



30x30 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

SIX SHORT YEARS TO TURN THE TIDE ON NATURE CONSERVATION



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Last year was the hottest year ever recorded. Ecosystems and species are being pushed towards extinction as the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss continue to worsen. It's a grim summary, but collectively we still have a chance to turn the tide.

Around the world, momentum is building around conservation, from remote communities and grassroots activists right up to national governments. Recognition of the role of nature as the life support system of this planet and our species is growing. The goal of 30x30 (or 30 by 30) — 30 per cent of the planet's terrestrial and marine areas protected by the year 2030 — has gained worldwide attention.¹

This is a tall order in a country like Canada, where only about 12 per cent of the land and water is currently protected.²

The challenge isn't just to ensure Canada achieves this goal but that it is met in the right way. Every square metre of what's now known as Canada is on the territory of a First Nation, Inuit or Métis People. **Vital conservation goals cannot perpetuate colonialism and the theft of land and resources from**

Indigenous communities.

Increasing the amount of protected areas here can and should be part of strengthening Indigenous rights and returning land and decision-making authority to Indigenous Peoples.³ **This challenge can't be used as an excuse for delay.** Provincial, territorial and federal governments must provide funding and resources to expedite Indigenous-led conservation.

The goal of doubling the amount of protected area across a jurisdiction as large as Canada is also vulnerable to greenwashing, substandard definitions of what protection is and other pitfalls

that governments must avoid. **They must establish new protected areas in the right 30 per cent:** areas with high ecological and cultural values,

habitat and species diversity, and areas actually under threat from logging, mining, oil and gas infrastructure, and other industrial development.

While this is a national-scale project and the federal government has committed to 30x30, decision-making sits largely with the provinces and territories. So far provincial and territorial governments have engaged with the goal to varying degrees — from agreeing to the target but not

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laying out a path to reach it, to not making a commitment at all.⁴

Amongst the challenges facing us in 2024, the need to fundamentally change our relationship with nature and the way we interact with land is paramount. A massive increase in conservation is inevitable as the only path to a better world. The choice before every government in Canada is whether we want to be a leader or a laggard that puts a safer future in jeopardy. Those who are in, or seeking, office need to step up and rise to this challenge, or leave the task of governing to those who will.

Read on to learn more about the need to increase protected areas here, the right ways to reach this goal and what governments in this country must do to get there.

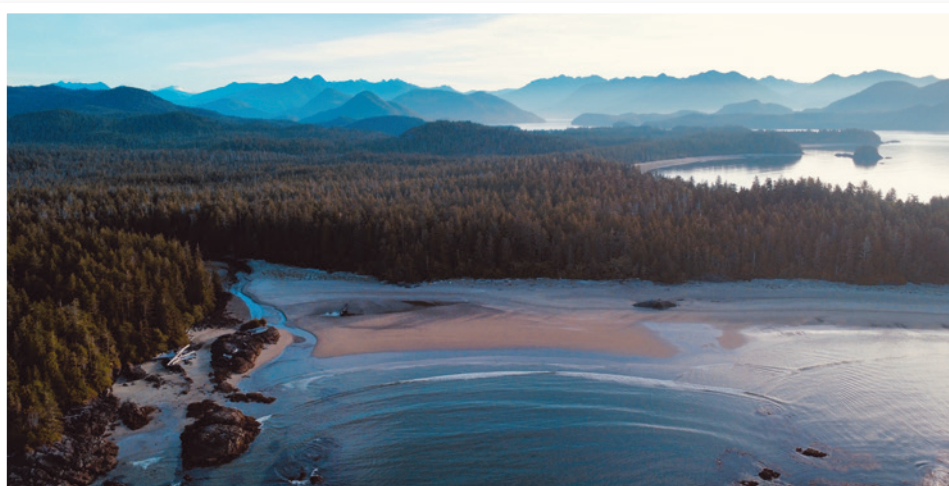


Photo top: Wenosaga Rapids on the Wenosaga River, Ear Falls, ON (Mike Grandmaison). Near Grassy Narrows and Lac Seul First Nation Territory (Mike Grandmaison). Yellow-banded bumble bee (Leif Richardson). Northern leopard frog (Robert McCaw). Photo bottom: Flores Island, Saahnuus'ath First Nation territory, B.C. (Torrance Coste).



