodiversity.⁷⁰

HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE: A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES

“Making nature healthy again is key to our physical and mental wellbeing and is an ally in the fight against climate change and disease outbreaks. It is at the heart of our growth strategy, the European Green Deal, and is part of a European recovery that gives more back to the planet than it takes away.”⁷¹

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

New Zealand has announced a \$1.1 billion (NZD) program to create 11,000 new regional jobs to help restore the country's natural environment.⁷²

“This investment in nature will not only support thousands of people with jobs but pay dividends for generations to come by giving nature a helping hand.”⁷³

NZ Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage

As the second largest country in the world, Canada stewards 20% of the Earth's wild forests, 24% of its wetlands, and almost one third of its land-stored carbon. We have some of the world's largest remaining wild rivers, the largest remaining natural terrestrial mammal migration, and billions of birds nesting in Canada's Boreal and temperate forests, tundra, wetlands and grasslands. Canada has an opportunity and a significant global responsibility to conserve nature. In fact, scientists have identified Canada as a potential “conservation superpower” based on the high proportion of global ecosystem values located within our country.⁷⁴

Canada should step forward alongside the EU, New Zealand, and other high ambition countries putting nature and ecological transformation at the heart of planning and investment as we recover from the COVID-19 crisis, for both the short- and long-term benefit of people and planet.

Saskatchewan River Delta.

Photo: Garth Lenz





Photo: Ruth Troughton

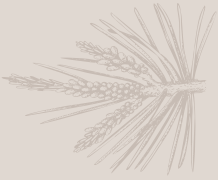
CANADIANS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT COMMITMENT TO PROTECT 30% OF LAND AND OCEAN BY 2030⁷⁵

A March 2020 Abacus poll found that nine out of 10 Canadians support the federal government's pledge to protect 30% of our land and seascape by 2030, 80% expect Canada to be a global leader in protecting land and water, and three quarters support expanding funding to create more protected areas.

This is consistent with the findings of a paper published last year that found Canadians want about half of Canada's land and ocean protected.⁷⁶

Progress in Canada has set the stage for more ambitious action

Last fall, Canada's federal government committed to protecting 25% of land and ocean by 2025 and 30% by 2030, recognizing the need for more ambitious action to reverse the on-going catastrophic decline of biodiversity. In June 2020 the Prime Minister reaffirmed this commitment in statements released on both *World Environment Day* and *World Oceans Day*.



CANADA'S PROGRESS

In 2015, the newly elected federal government promised to deliver on Canada's internationally agreed-to target of protecting at least 17% of land and freshwater in well-designed, well-managed networks of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

Two advisory committees were created and produced reports with recommendations for how to implement this commitment in ways that would contribute to reconciliation: a National Advisory Panel and an Indigenous Circle of Experts.^{79,80}

2015

2017

2010

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

2016

2017

2017

2018

In 2017, for the first time ever the federal government convened all levels of government — federal, provincial, territorial, municipal, and Indigenous — to plan for how to deliver on the 2020 land and freshwater protection target through the "Pathway to Canada Target One" initiative. Through this initiative, federal, provincial, and territorial governments developed a common approach for delivering on the commitment, as well as standards and tools for determining what should count in Canada as protected areas and OECMs based on international definitions and guidelines.^{77,78}

Through their 2018 Budget, the federal government invested \$1.3 billion in nature conservation — the largest conservation investment in Canadian history. This investment also marked the start of a new shared approach to financing land protection in Canada, supporting provinces and territories, Indigenous governments, private landowners, NGO conservation work, and leveraging significant philanthropic investments.

on protecting land and ocean over the past four years provides a solid foundation for achieving these new targets.

Since 2018, agreements have been signed by Crown and Indigenous governments to establish new Indigenous protected areas, including Thaidene Néné and Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta in the Northwest Territories, the Peel River Watershed in the Yukon and Qat'muk in the Central Purcell Mountains of British Columbia.

In June 2020, Environment and Climate Change Canada announced a list of projects funded through the federal Pathway to Canada Target One "Challenge Fund." Once completed, these projects should help Canada achieve almost 17% protection of land and freshwater.

*Government of Canada. (2020). Canada Target 1 Challenge. Accessed June 19, 2020.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/nature-legacy/canada-target-one-challenge.html#events>.

2018

2020

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

2023

2024

2025

2019

2020

In late 2019, recognizing that 17% is a milestone target towards the more ambitious action needed to conserve biodiversity, the Government of Canada committed to new milestone targets of protecting 25% by 2025 and 30% by 2030, and to implementing nature-based climate solutions.

On June 5th, 2020 — World Environment Day — the Prime Minister reconfirmed the federal government's commitment to protecting 25% of land and ocean by 2025 and 30% by 2030, and to implementing nature-based climate solutions.

While all governments in Canada, and their partners, still have a long way to go to complete a network of effectively managed protected areas that will act as a foundation for sustaining all life in our Canadian landscape, important steps have been taken, and new commitments made, setting the stage for scaling up on-the-ground conservation action over the next decade.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA ARE LEADING THE WAY ON CONSERVATION

Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship, including Indigenous protected and conserved areas (IPCAs), land use planning and Indigenous Guardians programs, are essential to advance conservation in Canada. Recognition of the importance of Indigenous-led conservation has been gaining momentum since the Indigenous Circle of Experts and National Advisory Panel tabled reports in March 2018 offering extensive recommendations on how to deliver on our conservation commitments in the spirit and practice of reconciliation.

Indigenous protected areas are being recognized by many Indigenous nations as ways to protect land, enhance food security, support cultural continuity, and deliver economic benefits for communities. For example, Thaidene Néné Indigenous Protected Area established in 2019 in partnership with Parks Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories will protect over 2.6 million hectares of boreal forest and tundra, and is projected to generate \$1–4 million annually for the local community of Lutsel K'e in the Northwest Territories.⁸¹ Indigenous

stewardship programs, such as Indigenous Guardians, are essential for managing and monitoring Indigenous protected areas. They can also provide stable, well-paying jobs, often in remote communities, and provide a significant return on investment. A study of the Coastal Guardians on the central coast of British Columbia reported a return on investment of between 10 and 20 dollars for every dollar invested.⁸²

Indigenous protected and conserved areas were at the heart of the Canada Nature Fund Challenge Program and accounted for the majority of supported projects.⁸³ Many more proposals exist that still need funding or will require more funding to implement.



