



The Race to Protect 30%



WILDERNESS
COMMITTEE

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Canada lagging on 2030
biodiversity targets

February 2026



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Acknowledgements

The Wilderness Committee would like to acknowledge this report is about lands and waters that comprise the ancestral homelands of hundreds of Indigenous communities, and that every part of what's now known as Canada is the territory of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The research and writing for this project was conducted by staff from our four offices, located in Vancouver, unceded xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh and səliłwətał territories; Victoria, unceded lək̓ʷəŋən territories; Winnipeg, Treaty One Territory, the ancestral and traditional lands of the Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Dakota, Inineew (Cree), Lakota, and Anisininew Peoples, and heart of the Métis Nation Homeland; Toronto, traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

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Introduction

No matter where you live, the life-sustaining role of biodiversity is all around you. Yet, conveying the urgency of biodiversity protection is difficult because the solution demands massive, planet-wide action, a scale that often feels abstract and removed from our daily reality. However, nature connects with our lives in intricate and indispensable ways.

Take food systems, for example: pollinators contribute more than \$15 billion to food production in North America annually, yet one in five pollinator species is at risk of extinction.¹ This relationship between people and biodiversity extends beyond economics to something much simpler: the possibility of a future where generations to come can experience their favourite species — whales, caribou, or even fungi — thriving in the wild.

Yet, the situation across the globe and in Canada is dire for biodiversity and continues to be met with insufficient attention and action to mend decades of irreversible losses. Globally, more than a million species are at some risk of extinction.² In Canada alone, roughly 5,000 species face some level of risk of extinction.³

In the late 2010s, stalled progress on increasing the amount of protected lands and waters around the world prompted calls for a new ambitious conservation target and timeline. The goal of nearly doubling protected areas globally to 30 per cent by 2030 (30x30) was first proposed in 2019.⁴ In December 2022, nearly every country in the world adopted 30x30 as a global goal, as part of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15).⁵ Yet, with less than five years left to achieve this target, it's essential to examine Canada's progress towards 30x30 and towards biodiversity protection in general.

In this report, the Wilderness Committee team working on conservation and environmental justice assesses where Canada and some of its provinces are at in terms of conservation, what's getting in the way of the 30x30 goal, and how we can get back on track towards protecting the biodiversity and ecosystems that make this place so special. The report breaks down which governments have made commitments and contrasts these promises with actual progress. It identifies political barriers and bad-faith efforts that threaten 30x30 and explicitly identifies the conflict between prioritizing resource extraction and prioritizing conservation. Most importantly, it highlights Indigenous-led conservation that serves as a beacon of hope and outlines what doubling protected areas the right way can and must look like — aligned with Indigenous rights and a just future for all.



Tetsa waterfalls, northeast B.C. (Wayne Sawchuk).

1. Canada's long road ahead to 30x30

Doubling protected areas in just five years is a tall order. While some governments have established new protected areas in recent years, no province or territory, or Canada as a whole, is on pace to have 30 per cent of lands and waters protected by 2030.⁶

When Canada hosted the COP15 summit in late 2022, it lagged behind other countries in terms of protected areas with less than 13 per cent of its terrestrial area and less than 12 per cent of its marine area legally preserved.⁷ In the three years since, there's been limited progress as the percentages remain relatively the same.⁸ Every province varies in terms of both real increases in the number of hectares protected, and in the general enthusiasm towards conservation and the 30x30 target. Provinces like Ontario and Saskatchewan lag further behind, and Quebec and B.C. are leaders — although in the latter cases, announcements promising a strong commitment to more protection exceed the actual amount of new protected areas.⁹



Walbran Valley witness loop, B.C. (David Hutchison).

Governments make these announcements with triumphant fanfare, but they don't include what per cent of their jurisdiction is represented by the newly announced protected areas, nor the rate of progress towards 30x30, or whether the new area increases or maintains it. As it happens, the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) records an overview of what percentage of the country and each province and territory is protected, along with a chart showing annual progress since 1990.¹⁰ And this data is stark: showing that the pace of conservation must increase drastically in order to reach 30x30.