Photo: Yellow-banded bumble bee (Leif Richardson).

NOT JUST MORE PROTECTION, BUT BETTER

Protecting more nature is an ecological necessity, but it's also a chance to address the fundamental injustice at the heart of Canada: colonialism and the theft of land from Indigenous Peoples.

Returning land and decision-making authority to First Nations, Inuit and Métis people is the right thing to do to begin to heal the harm done over the last few centuries. It's also the best chance we have to tackle the biodiversity crisis and invest in a stable future. Research from Canada and around the world shows biodiversity is higher on Indigenous-managed or co-managed lands.⁵ Indigenous-led conservation is the just path to meeting global nature protection targets.

Historically, conservation and

the creation of protected areas has perpetuated colonialism, limiting or even eliminating Indigenous Peoples' access to their lands and resources.^{6,7} The doubling of protected areas in the next six years needs to buck this trend completely.

Support for Indigenous rights and the return of land to Indigenous People cannot be limited just to Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), but must be extended to the rest of a nation's territory as well. If provincial, territorial and federal governments are going to look to Indigenous nations as leaders on the path to meeting targets on biodiversity and climate change, they must also return land, jurisdiction and decision making powers to First Nations, Inuit and Métis governments more broadly to ensure they benefit from their territories both inside and outside IPCAs.



Photo: "Many People, One Canoe" Salish First Nations Gathering of Canoes to Protect the Salish Sea (Michael Wheatley).

REAL PROTECTION, NOT CREATIVE ACCOUNTING

Charlotte Dawe Conservation and Policy Campaigner [@ClimateChar](#)

Globally, the primary drivers of biodiversity loss are changes to sea and land ecosystems and the exploitation of plants and animals — both driven by industrial extraction.²¹ Protecting and recovering biodiversity can't be done without reining in impacts from resource extraction and other destructive industries.

Unfortunately, what qualifies as protection in 30x30 goals is not straightforward. The federal government has stated that protected areas may not necessarily prohibit industrial activities, meaning an area designated as "protected" could include fossil fuel development, logging, mining, commercial fishing or other activities that threaten the planet's ecological life-support systems.²² While this creative accounting will look good on paper, its practical application will lead to failure on the ground. **To actually recover biodiversity, all new areas protected as part of the 30x30 goal must exclude these harmful industries.**

This is not to rule out small-scale, low-impact activities, such as mushroom harvesting or ecotourism, which can coexist with biodiversity protection. Designating areas under historic models known as fortress conservation — those that

view all human activity as harmful while excluding Indigenous land use — is not the solution.²³ **But large-scale industrial extraction should be unequivocally prohibited within protected areas.**

We have an opportunity for monumental benefits for biodiversity if we protect the right places. Just 15 per cent of vertebrates, plants and butterflies in Canada are currently protected within parks.²⁴ This shortage arises from an overrepresentation of low-biodiversity areas in parks: often places covered in ice or snow, conveniently less appealing for industrial extraction. Instead, new areas must be protected based on their importance for biodiversity and wildlife habitat. Protecting the most biodiverse 30 per cent of the land and water in Canada would safeguard over 65 per cent of all species — an inspiring goal to work towards.²⁵



Photo: Southern mountain caribou (David Moskowitz).

JURISDICTION MATTERS

Katie Krelove Ontario Campaigner [@wildernewsON](#)

In Canada, provinces and territories hold the balance of power when it comes to land use, resource extraction and urban development — the biggest obstacles to nature conservation.⁸ Meeting the 30x30 goal will require the co-operation of these governments, who must also make room for Indigenous knowledge, leadership and governance. So far, the national pledge has been met with mixed responses from different provinces. But there is a lot to lose for regions that don't step up, including federal funds.