Bison in Grasslands National Park. Photo: Matt Jacques, @mattjacques

CANADIAN STANDARDS FOR TERRESTRIAL PROTECTED AREAS AND OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES

For the first time ever, in 2018 Canada's federal, provincial, and territorial governments adopted common standards for protected areas and "other effective area-based conservation measures" (OECMs) through the Pathway to Canada Target One process. While protected areas have long been the cornerstone of area-based conservation, OECMs emerged more recently in biodiversity targets set under the CBD in 2010. Aichi Target 11 commits countries to protect at least 17% of land and freshwater by 2020 in well-designed and effectively managed systems of protected areas and "other effective area-based conservation measures".⁸⁴

The main difference between protected areas and OECMs is that protected areas must have a primary goal of conserving nature, while OECMs may be established for other purposes, but must still deliver effective conservation outcomes. OECMs are not a "weaker" form of protection. Both protected areas and OECMs require that incompatible activities be prohibited (including industrial activities and damaging infrastructure developments), and that other activities be effectively managed. Like protected areas, OECMs must also be permanently protected.⁸⁵

A Canadian Decision Support Tool has been developed, based on international definitions and guidance, to help assess whether areas qualify as protected areas or OECMs. Case studies and other materials are also available to support the screening of potential areas.⁸⁶

OECMs recognized so far in Canada include part of Canadian Forces Base Shilo in Manitoba, which effectively conserves important native grasslands; and conservation zones designated through constitutionally protected land use plans in the NWT.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

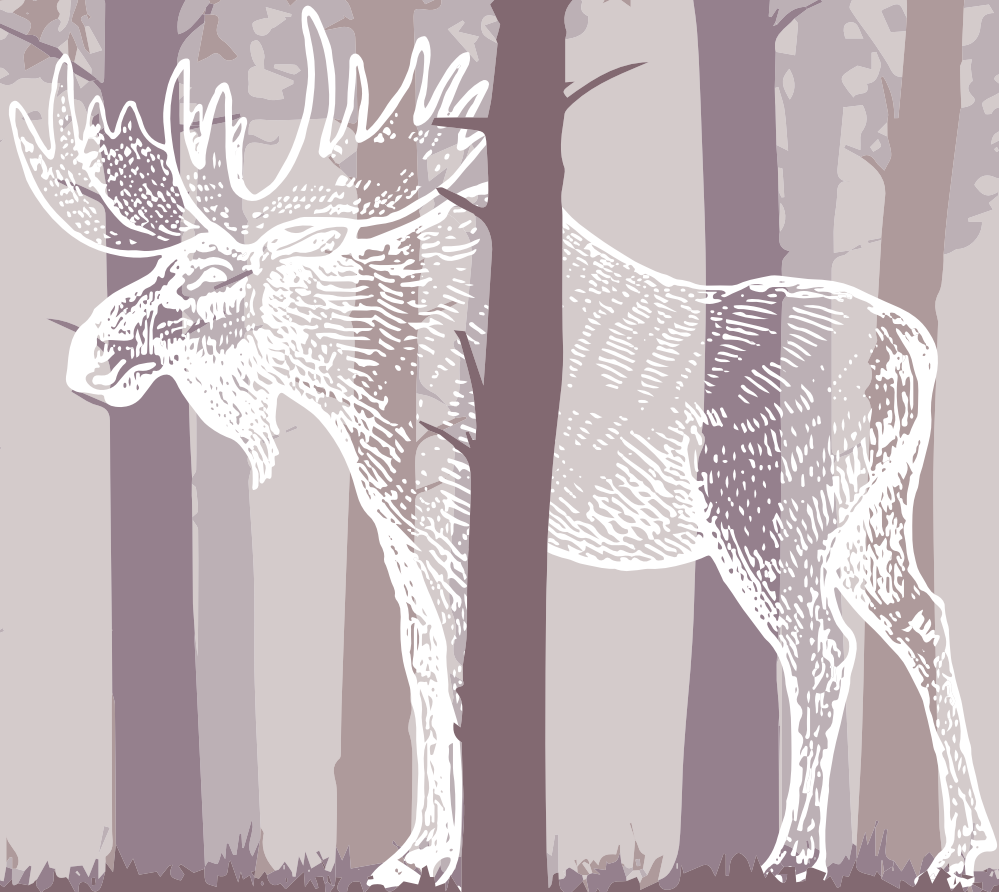
As Canadian governments look beyond immediate COVID-19 crisis support programs to medium and long-term recovery measures, conserving nature — our life support system — must be at their heart. This includes delivering on the federal government’s commitment to protect 25% of our landscape by 2025 and 30% by 2030. To help achieve this, CPAWS recommends that federal, provincial, and territorial governments in Canada:

- 1** Publicly commit to protecting and restoring nature at the heart of COVID-19 recovery plans and investments.
- 2** Invest in completing effective networks of protected areas, recognizing the significant benefits that protected areas provide for mental and physical health, conserving biodiversity, mitigating and adapting to climate change, job creation, and economic stimulus.
- 3** Invest in long term protected area management, recognizing this is necessary to maximize the benefits and return on investment that protected areas provide for local communities.
- 4** Support Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship, ensuring protected areas are created and managed in ways that contribute to reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, and with the Earth.
- 5** Adhere to agreed-upon Canadian standards for protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, ensuring these areas are permanently protected from industrial activities and damaging infrastructure.
- 6** The federal government should also embrace an international leadership role, starting by immediately joining the “High Ambition Coalition” of countries championing ambitious action on nature conservation.

Photo: Sharisa Johnson

Part 2

Action by all governments
is key to successful
conservation outcomes



HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE: A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Canada's international leadership potential requires leadership at home as well as on the world stage. Delivering on Canada's domestic commitments and responsibilities requires provincial and territorial governments to join the federal and Indigenous governments in recognizing the enormous value and importance of protecting significantly more of our landscape, and committing to work with partners to complete well-designed, well-managed protected area networks across Canada.

Responsibility for protecting Canada's environment is shared among all levels of government, while provinces and territories have primary jurisdiction over land and natural resources according to the Canadian Constitution. Indigenous peoples' rights are also recognized under the Canadian Constitution. The federal government has primary responsibility to represent the country in matters of international law, including UN treaties like the UN CBD. This means that the leadership, engagement, and support of all levels of government is key to successfully delivering on land protection goals and commitments.

The federal government has stepped up and demonstrated leadership by convening provinces, territories, Indigenous peoples, NGOs and other partners to plan for how to best move forward to deliver on Canada's commitment to protect 17% of our land and freshwater by 2020. They have invested \$1.3 billion over five years not only for federal conservation initiatives, but to support provinces, territories, Indigenous governments, and NGOs with their work to deliver on Canada's conservation targets.

*Kluane National Park
and Reserve. Photo: Adil
Darvesh*





Photo: Jason Mowry

Indigenous governments across Canada have stepped forward with leading edge landscape-level plans and initiatives to conserve their traditional territories, bringing together western science and Indigenous knowledge. In southern Canada, municipalities are getting involved, along with land trusts and private landowners.

