



LAST CHANCE LANDSCAPES



Protected Area Vision for BC

GETTING TO 30 PER CENT PROTECTION BY 2030



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Headlines these days make it clear wild nature is in trouble. In B.C., we're staring down the barrel of twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. A record-shattering heatwave killed hundreds of people in June. Wildfires have turned landscapes to ash and skies blood-red and climate change-charged atmospheric rivers have wrought havoc. Meanwhile, governments force climate-killing pipelines like Coastal Gaslink and the Trans Mountain expansion through Indigenous territories without consent. Something's got to give.

Beautiful British Columbia isn't just a license plate slogan. If you live here, you know. The abundance of mountains, forests, rivers and coastlines are stunning with their brilliant variety of biodiversity and vast expanse of landscapes.

But decades of unregulated industrial activities have severely damaged many natural habitats and put wildlife in a dangerous state. They, like us, face increasingly hostile

weather from climate change. B.C. is home to more than 1,900 plants and animals on the provincial species-at-risk list. At last count, spotted owls are down to just three adults remaining in the shredded remains of their old-growth forest habitat. Some herds of southern mountain caribou have disappeared from their logging-ravaged forests so fast there's been barely enough time to remove road signs warning to look out for them.¹

And, more bad news.

The long-promised B.C. endangered species law was quietly smothered in the back rooms of the legislature buildings. It's a victim of the powerful logging, mining and oil and gas lobbies.²

There could be some good news on the horizon. The government of Canada presented a bold new vision of expanding protected areas to cover

30 per cent of the landscape by 2030.³

In cooperation with Indigenous nations and the province, this vision could significantly expand the protected areas system.⁴

The century-old provincial park system is one way people here sought to protect and preserve natural landscapes and species.⁵ However, successive generations have struggled to hold on to a protected area system as it

With Indigenous nations leading the way, we can accomplish the desperately needed expansion of the protected area system here.

faced push-back by extractive industrial corporations that profit from clearcut logging, strip mining, and oil and gas drilling. The slog to create protected areas was painfully slow. By 1980 only about five per cent of B.C. had been protected.⁶ Then, everything changed.

Forty years ago, First Nations sparked a revolution to expand protected areas in B.C.

The Nlaka'pamux and Li'wat Nations successfully defended Stein Valley from logging threats, as did the Tla-o-qui-aht and Ahousaht Nations on Meares Island and the Haida Nation at Gwaii Haanas. Hundreds of thousands joined together in massive campaigns to support their visions. Today, the protected area system in B.C. has grown to over 15 per cent of the landscape, thanks largely to Indigenous Peoples' vision, foresight, leadership and determination.⁷

With Indigenous nations leading the way, we can accomplish the desperately needed expansion of the protected area system here. We could see it double in size by 2030 to meet Canadian promises made on the international stage. Read on to learn why those promises were made and what you can do to make them come true.



Photo top: Grizzly bear, interior B.C. forest (John E. Marriott).
Photo bottom: 1993 rally to save Clayoquot Sound, Victoria (WC files).

CANADA'S BIG PROMISE

On Sep. 28, 2020, the government of Canada committed to the international community to protect 30 per cent of its landscapes by 2030. This promise is part of global efforts to mitigate biodiversity loss and climate change and included a milestone goal of 25 per cent protection by 2025.⁸

For B.C. to do its part, a hundred thousand square kilometres of new protected areas are required by 2025, with a further fifty thousand by 2030. The total area of B.C. is over 940 thousand square kilometres, so it's only an additional 16 per cent of the province.⁹

In 2021, B.C. announced a plan to move towards temporary logging deferrals on some of its most cherished and endangered ecosystems — old-growth forests. Twenty-six thousand square kilometres of endangered old-growth forests in areas Indigenous nations are considering for preservation are being targeted for deferrals to let protected area planning proceed without the threat of imminent logging.¹⁰

Many Indigenous nations have been planning for this



Photo: Gitanyow Nation Territory, Stikine Headwaters (Carr Clifton).

moment. Some have carefully crafted protected area proposals and land use visions. This Indigenous leadership provides hope that together, the 2025 and 2030 protected area targets will be met. It's time for Canada and B.C. to step up.



Photo: Clayoquot Sound (Jacqueline Windh).