Several provinces, territories

and Indigenous governments recognized the significance of the historic Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in 2022 and announced new targets in line with national commitments. British Columbia and Québec adopted 30x30 and pledged hundreds of millions to meet it.^{9,10} Nova Scotia pledged 20 per cent by 2030 and \$20 million.¹¹ The Yukon was the first to sign a "Nature Agreement" with Canada to secure millions of dollars in federal investment to grow protected areas, followed by Nova Scotia and the Northwest Territories in collaboration with

local First Nations.^{12,13,14} In B.C., an agreement included sign-on by Indigenous leaders and a total of \$1 billion leveraged from the province, the federal government and private sources.¹⁵ The Manitoba and federal governments along with the Indigenous-led Seal River Watershed Alliance signed a memorandum to preserve a massive 50,000 square kilometres of forests and lakes in the Seal River watershed west of Churchill.¹⁶

But some provinces have buried their heads in the sand and refused to see the writing on the wall when it comes to nature conservation. A prime example is Ontario, where a dismal 10.9 per cent of the province is protected.¹⁷ The Ontario government hasn't set any conservation targets and has ignored First Nations-led protected area

proposals, even when they have the support of the federal government.¹⁸ This lack of progress ignores advice from the Ontario government's own appointed expert working group on growing protected places.^{19,20}

Ontario and other laggard provinces can't afford to remain on the sidelines any longer, and the federal government can't meet its targets without their co-operation. Canada will need to use all the financial and legal incentives at its disposal to compel provincial buy-in. And the public must use its collective voices to speak up for 30x30 at all levels of government and at every opportunity.



Photo: Prairie Grasslands, SK (Mike Grandmaison).



Photo: Black-tailed prairie dogs (Don Johnston).

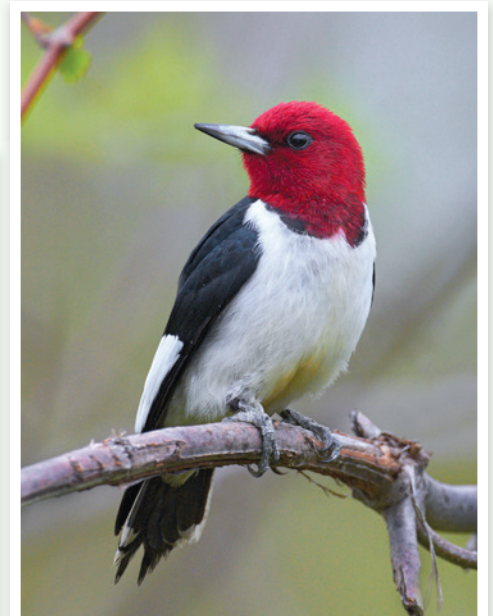
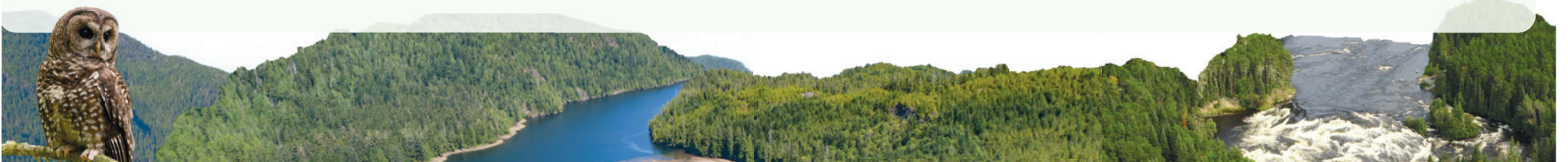


Photo: Red-headed woodpecker (Robert McCaw).