Provinces and territories vary in their enthusiasm for expanding protected area networks. Some, such as Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador have made political commitments to expand land protection in their jurisdictions and are working towards this goal; the Northwest Territories and the Yukon have defined Land Use Planning processes, which have the potential to result in new, expansive, co-managed protected areas and conservation zones. Other provinces are either slow or reluctant to respond or, in the case of Alberta, actively undermining and dismantling the existing protected area system.

Across the country we have identified priorities for action on parks and protected areas in each province and territory in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and Canada's commitments to expand protection. We have also identified opportunities and challenges in improving the effectiveness of park management.

YUKON TERRITORY

Land use planning offers a path to a positive future for nature and people

With its vast wilderness, the Yukon presents an opportunity for conservation outcomes at a scale that is impossible in most other parts of the world. The constitutionally protected land use planning process, as defined in the Final Agreements (modern treaties) signed by 11 Yukon First Nations, is a powerful tool to create a sustainable future for the territory's land, water, wildlife, and people. It is a process that allows conservation to be achieved in a way that supports reconciliation and sets the stage for more sustainable tourism and infrastructure, while also providing certainty for resource development. There is also great potential for the creation of IPCAs in the territory, which offer a meaningful way to achieve First Nation-led conservation — particularly for the three First Nations without Final Agreements.

With the August 2019 announcement of the final Peel River Watershed Land Use Plan, over 20% of the Territory is now protected, or identified for permanent protection.⁸⁷ Only two of seven regional land use plans have been completed so far, leaving space for additional protection in the future, based on western science, traditional knowledge and cultural values. Currently, a regional land use planning process is underway in the Dawson Region, sub-regional planning is taking place in the Beaver River Watershed and Indigenous-led land use planning processes are also starting in the southeast Yukon.

Kluane National Park and Reserve. Photo: Adil Darvesh



“Responding to the COVID-19 crisis calls for us all to confront the vested interests that oppose transformative change, and to end ‘business as usual’. We can build back better and emerge from the current crisis stronger and more resilient than ever — but to do so means choosing policies and actions that protect nature — so that nature can help to protect us.”

– Co-chairs of IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and President, Ecohealth Alliance



Source: Settele, J., Díaz, S., Brondizio, E., & Daszak, P. (2020). COVID-19 Stimulus Measures Must Save Lives, Protect Livelihoods, and Safeguard Nature to Reduce the Risk of Future Pandemics. IPBES. <https://ipbes.net/covid19stimulus>.

ACTION BY ALL GOVERNMENTS IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

The Yukon's parks system is generally well managed by a capable Parks department. However, as new areas are added, the cost of managing the system is increasing, with limited funding available for the long-term management of new protected areas. This not only puts the health of existing protected areas at risk, but also reduces the appeal for establishing new ones.

To address this issue, Yukon Parks needs adequate long-term funding to support management of a large and ecologically representative parks system. Recognizing the important and growing role of First Nations in establishing and managing protected areas in the Yukon, funding should also be provided directly to First Nations governments to support Indigenous Guardians, planning and monitoring. This investment would contribute to reconciliation by supporting accelerated implementation of the Final Agreements as well as Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship; provide short-term jobs in local communities hit by the sharp downturn in the mining and tourism industries; and set the stage for resource industry growth and nature and culture based tourism when economic conditions improve by providing greater land use certainty.



*Alsek Valley. Photo:
Atsushi Sugimoto*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The federal and territorial governments should invest in funding for land use planning, including immediate funding to First Nations governments, to support their efforts to prepare for both current and future planning processes. Additional funding for the ENGO community is also important, as non-profits play an important role in supporting First Nations with both western science and public outreach.
- First Nations without Final Agreements should be financially supported in their efforts to build capacity in their Lands departments and to complete their own land use planning processes.
- Long term funding commitments for managing protected areas are needed to deliver on their significant potential ecological, cultural, and economic benefits.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Indigenous Governments lead the way in establishing and stewarding protected and conserved areas

In the Northwest Territories, Indigenous Governments are leading the way to establishing and stewarding Indigenous protected and conserved areas. These efforts are supported by legislation such as the new NWT Protected Areas Act (PAA) (June 2019) that explicitly supports Indigenous and co-managed protected areas, the Canada Wildlife Act and Canada National Parks Act. Regional land-use plans which are a provision of land claim agreements are another effective conservation tool. The inclusion of Indigenous law and governance in establishment and co-management activities are pillars of protected and conserved areas in the NWT.



Photo: Leonard Laub

ACTION BY ALL GOVERNMENTS IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

Recent momentum has included establishment agreements signed for three longstanding candidate protected areas: Edézhíe — a partnership between Dehcho and Tłı̄chǫ First Nations, the Canadian Wildlife Service and GNWT; Thaidene Nënë — a partnership between Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation, Parks Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories; and Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta — a partnership between the K'asho Got'ine of the Sahtu region and the Government of the Northwest Territories. Another area identified by the Tłı̄chǫ Government -Dinàgà Wek'èhodì along the North Arm of Great Slave Lake is soon to be established.

Other community supported candidate protected areas such as Łue Túé Sųlái, Ejjé Túé Ndáde, Ka'a'gee Tu, Sambaa K'e in the Dehcho region are core to the draft Dehcho Land Use Plan and are connected with proposed conservation zones that will secure substantial habitat for boreal caribou, several other species at risk, migratory birds, and waterfowl. Multi-faceted community-led conservation planning initiatives, for example the *Nío Nę P'ęnę* (Trails of the Mountain Caribou) project are also moving forward based on local interests and Indigenous knowledge. Guardian programs, wildlife management, habitat protection, youth engagement, and education are a few of the guiding elements.

In the NWT, protected and conserved areas deliver vast benefits for nature and for people. They can contribute to diversified local economies through employment in tourism and in the multi-disciplinary roles of management, monitoring, education, health and culture, to name a few of the opportunities. They mitigate climate change and are reference sites where management and monitoring contribute to an understanding of the impacts of development on the broader landscape. They are a potential training ground for participation in the environmental aspects of industry. There is a tremendous untapped potential here, therefore, long-term investments in protected and conserved areas are critical!

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Federal and territorial governments should invest in a long-term Northwest Territories fund for managing protected and conserved areas alongside long-term investment in Indigenous Guardian programs.
- Federal and territorial governments should work across departments to invest in programs that leverage protected and conserved areas for economic development, culture, education, health or other objectives that are compatible with management plans and the needs of co-management partners.