WILD MOUNTAIN PARKS IN WAITING

Activists have been fighting for years — sometimes decades — to keep precious wild places safe from chainsaws and backhoes. It's been a long battle and a long wait.

Argenta Face is a **6,000-hectare** forested area located at the north end of Kootenay Lake in **southeast B.C.** Surrounded on three sides by the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy, this much-loved wilderness gem is threatened by impending logging. This region is located within the traditional territory of the **Ktunaxa, Secwépemc, Sinixt and Sylix Okanagan Nations.**

Raush Valley is a **100,000-hectare** intact watershed located in **east-central B.C.** between Wells Gray Provincial Park and the upper Fraser River. The Raush is the biggest intact tributary to the Fraser that's not protected. Though almost 7,000 hectares of the valley has been included in two parks, the rest is threatened by logging. The Raush River watershed is located within the traditional territory

of the **Secwépemc and Lheidli T'enneh Nations.**¹⁶

Goat River starts in the Cariboo Mountains and enters the upper Fraser River in the Robson Valley in east-central B.C. The river's valley harbours old-growth forests, a historic gold trail and important wildlife populations. Its watershed has seen some industrial development but is primarily pristine and covers **66,000-hectares.** The Goat River Valley is located within the traditional territory of the **Secwépemc and Lheidli T'enneh Nations.**¹⁷



Photo: Endangered Argenta Face forest (Joe Foy).

INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREA PROPOSALS

All of what we call British Columbia is Indigenous land that's never been ceded to Canada or the provincial government. All parks and protected areas must come from First Nations' visions for their land.¹¹

The proposed **Dene K'éh Kusān** conservancy, designed, planned and mapped by the **Kaska Dena people** with federal government support, is a **four-million-hectare** cluster of intact wilderness watersheds, mountains and forests in north-central B.C. This extraordinarily diverse and wildlife-rich area is contiguous with a number of existing protected areas, making its value for conservation even greater. B.C. has yet to endorse the conservancy, but when the province officially does, **Dene K'éh Kusān** could end up being the largest protected area ever.¹²

The proposed **Qat'muk Indigenous Protected Area (IPA)** of the **Ktunaxa Nation** will span approximately **70,000 hectares** in southeast B.C. Immediately north of the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy Provincial Park, it would encompass the Jumbo Valley and parts of adjacent watersheds. This scenic mountain area was once proposed to become a gigantic ski resort — a

plan vigorously opposed by the Ktunaxa and environmental allies. Protected wilderness habitats around Jumbo Pass are critical to the continued survival of the region's grizzly bear population.¹³

For several years the **Ahousaht, Tla-o-qui-aht** and **Hesquiaht Nations** have been undertaking land use visioning processes for their territories in **Clayoquot Sound** on Vancouver Island. The Ahousaht envision **Wiklak'wiih**

Areas designed to conserve biological diversity, natural landscapes and wilderness, and provide for Ahousaht's spiritual, cultural and sustenance use. In 2000, the federal government secured Clayoquot's reputation as a globally significant natural area by facilitating UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve designation.¹⁴ In September 2020, B.C. temporarily deferred old-growth logging for two years in Clayoquot

along with eight other areas in response to recommendations from an independent panel report.¹⁵