Canada's total share of protected lands and waters currently stands at 13.8 per cent and 15.5 per cent respectively. However, most of the progress towards these numbers was achieved between the years 2000 and 2020.^{11,12} In the past five years, marine and coastal protections have increased by only 3 percentage points, and protections for lands and inland waters by just 1 percentage point.¹³ Without an overarching and strategic federal plan to track progress, what we are left with is a target without accountability, leaving the door open to political buck-passing and advancement that is far too slow.

Achieving 30x30 requires the protection of an additional 17 per cent of Canada, nearly 170 million hectares. With less than five years remaining before the end of 2030, the goal now requires the annual protection of an average of 33.9 million hectares — an area more than half the size of Alberta.¹⁴

1.1 Why protecting nature needs a shift in mindset



Simply put, biodiversity preservation requires lands and waters to be protected from extractivism — a system that prioritizes resource extraction at the expense of Indigenous rights and the environment, which the colonial state of Canada was founded on.¹⁵ **The core problem is not that nature is unprotected in principle, but that without protection it continues to be actively destroyed.**

This nuance is essential if we want to achieve the right 30x30. If we designate lands and waters for the sake of perceived protection and don't actively stop unchecked extractivism across ecosystems, we risk achieving a 30x30 that will not benefit biodiversity and species at risk. Without a clear understanding among policymakers that biodiversity protection requires challenging the status quo of overconsumption and the treatment of ecosystems solely as economic resources, there is a risk that a poorly implemented 30x30 will simply limit protection to those designated areas while accelerating degradation across the remaining 70 per cent of lands and waters.

Not only are we seeing limited progress towards protecting 30 per cent of lands and waters by 2030, but an increase in extractive rhetoric and focus from governments across the country.¹⁶ With the federal government set to fast-track several mega projects in the coming years by exempting environmental laws, it is more important than ever to place lands and waters beyond the reach of industrial development and the current extractive push shaping decision-making in Canada.

1.2 Indigenous rights at the heart of 30x30

Protecting 30 per cent the right way requires adherence to science and targeting the most threatened ecosystems. It also requires a strong working relationship with Indigenous governments, one based in support and respect for Indigenous authority and sovereignty.

Unfortunately, Canada and a lot of its provinces and territories have spent much of 2025 prioritizing industrial development at the expense of both environmental oversight and consultation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis People. Legislation like Bill 5 in Ontario, Bill 15 in B.C. and federal Bill C-5 threaten the biodiversity and ecosystems that the 30x30 pledge is aimed at protecting.¹⁷ They jeopardize the respectful government-to-government relationships with Indigenous Nations that achieving 30x30 will hinge on.



Awí'nakola-Tree of Life gathering, Kwakiutl First Nation Territory, B.C. (Agathe Bernard).

First Nations leaders have criticized this approach as “colonization in 2025” — and a path to increased conflict between Indigenous governments and Canada, its provinces and territories.¹⁸

The renewed push for more resource extraction has been accompanied by weakened enthusiasm from governments for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Many political parties are calling for repealing legislation around Indigenous rights, and governments that have previously defended aligning laws with UNDRIP aren't making a strong case that protecting Indigenous rights is an essential part of both a healthy economy and healthy nature.¹⁹

The federal and provincial governments have the ability to aim the effort and resources usually reserved to promote and encourage resource extraction directly at the 30x30 goal, and fast-track the planning and implementation of new Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs). Conservation must be led by Indigenous Title holders, with the federal, provincial and territorial governments providing both the funding and legislation to enable new protected areas.

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2. 30x30: Promises versus Progress

For more than three decades, governments across Canada have made ambitious commitments to protect nature — only to fall short when it comes time to deliver. Despite repeated national and international pledges to expand protected and conserved areas, the biodiversity crisis has deepened, revealing a troubling pattern: bold promises, uneven follow-through, and missed targets.

This gap between commitment and action is especially clear in the push toward 30x30. Chronic underfunding has limited progress on the ground, while policy choices continue to prioritize short-term resource extraction over long-term protection.