NUNAVUT*

Nunavut covers 20% of Canada, and almost 20% of the territory is Inuit-owned land, with title held by territorial and regional Inuit organizations. The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement provides for the establishment of parks and conservation areas, including requirements for Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreements, and mandates the creation of a land use planning process that is legally binding.

As of the end of 2018, 10.1% of the territory was in protected areas, with 99% of this area created under federal legislation as national parks, national wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries and the Thelon Wildlife Sanctuary.

The federal government's Canada Nature Fund has recently invested in three proposed protected area projects in Nunavut: the establishment of Agguttinni Territorial Park by the Government of Nunavut; preliminary planning for an Inuit protected and conserved area on the Boothia Peninsula by the Spence Bay Hunters and Trappers Association; and expanded protection of Inuit-owned lands on Bathurst Island for endangered Peary caribou by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association.

The draft Nunavut Land Use Plan offers additional opportunities to protect large areas of ecologically and culturally significant lands over the coming years. The plan includes goals to protect and sustain the environment, encourage conservation planning, build healthier communities and encourage sustainable economic development. Once approved, the plan will guide conservation and development projects in the Nunavut Settlement Area. Community consultations on the most recent draft were underway prior to the pandemic.

Photo: Isaac Demeester



**CPAWS does not have an office in Nunavut. Therefore, our recommendations are based on existing land use and protected area work and proposals that are publicly advancing in the territory.*

BRITISH COLUMBIA

A critical and longstanding funding shortfall for BC Parks

In British Columbia, as in other parts of Canada, parks have become increasingly important in supporting people's mental and physical well-being through the global COVID-19 pandemic. More than 26 million people visit BC's provincial parks each year, making them extremely important for the province's economy, health, and identity.

Despite the widely recognized need for healthy, accessible parks, BC's cherished provincial parks system has been seriously under-resourced for decades. This continues to put wildlife and visitors at risk and creates barriers to much-needed expansions to our parks system.



“Human societies and economies rely on biodiversity in fundamental ways. Our research shows that \$44 trillion of economic value generation — over half the world’s total GDP — is moderately or highly dependent on nature and its services. Nature loss matters for most businesses — through impacts on operations, supply chains, and markets.”

– World Economic Forum Global Risk report, January 2020



Source : World Economic Forum. (2020). The Global Risks Report 2020. Retrieved from: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risk_Report_2020.pdf.

*Sawblade Falls, Pinecone
Burke Provincial Park.
Photo: Heather Filyk*

HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE: A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Provincial parks were among the first places to close in the early days of BC's pandemic response. With limited staff and resources to manage visitor interaction safely, and maintain facilities to new health standards, this shutdown was all but inevitable. It has highlighted the deep cracks in a faulty system that CPAWS-BC and our partners have been working tirelessly to mend for decades.

Since the early 2000s, when BC Parks had its funding cut significantly, the province has struggled with the important job of protecting wildlife and nature while also providing opportunities for people to connect with these special places. Parks are becoming increasingly overcrowded, with a marked increase in degraded and aging infrastructure. Understaffing at parks across the province has led to core functions such as monitoring, enforcement, research, and education becoming restricted or cut entirely.

Park staff need resources to monitor visitors and the natural systems around them, from campgrounds to water quality to wildlife management. Without resourced staff and an appropriate level of funding for the park system, we continue to put visitors and wildlife at risk.

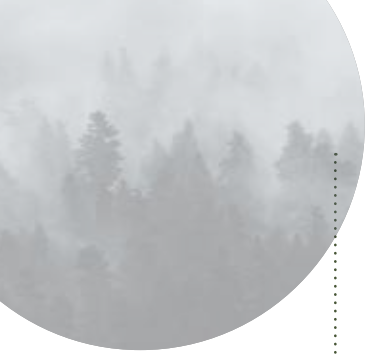
New protected areas

Major opportunities exist in BC to support Indigenous-led conservation initiatives. Many of these projects are underway across the province with support from the federal government, including IPCA establishment and land use planning initiatives by the Kaska Dena, Taku River Tlingit, Tahltan, and Ktunaxa First Nations.

Protecting nature is BC's best hope, and the conservation vision of First Nations will be essential to combatting climate change and addressing global biodiversity declines. Long term support from the provincial and federal governments is critical in delivering on the enormous potential benefits these important conservation initiatives offer to local communities, and to all Canadians.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Government of British Columbia should invest immediately in BC Parks, increasing staff capacity for visitor management, ecological monitoring, and management planning to better recognize the critical role that parks play in supporting our health, our communities, and our environment.
- The Government of British Columbia should support Indigenous-led conservation initiatives that enable reconciliation with Indigenous nations, protection and recovery of species at risk, and build sustainable long-term jobs in rural and remote communities.



*Cypress Provincial Park.
Photo: Jordan Schilling*

ALBERTA

Actively dismantling the province's cherished park system

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, the Government of Alberta announced that 164 provincial parks would have their legal park designation removed and 20 parks would be partially or fully closed this year. Little rationale was provided, and no public consultation was conducted. However, a public opinion poll commissioned by CPAWS found that 7 out of 10 Albertans oppose the removal or closure of these parks.⁸⁸

While Alberta had previously committed to meeting the international target of protecting 17% of the province's land and freshwater by 2020, and co-chaired the intergovernmental Pathway to Canada Target One process with the federal government, the current provincial government has done a complete about-face, and is now actively dismantling and undermining Alberta's existing provincial parks system.



Photo: Steve Wiesner

HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE: A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES



Protests against park closures in AB. Photo: Matt Bozec

“Once this war is over, may the challenge really be to create a planet that is fit for our grandchildren”

– Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England



Source : Tett, G., Nauman, B., Temple-West, P. & Edgecliffe-Johnson, A. (2020). Polman tells banks to step up; Schwab names names; Covid-19 saints and sinners. Quote by: Mark Carney. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/39047667-4204-4915-8e19-6b3a193c071b>.

These changes would impact 175 parks: 37% of all park sites in Alberta, including 74% of all provincial recreation areas.⁸⁹ While these parks cover a relatively small land base, they are the most accessible areas for Albertans across the province to access parks and experience our public protected areas. Many of these parks also protect important conservation values such as protections for rare plants, locally important habitats, or breeding areas for wildlife.

If these changes go ahead, the parks would lose protection and revert to vacant public land. They could then be opened for uses that are not permitted in protected areas, such as resource extraction or commercial developments.⁹⁰ Reinforcing the risk of development if they are removed from the parks system, the provincial government recently rescinded a policy that prevented open pit coal mines from being developed on the eastern slopes of the Rockies, including the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River, Oldman River, and Bow River, where many of these park closures are located.