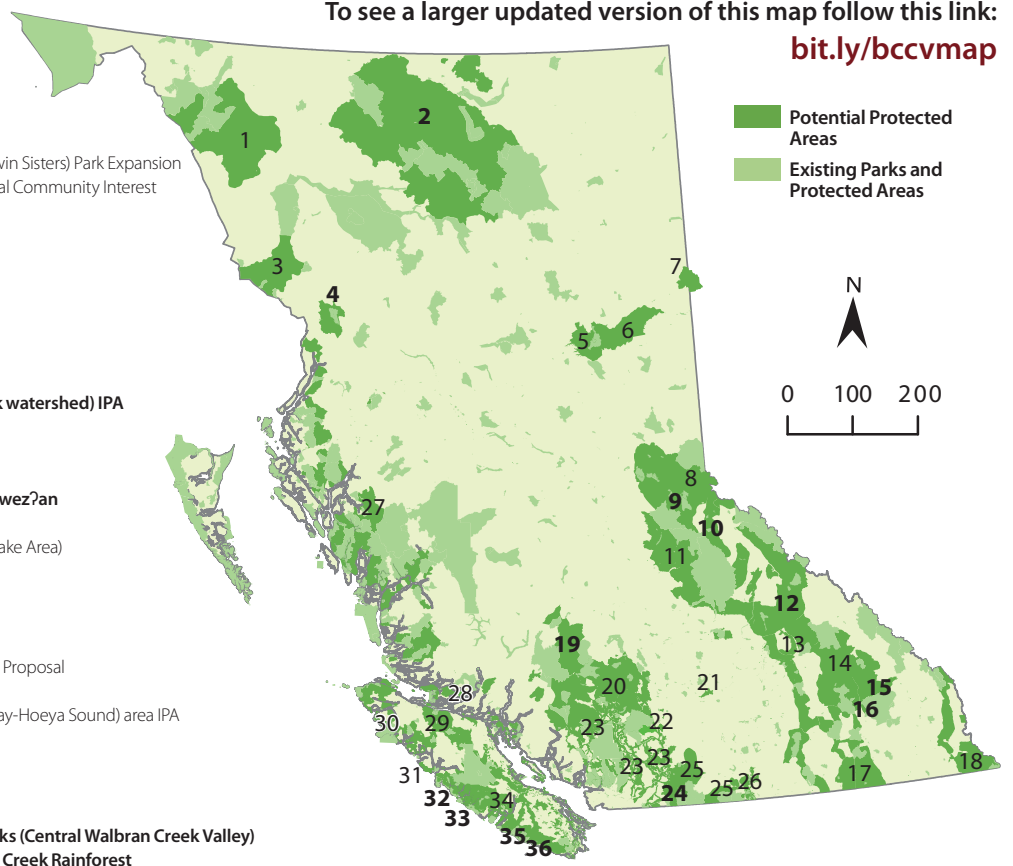
These three Indigenous land-use visions could potentially result in **700 square kilometres, an area nearly seven times larger than the City of Vancouver**, of some of the finest remaining intact old-growth forests on Earth gaining protected area status.

Map of Potential Protected Areas in BC

Name of Potential Protected Areas

- 1 Taku River Headwaters
- 2 Kaska Dena Nation Dene K'éh Kusān IPA
- 3 Iskut River Watershed
- 4 Gitanyow Nation Wilp Wii Litsxw Meziadin IPA
- 5 Sauteau and West Moberly First Nations Klin-se-za (Twin Sisters) Park Expansion
- 6 Sauteau and West Moberly First Nations Area of Critical Community Interest
- 7 Doig River First Nation K'ih tsaa'dze Tribal Park
- 8 Walker Rainforest Wilderness
- 9 Goat River Valley
- 10 Raush River Valley
- 11 Quesnel Lake Wilderness
- 12 Argonaut Creek Valley
- 13 Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness
- 14 Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal
- 15 Ktunaxa First Nation Qat'muk (Jumbo-Toby Creek watershed) IPA
- 16 Argenta Face
- 17 South Selkirk Study Area
- 18 Flathead River Valley
- 19 Tsilhqot'in Nation Dasiqox Tribal Park or Nexwagwez'an
- 20 St'át'imc Land Use Plan Wildlife Protection Zones
- 21 St'k'emlúpsemc te Secwépemc Nation Pipsell (Jacko Lake Area)
- 22 Siska Indian Band Siska Watershed Heritage Park
- 23 Spotted Owl Habitat Areas
- 24 Skagit River Headwaters
- 25 Lower Similkameen Indian Band Smelqmix IPCAs
- 26 South Okanagan - Similkameen National Park Reserve Proposal
- 27 Gardner Canal Complex
- 28 Mamalilikulla First Nation Gwaxdlala/Nalaxdlala (Lull Bay-Hoeya Sound) area IPA
- 29 Tsitika River Complex
- 30 East Creek Valley
- 31 West Nootka Island
- 32 Ahousaht First Nation Wiklak'wiih Areas
- 33 Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations Tribal Parks
- 34 Nahmint River Valley
- 35 Kaxi:ks (Central Walbran Creek Valley)
- 36 Fairy Creek Rainforest

To see a larger updated version of this map follow this link: bit.ly/bccvmap



TEARING DOWN BC MINING TENURES

Many things have changed in the 150 years since B.C. was declared a province, but the process to obtain a mining tenure isn't one of them.¹⁸ Settler gold seekers could pound a stake in the ground and declare Indigenous land theirs to dig up. It was theft then, and it's theft now. B.C.'s tenure system for resource companies doesn't need tinkering — it needs to be torn down and relegated to the trash heap of shameful colonial history.