Duck Mountain Provincial Park, MB (Eric Reder).

Among the provinces, Manitoba has made public commitments that, with adequate funding and political will, could still translate into real conservation gains. By contrast, Ontario refuses to meaningfully acknowledge or participate in 30x30, even as First Nations bring forward ready-to-implement proposals to protect lands and waters. This refusal not only undermines conservation goals but also disregards Indigenous relationship building and reconciliation, as well as the proven effectiveness of Indigenous-led protection.

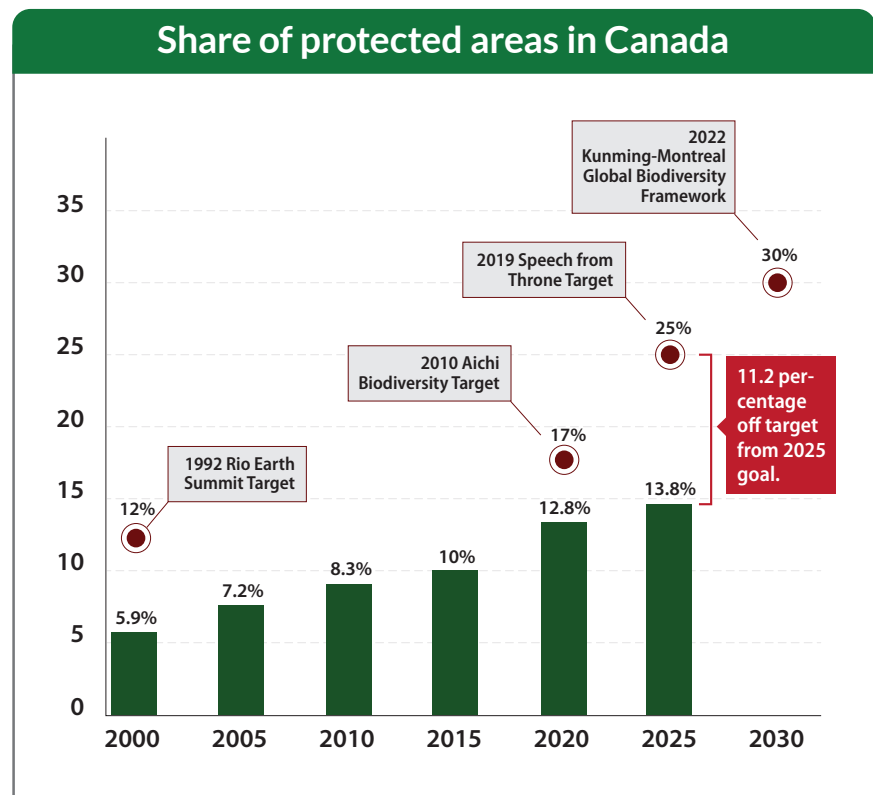
B.C., once seen as a conservation leader, has made notable commitments including nature agreements and announcements of conservation funding, yet on-the-ground progress has largely stalled. Protection outcomes have failed to keep pace with promises and opaque reporting has created a misleading picture of advancement.

Together, these provincial examples reveal a national truth: achieving 30x30 will require more than promises. It demands sustained funding, political courage, and respect for Indigenous rights — without which Canada's commitments will remain words on paper while nature continues to be destroyed.

2.1 Canada's pattern of missed conservation targets

For more than three decades, the Canadian government has committed to internationally agreed upon targets for biodiversity and to grow protected and conserved areas. However, the country has consistently failed to achieve them, even while biodiversity loss has become a crisis.²⁰ Our survival depends on the country changing this failing record.

At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, countries set the global goal of protecting 12 per cent of lands and waters through the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.²¹ Yet they failed to reach it by the 2000 deadline. In 2010, the Decade on Biodiversity brought countries together to promote the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.²² These targets included the protection of 17 per cent of land and inland waters, and 10 per cent of marine and coastal areas by 2020.