While the government has suggested that areas removed from the parks system could be managed by third parties, they would still lose their legislative protection. Under this new model, private operators would not be as accountable to Albertans for maintaining conservation values and quality outdoor experiences. Most potential operators do not have the resources needed to effectively manage these important places. Thus, it is unlikely many of them would continue to operate as conservation or managed recreation areas.

CPAWS believes that these special places are the shared natural heritage of Albertans and should be kept in trust by the Government of Alberta for all Albertans to enjoy as part of an effectively managed public park system.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Government of Alberta should:

- Reverse their decision to remove the protective designation for these parks.
- Make land use decisions through the land use planning process.
- Uphold their commitment to transparent decision making and robust consultation.

All Albertans and Canadians who visit Alberta's Parks should voice their concerns about these changes to their elected representatives.

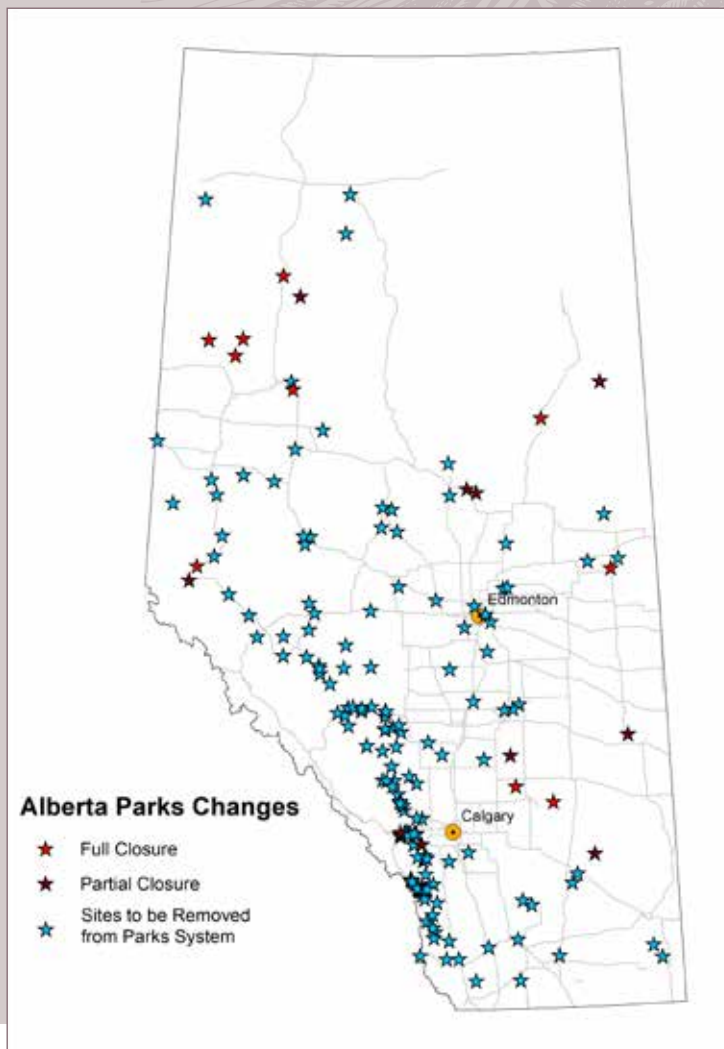


Figure 1.
Parks in
Alberta to
be removed
from the
Parks System

SASKATCHEWAN

Significant opportunities exist to expand the province's protected area system

With only 9% of Saskatchewan's landscape currently protected, the province has not increased its percentage target for protected areas since the 1990s (it is still formally at 12%) despite scientific evidence of the value and importance of larger scale networks of protection, along with broad public support. Significant opportunities exist to expand the province's protected area system through partnership among the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, Indigenous peoples, forest companies, and other land users (including ranchers/pasture patrons, hunters, trappers, and fishermen). These include:

- **Saskatchewan River Delta** – For many years, CPAWS Saskatchewan has been working with Cumberland House and Peter Ballantyne Cree Nations, as well as with Weyerhaeuser Forest Products and the Government of Saskatchewan, to establish an almost 4,000 square kilometer protected area in the Suggi Lowlands/Mossy River Watershed at the heart of the Delta.
- **Athabasca Basin** – CPAWS Saskatchewan has partnered with northern communities as represented by Ya' thi Néné Lands and Resources and the Government of Saskatchewan to create new Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) covering about 6,000 square kilometers of thriving boreal forest and sub-alpine tundra in the Athabasca Basin, including important habitat for woodland and barren ground caribou. In late 2019, the federal government announced funding to establish this area through the Canada Target 1 Challenge fund.

Grasslands National Park.

Photo: Matt Jacques,

@mattjacques





Saskatchewan River Delta.

Photo: Garth Lenz

- **Grasslands** – Temperate grasslands are among the most endangered ecosystems on the planet and in Canada. In southern Saskatchewan, there is an immediate opportunity for the federal and provincial governments to work with ranchers/pasture patrons and Indigenous peoples to finalize permanent conservation measures for important grasslands at Govenlock, Nashlyn and Battle Creek, and to put in place effective long-term conservation measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Government of Saskatchewan should raise its protected area targets to, at minimum, align with national targets of 25 percent protection by 2025 and 30 percent by 2030, recognizing significantly more of the province's grasslands and forest habitat needs protection to safeguard nature and its benefits for people.
- The Government of Saskatchewan should commit to investing in protected area establishment and management, including Indigenous stewardship, as part of the province's post-COVID recovery plan.
- The Government of Saskatchewan should work with First Nations governments and partners to establish an Indigenous-led conservation area in and around the Saskatchewan River Delta/Suggi Lowlands/Mossy River Watershed.
- The Government of Saskatchewan should continue to implement the results of Indigenous-led land use and IPCA planning in the Athabasca region, when completed, and support other IPCAs as part of land use, caribou range and forest management planning in the boreal.
- The provincial and federal governments should continue to work with ranchers and First Nations to finalize protection measures for Govenlock, Nashlyn and Battle Creek grasslands, and ensure effective long-term conservation measures are in place for other former Federal and Provincial community pastures.



Photo: Dan Bolton

MANITOBA

Indigenous-led conservation presents an exceptional opportunity for conservation and economic development

With only 11.1% of Manitoba's landscape currently protected, the province has a long way to go to safeguard its wealth of wild lands and waters, wildlife, and natural carbon stores. However, there are many opportunities to protect more of Manitoba's magnificent landscape while at the same time providing greater certainty to industry, diversifying community economies, and helping to support the province's plans to expand its northern tourism industry.