The proposed **Wilp Wii Litsxw Meziadin IPA** in traditional **Gitanyow Nation** territory in northwest B.C. is a **30,000-hectare** area designed by the Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs to protect a crucial run of sockeye salmon from potential mine impacts. The Gitanyow have determined the cost of buying out mineral tenure is prohibitive but are considering plans to move forward with protection — with or without the support of Canada or B.C.¹⁹

The proposed **Dasiqox Tribal Park or Nexwagwezʔan** is a land, water and wildlife management area located in traditional **Tsilhqot'in Nation** territory in southwest B.C., in the shared caretaker areas of **Xeni Gwet'in** and **Yunešit'in**

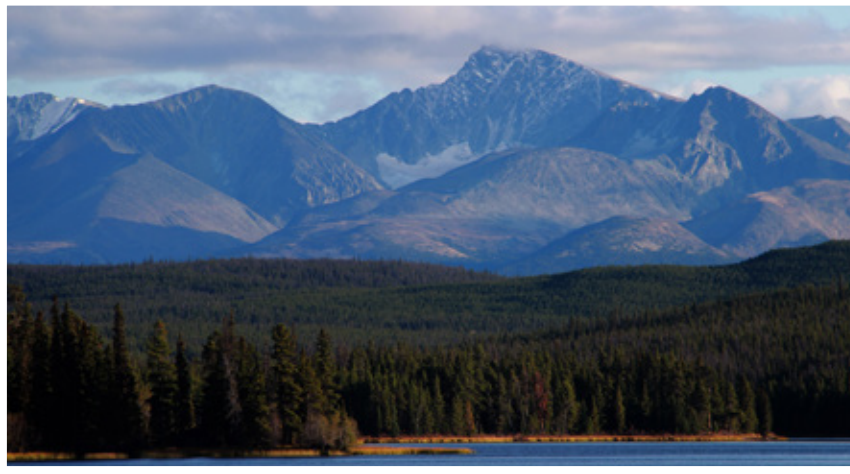


Photo: Te2tan Biny (Fish Lake), Dasiqox Tribal Park (Joe Foy).

peoples. The area encompasses about **300,000 hectares** and borders several existing parks and protected areas. This IPA proposal is hung up because of a



Photo: 26 Mile Creek, Skagit Headwaters (Joe Foy).

mineral tenure, even though the courts declared the proposed New Prosperity open-pit mine dead.²⁰

The **Skagit Headwaters** region in southwest B.C. has a **6,000-hectare** “donut hole” of unprotected lands surrounded by Manning and Skagit provincial parks. The left-out lands are proposed for protection, but a mineral tenure held by the notorious corporation Imperial Metals is stalling the process. The Skagit Headwaters are located within the traditional territories of the **Upper Skagit, Stó:lō, Syilx and Nlaka'pamux** peoples.²¹



Photo: Drumming in Dasiqox Tribal Park (Joe Foy).



Photo: Porcupine Peak, Skagit Headwaters (Joe Foy).

RAINFOREST RUCKUS

Ancient temperate rainforests in B.C. invoke powerful feelings for anyone who's walked among the mossy giants within them. The great age and size of some of these trees are sometimes impossible to believe. Once cut, we'll never see the likes of them again. To many, it's as clear as big stumps on a mountainside. **Old-growth logging has to be banned now while there is still some left.**

This conviction has sparked protests that garner attention around the world, and thousands of people have been arrested for protecting the last of the giants. We love big tree forests — but as recent B.C. government mapping shows, industrial logging has made them heartbreakingly rare.²² It's cause for concern that some of the smallest protected area proposals are the sites of some of the biggest protests — perhaps because so little ancient forest is left. Like no other place on Earth, B.C. has both coastal and inland rainforests.²³

Fairy Creek Rainforest in the territory of the **Pacheedaht**

Nation is just **1,200 hectares** in size. Still, because it's the last intact old-growth valley outside of parks remaining on southern Vancouver Island, logging plans there have sparked the largest civil disobedience campaign in Canadian history.²⁴ In the summer of 2020, the Pacheedaht convinced the B.C. government to temporarily defer logging here while it develops a long-term plan for its territory.²⁵