RESULTS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF PROTECTED AREAS

Eric Reder Wilderness and Water Campaigner [@EricReder](#)

For nature, clean air, fresh water and wildlife, getting to 30x30 is a big deal. But the benefits of protecting 30 per cent of lands and waters goes far beyond the environment.

Conservation not only tackles the biodiversity crisis but lifts up society in other ways. We can solve multiple problems by protecting nature. The 30x30 effort can and should address Indigenous reconciliation and public health — two of the most important issues before us.

Engaging in land use discussions with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities fundamentally requires a good relationship between governments. As the federal government comes calling to expand protected areas, communities will

rightly be asking about clean water, housing, education and other priorities. The federal government's record of underfunding Indigenous communities will need to be addressed, as protected areas goals are met, to ensure this effort achieves justice for all people as well as ecosystems.²⁶

Having nature around all of us has also been shown to improve our health.²⁷ With health spending accounting for a massive chunk of government spending, adding protected areas is a wise public health investment.²⁸ When we add protected areas near schools, we provide opportunities for the next generation to become educated first hand about the interconnected



Photo: Trumpeter swans, lower Bird River, Sagkeeng First Nation territory (Eric Reder).

web of life and our dependence on it. Folks raised with this nature exposure will be better equipped to care for biodiversity in the future.

While it's important to account for these benefits of increased conservation, it's also important for governments to show their work towards the 30x30 goal. It's easy to be cynical about political goal-setting that places targets far off into a distant election cycle. Governments can set milestones along the timeline to 30x30 to demonstrate commitment and ensure they properly apply resources and political will.

For example, in the 2000s the Manitoba government produced protected areas initiative reports highlighting more than 100

areas of interest. On separate mapping projects, areas First Nations nominated were listed. Having this information available, with a large list of projected new protected areas, creates accountability for governments and lets the public assess progress towards our global goals.



Photo: Chief Shirley Ducharme, O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation at the announcement of mining withdrawals from the Seal River Watershed (Eric Reder).



Photo: Rice River falls, Hollow Water First Nation, MB (Eric Reder).

CHOOSING THE RIGHT 30 PER CENT

Joe Foy Protected Areas Campaigner [@JoeFoyWild](#)

If I asked you to choose 30 per cent of an apple pie to keep, it would be pretty easy: get a knife and carve off about a third, put it on a plate and pop it in the fridge. Done. But if I asked you to choose 30 per cent of your bike to keep, that would be more difficult. If it didn't work out, you could end up with a pile of random parts that couldn't transport you anywhere.

We all know the living landscape is a lot more intricate than a bicycle and can't simply be carved up like a piece of pie. So how do we know which 30 per cent should be protected by 2030?

Meeting the 30x30 goal means conserving about 1.8 million square kilometers, which is larger than Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island put together, in six short years.²⁹ And what's more, it can't just be any 1.5 million square kilometres. The focus needs to be on the areas with the greatest biodiversity, ecological importance and cultural value — not just on places where it isn't disruptive to resource industries.

So what's standing in the way of making these smart choices? **More often than not it's the land and resource tenure systems that are in the way.** These management regimes allow logging, mining, oil and gas, and other companies to claim rights



Photo: Old-growth forest in Eden Grove, Pacheedaht First Nation territory, B.C. (Em Hoffpauir).

over vast swaths of lands — even though most of these lands are not private holdings.³⁰ Not surprisingly, corporations generally encourage protecting non-tenured lands like glaciers, mountaintops and other areas where there is less or none of what they're after.³¹ Provinces and territories must break this tenure system stranglehold to allow species critical habitat areas and other important places to be protected.

A fulsome criteria for protection must be co-developed with Indigenous titleholders in each province, accounting for regional

differences and existing cumulative impacts on biodiversity. To date, the creation of protected areas has been far too slow. **And it has also missed many of the most-threatened ecosystems.** Getting to 30 per cent by 2030 must reverse both of these trends.



Photo: Spotted owl and chick (Jared Hobbs).