The federal government's Canada Target 1 challenge fund is already supporting nine protected area establishment and planning projects in Manitoba, most of which are Indigenous led. For example, CPAWS MB is working with the Sayisi Dene First Nation, three other neighbouring First Nations and the Inuit to conserve the entire Seal River Watershed as an Indigenous Protected Area. The Seal is the last major river in northern Manitoba unaffected by hydroelectric development. Its vast northern watershed covers more than 50,000 square kilometers: home to caribou, polar bears, beluga whales and millions of migratory birds. The initiative has received significant, multi-year funding from Canada's Nature Fund and is well underway.

Further south, CPAWS is partnering with Fisher River Cree Nation to undertake a public engagement process aimed at developing a conservation plan for an 11,000 square kilometer study area. The goal of the project is to establish a network of interconnected protected areas in the southern Interlake region, a rich ecological area with significant biological carbon stored in expansive peatlands. This initiative is also well underway, and the goals and objectives are supported by the Government of Manitoba.

ACTION BY ALL GOVERNMENTS IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

Land use planning offers another big opportunity to better conserve the boreal forest while creating jobs and supporting diversified local economies. For decades, land use planning has been promised in Manitoba, but has been advancing at a snail's pace largely due to a lack of available funding. To date, only four of fifteen First Nations have completed land use plans for their regions through this process. Others have expressed interest in advancing land use planning in their Resource Management Areas. Investing in government and community capacity to complete these plans, as well as for long term Indigenous stewardship initiatives, would create jobs in local communities, contribute to Canada's conservation goals, and provide much-needed certainty for business investment by providing clear direction for where development can and cannot take place.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The federal and provincial governments should collaborate with Indigenous nations and other partners to complete projects supported by the Canada Target One Challenge Fund. To maximize the economic, environmental and social benefits to communities, funding should also be provided for long-term protected area management.
- The Government of Manitoba should live up to its longstanding commitment to work with Indigenous nations to complete land use plans for resource management areas. The federal government could help by providing financial support.
- The federal government should help expand job opportunities and other economic benefits associated with Manitoba's recent investment in upgrading provincial park infrastructure by providing matching funds.

Photo: Eduardo Bergen

ONTARIO

Ontario is liquidating rather than conserving nature

In stark contrast to the momentum that is building for nature conservation elsewhere in the world, Ontario seems stuck in a past era when nature was a resource to be exploited as fast as possible. Its proposal to increase urban sprawl by opening up more precious farmlands and other rural areas to developers in southern Ontario is raising deep concern. The recent push to double logging in the province will foreclose on options to build back better after the pandemic, contribute to the demise of endangered species like caribou, and worsen our climate crisis. Ontario's 'open for business' approach may also undermine the province's ability to manage parks for ecological integrity, as required by law. Logging will continue in Ontario's flagship park, Algonquin, harming the park's ecosystems. The natural ecosystems of the province will continue to decline, first from never-ending threats and second, from neglect and provincial underfunding.

The *Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan* proposes increasing park visitors by a million people per year. However, the needed investments to ensure parks can accommodate these visitors without putting the wildlife and ecosystems they protect at greater risk have not been made. Without sufficient enforcement, proper monitoring for ecological integrity, and naturalist programs, we may end up "loving our parks to death". **Just like we have learned to be cautious not to overload our health care system, we must also take great care to manage the burdens on our protected areas.**

Photo: Ryan Christodoulou





Photo: Leila Boujnane

Rather than liquidating nature, and foreclosing on options, the Government of Ontario should work with Ontarians to safeguard nature to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, stem the loss of biodiversity, create green jobs and add room for all people to get out into nature, especially near large urban centres. COVID-19 crisis has shown us that protected natural areas are sorely lacking, needed more than ever, and are vital to our collective and overall well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Government of Ontario should:

- Put protecting and restoring nature — our life support system — at the heart of COVID-19 recovery plans.
- Reverse plans to open up important green spaces in southern Ontario to development and to double logging, focusing instead on protecting and restoring connected networks of natural spaces throughout the province, including critical habitat for caribou and other species at risk.
- Recognize and support Indigenous protected areas, including those proposed by Moose Cree First Nation and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug Nation in northern Ontario.
- Increase investment in provincial park management to ensure the parks' ecological integrity is maintained and restored, as visitation increases.

**“To care for
humanity, we
MUST care for
nature.”**

– Antonio Guterres,
UN Secretary-General



Source :Guterres, A. (2020).
Secretary-General's message
on World Environment Day.
United Nations Secretary-
General. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-06-05/secretary-generals-message-world-environment-day-scroll-down-for-french-version>.



Lac Walker. Photo: Marcel Houle

QUEBEC

New parks and protected areas must be at the heart of Quebec's recovery plan!

Quebec's parks and other protected areas are a proven tool to help alleviate the biodiversity crisis. Quebec's protected areas are well-managed and thus contribute to maintaining healthy intact ecosystems. They also prevent harmful activities within their boundaries, most importantly - industrial development. Quebec's parks and other protected areas also contribute to the improvement of public health, sustain resilient local economies and help combat climate change.

In June 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Government of Quebec introduced Bill 61, which would weaken environmental regulations. This would be a giant step backwards for Quebec just when the world is recognizing the needs to do much more to protect nature in order to protect ourselves. **SNAP Québec urges the Government of Quebec to make a U-turn and put Nature at the heart of its post-COVID policies.**

Longing for national parks reopening, residents of Quebec flocked to urban parks and natural areas during the lockdown, proving once again the vital importance of nature for our mental and physical health, along with the essential services we rely on from healthy ecosystems.

With more than 100 000 square kilometers already identified as potential protected areas — all supported by local communities — Quebec has an opportunity to be an international leader on a nature-centered recovery.

ACTION BY ALL GOVERNMENTS IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION OUTCOMES

Delivering on these projects would not only enable Quebec to reach international conservation targets, but also create a foundation for a resilient economy. In addition to maintaining vital ecological services — including public health support — investing in a truly green recovery would notably boost the tourism industry and regional economies.

As international travel is expected to be further hindered by the pandemic, we have a unique opportunity to invest in nature and culture-based tourism in near-urban, rural and remote areas of Quebec. This would support a struggling sector in the short term, while helping communities build more resilient and diversified economies in the longer-term.

All across Quebec, local and Indigenous communities are already involved in tourism development projects associated with protected areas proposals, such as the Chic-Chocs Mountains in Lower-Saint-Lawrence, Sainte-Thérèse Island in Montérégie, the Dumoine, Noire and Coulonge River watersheds in the Outaouais, Lac Walker and Magpie River on the North-Shore, Iluliliq and Baie-aux-Feuilles parks projects in Nunavik.