In 2019, Canada introduced the target of protecting 25 per cent of lands and waters by 2025 (25x25) in that year's speech from the throne.²³ Later in 2021, the federal government announced \$2.3 billion over five years to support this commitment in the form of the Enhanced Nature Legacy for Canada, a horizontal initiative where multiple federal departments such as Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Parks Canada and Natural Resources Canada coordinate funding and protection efforts.²⁴

Lastly, in 2022, Canada adopted the boldest piece of international policy on biodiversity to date: the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.²⁵ The framework is a pathway to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, and a vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050. It includes 23 targets to be achieved by 2030, including Target 3, protecting 30 per cent of lands and waters by 2030.

However, as per most recently available data, Canada has only protected 15.5 per cent (or approximately 893,437 square kilometres) of marine and coastal areas and 13.8 per cent (or approximately 1.3 million square kilometres) of land and inland waters.²⁶ **This means Canada has missed every one of its international commitments to protect lands and waters except the Aichi target of protecting 10 per cent of marine and coastal areas by 2020.**

Progress toward the 30x30 goal has barely moved in the last couple of years. Canada's ongoing commitment to the target is increasingly in doubt, given the current government's lack of policy direction, dedicated budget allocation or even renewed public statements to support it.^{27,28} With the Enhanced Nature Legacy initiative funding running out in 2026 and no new announcements about its extension or the creation of a similar fund to replace it, the federal government will fail again. Only long-term funding — and political will — can ensure progress on new protected areas.

2.1.1 Not just a numbers game



Moose in Algonquin Provincial Park, ON (Mike Grandmaison).

The 30x30 goal is not only about percentages, but about effective conservation and protection of the right areas, with the right methods. The target needs to be both quantitative and qualitative to ensure it effectively tackles the biodiversity and extinction crises. To account for this, the Kunming-Montreal framework ensures that the target is effective by including specific qualities that protected areas need to have to achieve biodiversity conservation, including:

- well-connected areas that allow species movement and natural processes like migration;
- ecologically representative areas that will ensure the country's many ecosystems are equally protected;
- highly biodiverse areas or areas of importance for biodiversity, such as species at risk habitat; and
- equitably governed areas that recognize Indigenous traditional territories.²⁹

Despite this specific criteria, a 2025 report from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada found the country is not on track to meet its 2030 targets in either a quantitative or qualitative sense. Across the board, ECCC, Parks Canada and DFO, the federal departments in charge of advancing the protection of lands and waters, did not have either a concrete plan to achieve 30x30 or the standards to ensure Canada's 30 per cent includes all qualitative elements required in the Kunming-Montreal Framework.³⁰

Compounding this problem, the vast majority of protected areas currently counted toward Canada's 30x30 progress were established before the global framework was adopted.³¹ Many were created under older standards that do not necessarily align with the framework's qualitative requirements. This makes it all the more urgent the quantity of protected areas increases substantially over the next five years while ensuring the qualitative criteria are fully integrated into new designations to create effective biodiversity protection in Canada.

2.1.2 Bold global commitments, weak local actions

While Canada has committed to implement the Kunming-Montreal Framework on the international stage, the reality is those commitments alone do not carry the legal weight in Canadian law to hold the federal government accountable. For the correct local implementation of the framework, Canada must translate these international commitments into enforceable policy on the ground. Between 2022 and 2025, two important pieces of policy were introduced by the federal government.



COP16 in Cali, Colombia (Lucero Gonzalez).

Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada

Released in 2024, Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy is the country's action plan for achieving the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Framework. The strategy outlines a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to halting biodiversity loss, centering collaboration between the federal government, provinces, territories and Indigenous governments.³² While the strategy was a promising first step in ensuring global biodiversity promises were advanced locally, the plan lacks a course of action on how the strategy is going to be executed as well as quantifiable objectives for recovering biodiversity. So far, no funding for its implementation has been announced.