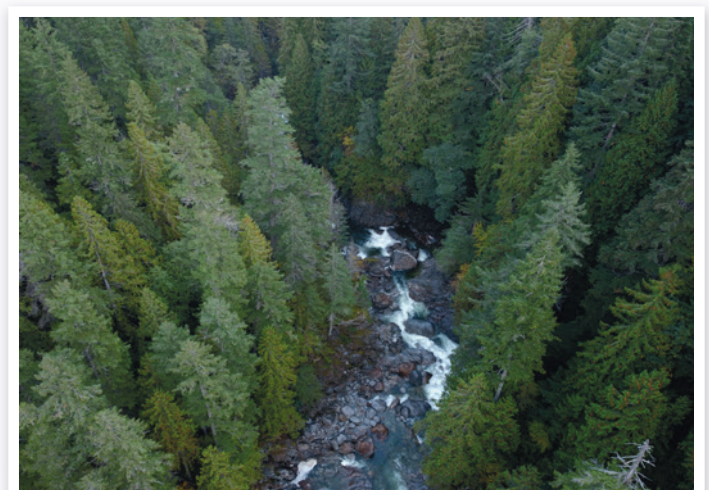


Photo: Spóžem Valley Wildlife Habitat Area old-growth forest, Spóžem First Nation territory, B.C. (Joe Foy).



A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

There are a lot of reasons not to envy the people who work in governments in 2024. An endless list of serious problems and an increasingly toxic public conversation about how to solve them make governing a daunting task.

But among the things that unite us all is the need for clean air and water, thriving and abundant nature and a safe and stable climate. Governments here in Canada and around the world have a chance right now to promote and invest in the protection of these things for our children and grandchildren — people for whom our love and sense of responsibility is another common attribute.

Those who hold office in this decade will be looked back on either as the political class that continued to kick the can down the road and let the biodiversity and climate crises grow worse, or as leaders who said enough is enough and chose to take responsibility instead.

A future where species continue to go extinct as more and more of their habitats are destroyed is a bleak and dangerous one. Reversing this trend requires more than just doubling the amount of area off-limits to industrial development. We need to come together and reimagine our relationship with nature and the species we share this planet with,



Photo: Dasiqox Tribal Park, T'silhqot'in territory, B.C. (Jeremy Sean Williams).

beyond just boundaries between no-take areas and sacrifice zones. **The goal of 30x30 needs to be the floor, not the ceiling — the starting point, not the final goal.**

This all sounds lofty and ambitious, but in places like Canada, it's not new. The first Europeans to see this continent described the land as pristine and untouched, despite the fact hundreds of thousands of people had thrived here for millennia before that.³² By recognizing these much older Indigenous governments and their authority and land rights, political leaders can address the ongoing legacy of colonialism here and start to make the future safer for all people and all living things.

The reason this seems bold is because it runs counter to historic and current political priorities that have

placed profit and narrow notions of economic growth above justice for people and the well-being of the planet. But this is within our power to change. **Our responsibility as individuals and communities is to let our representatives at all levels of government know we expect them to be a part of this shift.** We can all

contact our provincial governments and call on them to commit to a 30x30 target and lay out a plan for a rapid and just expansion of Indigenous-led protected areas to get there.



Photo: Skwxwú7mesh and səlilwatał Nation sign the Save the Fraser Declaration (WCEL).

TAKE ACTION

Protecting 30 per cent of the lands and waters within Canada by 2030 is a monumental undertaking. Just as important is the need to get this right: conserving ecosystems and the biodiversity within them, and centring Indigenous Rights and Title. The governments of every province and territory need to hear from us that it is time to get on board with this vision and not get left behind.

- ▶ Write to you premier and demand the government commit to, invest in and work with Indigenous communities and the federal government to get to 30x30.



Photo: 2023 United for Old-growth Rally, Victoria, BC, lək'wəŋən territories (Tim Matheson).

WildernessCommittee.org/30x30

YES! I'LL HELP US GET TO 30 BY 30

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