As Quebec advances these projects, it must also ensure that environmentally damaging activities such as mining, forestry, building dams and major infrastructure development are prohibited from all conservation areas to ensure the effectiveness of these investments in nature.



Gaspésie. Photo: Mélissa Vaitilingame

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Government of Quebec should:

- Deliver on the 100 000 square kilometres planned protected areas across the province, notably Lac Walker, Iluliliq and Baie-aux-Feuilles national parks, Magpie river, Chic-Chocs and Sainte-Thérèse Island, in partnership with Indigenous nations.
- Establish, through the Municipality Fund for Biodiversity, new connectivity corridors, which can also provide excellent tourism opportunities.
- Continue to prohibit industrial activities in all conserved areas, in compliance with IUCN guidelines.
- Invest in nature-based and culture-based tourism opportunities associated with parks and protected area establishment and provide training for regional staff.

GATINEAU PARK – A PARK IN NAME ONLY

Gatineau Park is the only federally owned and administered wilderness park in Canada not subject to the National Parks Act and not managed by Parks Canada. Gatineau Park is a “park” in name only — its boundaries are not recognized in an Act of Parliament, there is no legislative guidance mandating that nature be put first in management decisions and the park manager lacks many basic authorities needed to safeguard the park’s rich natural heritage for current and future generations.

Given its proximity to a large urban area and numerous roads that cross the park leading to habitat fragmentation, Gatineau Park risks becoming isolated from other natural areas and losing its ecological integrity. This would be devastating for the entire Outaouais region, where the park plays an important role in nature conservation and is also the region’s major economic driver.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The federal government should amend the *National Capital Act* to enshrine the park’s boundaries in legislation, thus granting Gatineau Park the same protections as those afforded to other National Parks.

Saint Lawrence River.

Photo: Nelson Boisvert



NEW BRUNSWICK

Protected Area Expected to Double

In 2019, CPAWS New Brunswick and partners welcomed the Government of New Brunswick's commitment to protect 10% of the province by the end of 2020, which will more than double the province's protected area coverage. This will protect more habitat for sensitive wildlife, and safeguard areas where New Brunswickers love to spend time in nature, which has become all the more important during the pandemic. Implementing this commitment will also help New Brunswickers adapt to climate change by, for example, protecting ecosystems that help absorb floodwaters and buffer coastal communities from the impact of storm surges.

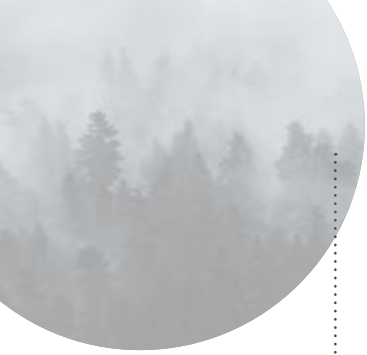
In early 2020, the federal government provided welcome financial support for implementing this commitment by investing \$12.8 million from the Canada Target 1 Challenge fund to support the establishment of new protected areas by the Government of New Brunswick. It also supports Indigenous protected and conserved areas (IPCAs) by the Mi'gmaq, Wolastoqiyik and Peskotomuhkati Nations. However, funding was not provided for on-going management of these places.

As the 2020 deadline draws nearer, the Government of New Brunswick should put in place interim protection measures for proposed new protected areas to ensure their natural values remain intact while consultation and legal protection processes are completed, and management planning proceeds. Threats to nature persist in the province and providing temporary protections will safeguard New Brunswick's wild spaces as we collectively strive to meet the 10% target.



*Beaver Pond, Mactaquac
Provincial Park, NB.
Photo: Kelsey Wierdsma*

*Restigouche River, NB.
Photo: Justin Dutcher*



Barnaby Head Trail, New River Beach Provincial Park, NB. Photo: Courtney Piercy

New Brunswick has lacked adequate nature-focused management of parks and protected areas for many years. In 2014, after extensive review, the provincial Parks Act was amended to mandate resource management plans for each provincial park. This move reflected an important first step by the government toward prioritizing conservation in parks, an action commended by CPAWS NB. However, while some provincial parks have had “master plans” or terms of reference developed in the past, there have been no management plans developed to date under this new legislation. Similarly, the province’s network of protected natural areas is legally protected from harmful activities, but these areas lack resources and plans to guide conservation and other management activities.

Investments in COVID-19 recovery offers an opportunity to better recognize the value of protected nature to the province by investing in nature and culture-based job opportunities in research and monitoring, community engagement and training, and outdoor recreation and ecotourism, all related to the management of the province’s parks and protected areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The Government of New Brunswick should move quickly to put in place interim protection measures for all proposed new protected areas.
- The federal and provincial governments should jointly invest in the long-term management of New Brunswick’s protected areas, including for management plans. The COVID-19 recovery plans offer an opportunity for this investment, recognizing the cost-effective economic, health and environmental benefits protected areas provide. Funding should include investments in provincial agencies as well as in local stewardship organizations, ecotourism partners, Indigenous Guardians, and university-based researchers.

NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia slipping further and further behind

There was a time when Nova Scotia was a leader in Canada for the creation of new protected areas, but unfortunately, that is no longer the case. Backroom deals, foot-dragging, and a series of missteps have badly tarnished Nova Scotia's reputation as a jurisdiction that prioritizes establishing protected areas. The province has been coasting for years on previous achievements and is now falling further and further behind relative to other jurisdictions. It is not too late to repair the damage. But it will require bold and decisive action on the part of the Government of Nova Scotia to move things in the right direction.

Outdated protected areas targets. The current Government of Nova Scotia is fixated on 13 percent protected areas target despite the official government plan for parks and protected areas exceeding this amount, and despite the national target being 25% by 2025, and 30% by 2030. There is no basis in science for a 13 percent target, yet the Government of Nova Scotia continues to claim that reaching such a target will be a major achievement. Such claims are incorrect. This target is too low and is based on a worldview that is completely detached from the ecological crisis we are currently facing.