The heart of the nearby Central Walbran Valley, or **Kaxi:ks**, is just

500 hectares. It's one of the most spectacular ancient rainforests in the province. Like Fairy Creek, it's been granted a temporary hold on logging after decades of protest, thanks to the leadership of the Pacheedaht.²⁶

The **Argonaut Creek** inland rainforest region sits astride **Secwépemc, Ktunaxa and Syilx** traditional territories, north of Revelstoke in southeast B.C. This lush forest with massive old trees is critical habitat for a herd of threatened southern

mountain caribou. In 2020 and 2021, locals, environmentalists and First Nations strongly protested logging plans. Thanks to them, about **2,000 hectares** of old-growth forests still stand — for now.²⁷



Photo: Logging in Argonaut Watershed (Charlotte Dawe).



Photo: At-risk Caycuse Valley forest (Emily Hoffpauir).

CHAMPIONS LIVE AMONG US – SOMETIMES THEY ARE US.

Look into their eyes, watch how they move, see their joyful moments. More of us need to understand and acknowledge that wild creatures in the forests, meadows and mountains around us are our relatives. We spring from the same tiny blue dot in the universe. They give meaning and provide light on our life's journey.



Photo: Spō'zēm Nation community open house (Joe Foy).

Kids do this a lot. Adults should remember to do it more.

Indigenous stories, art, teachings and traditions are ablaze with this truth. We need to stop ignoring and repressing this knowledge and begin to honour and uphold it.

It's the calamity of our time that so many wild creatures around the planet are running on empty. Their habitats are so fragmented by industrial activities and stressed by the changing climate that they're dying.²⁸

But there's still much hope. There are champions, and they live among us. Sometimes they are us.

One fight to save a species is particularly dire. But even this fight has hope. Spotted owls are down to just three in Canada. Once numbering more than a thousand, these nocturnal predators silently rode the wind on hunting sorties through the moon-lit ancient forests of the **Coast Salish, St'át'imc and Nlaka'pamux** peoples. Their calls to one another have echoed in the tall timber since time immemorial. The spotted owl is honoured as a messenger from the spirit world and has had its likeness painted in red ochre on canyon walls. This beautiful creature is in danger of disappearing completely because too much of its habitat has been logged.²⁹

Thankfully the owl has champions. In a last-minute reprieve, the Nlaka'

pamux community of **Spō'zēm Nation** demanded the owl's habitat be protected and restored and said no to further logging. The governments of Canada and B.C. recently heeded Spō'zēm Nation's call. They put a logging moratorium in place in two of the nation's valleys. Now, all of the owl's critical habitat through its range is being mapped for preservation and restoration. Together, we could add another **300,000 hectares** to B.C.'s protected area system — giving this creature a new lease on life.³⁰

Other similar stories of champions for at-risk wild creatures can be told, including southern mountain caribou, marbled murrelet, grizzly bear, pine marten, sapsucker and many more. All these creatures need room to roam and proper habitat protection. This will require heeding multiple Indigenous nations' conservation visions and preserving millions of additional hectares of habitat. They also require a strong species at risk law in B.C.

As we continue the fight to raise

protection in B.C. to 30 per cent by 2030, we take strength from the other creatures and biodiversity that share these lands. They are why we absolutely must meet this goal.

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TAKE ACTION

Write B.C.'s premier and call for:

- ▶ Immediate designation and funding for new Indigenous protected areas everywhere there is Indigenous support
- ▶ A commitment to reach 30 per cent of the province protected by 2030
- ▶ Immediate deferral of all at-risk old-growth and a plan for permanent protection of all old-growth, combined with transition and operational funding for First Nations and communities
- ▶ Enactment of a strong endangered species law, something the B.C. government promised when first elected.



Photo: Tsilhqot'in Nation drummer (Garth Lenz).

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Wilderness Committee, Vol.41, No.1, 2022.
 Canadian Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 0900567.
 Posted in Vancouver for free distribution. Printed in Canada on recycled newsprint with vegetable-based inks.
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Published by
Wilderness Committee — National Office
 46 E. 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5T 1J4
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