Delisting Owls Head Provincial Park Reserve. Owls Head has been a provincial park reserve since the 1970s. It protects an important coastal area along the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia, containing beaches, headlands, salt marshes, temperate

*Owls Head, Nova Scotia.
Photo: Vision Air*

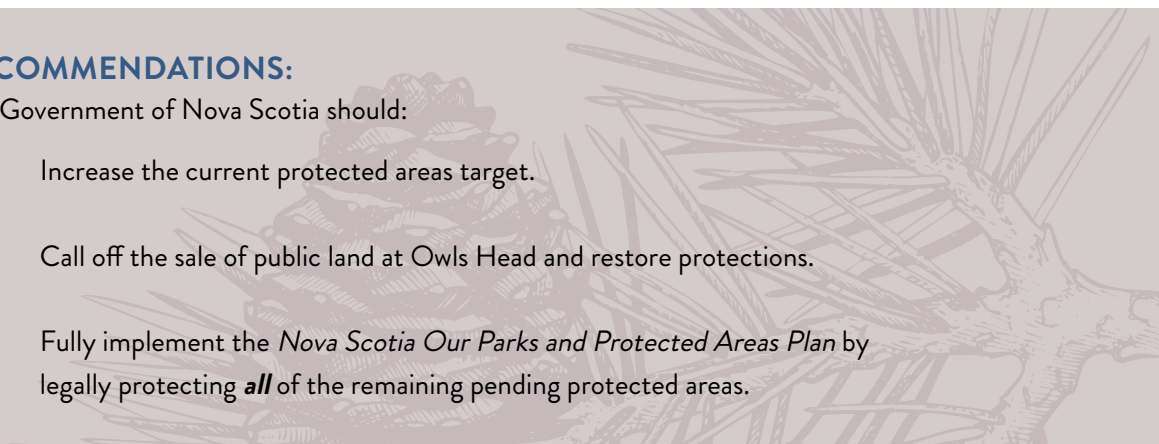


rainforest, and globally rare coastal barrens, making it an important place for conservation. Despite its ecological significance, however, the Government of Nova Scotia secretly de-listed Owls Head Provincial Park Reserve last year, behind-closed-doors with no public notice or consultation. Now, they are attempting to sell-off these public lands at Owls Head to a private golf course developer, against vocal objections from the public. Several thousand letters have been submitted to the government asking for the land sale to be called off and for Owls Head to be properly protected, yet the provincial government still refuses to change course.

Delays in implementing Protected Areas Plan. Nova Scotia has a plan to establish many new parks and protected areas, yet the government has been dragging out implementation for years. Finalized in 2013, this plan is supposed to result in the protection of some of the best remaining natural areas in the province. Unfortunately, seven years after the plan was approved, nearly 200 sites have not yet received legal protection. Places like Cherry Hill Beach, Sackville River-Lewis Lake, Giants Lake, and Economy River are still awaiting stronger protections. Delaying the full implementation of the *Nova Scotia Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* is jeopardizing the ecological integrity of the sites that have been promised for protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Government of Nova Scotia should:

- Increase the current protected areas target.
 - Call off the sale of public land at Owls Head and restore protections.
 - Fully implement the *Nova Scotia Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* by legally protecting **all** of the remaining pending protected areas.
- 



NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

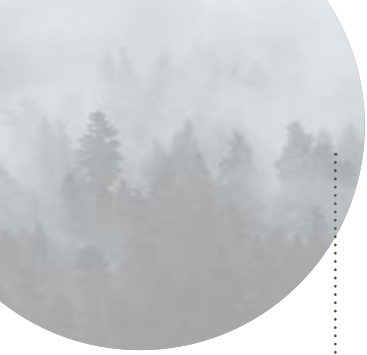
A Home For Nature is a process not the End game

After more than 25 years, the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians finally have the opportunity to see a proposed protected areas network plan for the island of Newfoundland. Released for public comment in May 2020, the [draft plan](#) proposes 24 new protected areas, the expansion of two existing protected areas and the creation of six transitional reserves* and **would protect an additional 3% of the province from industrial activities like forestry and mining**. Creating these protected areas would safeguard some of the island's most significant natural areas for residents to enjoy now and in the future and ensure our unique and endangered wild plants and animals have the habitat they need to survive and thrive. The plan was designed to protect important areas while minimizing potential impacts on resource industries and other land use activities.

The boundaries proposed in this plan are not final. The Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC) will engage the public in two phases of consultations. During the first phase, the public has until October 1, 2020 to submit feedback on the plan to WERAC which will then provide recommendations to the provincial government. Once the overall plan is approved, WERAC will then consult communities, stakeholders and government on the proposed boundaries for each site, and on what activities should be acceptable in each area, including existing traditional uses.

Photo: Tomothy Holmes

*Transitional reserves are lands intended for future protection as wilderness or ecological reserves, where mineral or petroleum exploration will be allowed to continue for 10 years. Unless there is a significant discovery, the area will then be transitioned to protection as a wilderness or ecological reserve.



HEALTHY NATURE HEALTHY PEOPLE: A CALL TO PUT NATURE PROTECTION AT THE HEART OF CANADA'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Now is the time for the public to provide their comments to WERAC to ensure this plan reflects what we value as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. CPAWS NL encourages Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to support the proposed plan during the phase one consultations so community members, stakeholders, and government officials can continue the dialogue and develop a plan that safeguards our most special places for the benefit of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, now and in the future. *A Home For Nature* is a process not the end game.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should:

- Publicly commit to an increased protected areas target.
- Complete existing protected area initiatives across the province in partnership with Indigenous nations.
- Develop and approve an efficient, transparent and timely Protected Areas Plan, grounded in science and Indigenous knowledge, and developed through a comprehensive and fair consultation process with communities and stakeholders.



Photo: Eric Maclean

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND*

Prince Edward Island has the smallest percentage of land protected of any province or territory in Canada, with only 3.6% of the island currently protected. During the 1990s the province adopted a plan to double the area protected to 7% by 2000 but that target was not achieved. Recently the provincial government has reaffirmed its commitment to reaching this target by the end of 2020, and several new land protection projects have been initiated.⁹¹

PEI is unique among Canadian provinces and territories in that 90% of its land is privately owned, which is the opposite of Canada overall, where 90% of land is in the public trust. This means private land protection and non-governmental land trust organizations play an important role. Indigenous peoples have been playing a leadership role in moving conservation forward on the island.

The federal Canada Nature Challenge Fund is helping to support a new partnership project which will protect approximately 4,400 hectares of high-priority habitat, including more of PEI's old-growth forest. Partners include the federal and provincial governments, land trust organizations and the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI.

Along the northwest coast of the island, Parks Canada is working with the province and the Mi'kmaq to assess the feasibility of protecting the Hog Island Sandhills — magnificent wild barrier islands that stretch 50 kilometres along the coast — as an expansion to the national park reserve.

These recent steps represent important progress for conservation in PEI, but the province still has a long way to go to meet its 7% commitment. Continued leadership and support from the provincial and federal governments, including investment in Indigenous-led conservation initiatives and land trusts, will be needed to deliver on this short term promise and move to the larger scale conservation action needed to protect and restore the island's biodiversity in the long term.



Photo: Amanda Phung

**CPAWS does not have an office in Prince Edward Island. Therefore, our overview is based on the best understanding we have regarding opportunities to achieve protection in this province.*

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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.



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