The Nature Accountability Bill

Alongside the 2030 Nature Strategy, the federal government tabled the Nature Accountability Bill in the summer of 2024, outlining the legal responsibility the federal government had to upholding its commitments under the UN Convention of Biological Diversity. The bill later died on the Order Paper when Parliament prorogued in January 2025.³³ In their draft form, the 2030 Nature Strategy and Nature Accountability Bill required the federal government to review the plans for achieving targets, report on progress regularly and create an advisory committee. However, it did not enshrine into law the 23 targets of the 2030 strategy nor create accountability measures if Canada were to fail the 2030 targets.³⁴ The bill would have to be reintroduced in parliament in order to advance and as of now, there is no indication the federal government will make this a priority.³⁵

As the federal government fails to make concrete advances in numbers, it simultaneously claims progress in foundational work such as identifying areas of interest for protected sites, developing internal policies and guidance between departments, and so on.³⁶ However, it is necessary to assess whether any of these claims are actually progressing effectively or urgently enough to provide meaningful interim biodiversity protection, even in the absence of finalized protected areas. While we all understand proper conservation that actually contributes to halting and reversing biodiversity loss takes time, especially when done in a way that upholds Indigenous Rights and Title, it remains essential to examine what current progress genuinely looks like on the ground.

2.1.3 Marine Protected Areas

Marine and coastal areas are largely under federal jurisdiction and three ministries are in charge of advancing their protection: Parks Canada, ECCC and DFO. Under each, there are several mechanisms of protection, including National Marine Conservation Areas, managed by Parks Canada, and Oceans Act Marine Protected Areas, managed by DFO. All contribute to the 30x30 target, but not consistently or to the same degree.^{37,38}



Coastal Steller sea lions, B.C. (Andrew S. Wright).

In 2021, through the Enhanced Nature Legacy initiative, the federal government allocated \$842.8 million to advance Canada's marine conservation targets.³⁹ The funding was distributed across all three departments to establish, monitor, and strengthen marine protected areas in support of achieving the 2025 — and advancing the 2030 — commitments. Yet, as the five-year funding period ends in March 2026, most of the protection targets remain unmet.^{40,41}

Notably, DFO has only established one Oceans Act Marine Protected Area through regulations made by the governor in council, failing to achieve the target of sixteen finalized areas.⁴² While there are nine other areas in different stages of planning and establishment, the department will still fall well below its target by the time the budget period concludes.⁴³ In contrast, DFO exceeded its goal for new Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs), establishing five new areas against a target of three.⁴⁴

Even though there was some progress establishing protected areas by the other two departments in the form of planning and other processes, no new marine protected areas (by Parks Canada) nor National Wildlife Areas (by ECCC) were finalized, despite the target of 10 and five new ones respectively.⁴⁵

Additionally, across the different departments and designations there is a lack of consistency on the minimum level of protection, as well as prohibited types of harmful activities within the designated areas, such as: oil and gas exploration, development and production; fishing via bottom trawl gear; waste disposal; and mineral exploration and exploitation. In 2019, the federal government introduced the Marine Protected Areas Protection Standard to address these inconsistencies.⁴⁶ In the same year, DFO established the OECM Protection Standard, under which activities are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.⁴⁷

Although these standards were intended to provide greater clarity and consistency, guidance for implementing them across marine protected areas has not yet been fully developed or applied. Additionally, in areas established prior to 2019, implementation of the standards varies by activity. As a result, some marine protected areas counted toward Canada's 30x30 target still permit harmful activities.⁴⁸ The extent of these activities is difficult to determine due to limited and inconsistent reporting within the CPCAD.

This leaves Canada with significant work ahead in ocean protection by 2030. The country must both increase marine and coastal protections by an additional 15.5 percentage points, and ensure minimum protection standards and qualitative requirements under the Kunming-Montreal Framework are fully met across all areas counted towards the target.

2.1.4 Terrestrial Protected Areas



Migrating barren-ground caribou, N.W.T. (John E. Marriott)

Federally managed terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems make up only about 6 per cent of total landmass in Canada.⁴⁹ This means most land and freshwater protection falls under provincial, territorial, and municipal jurisdiction. Federally, two departments are responsible for managing, advancing, and reporting on terrestrial protected areas: ECCC and Parks Canada.⁵⁰ Under the 2021 Enhanced Nature Legacy initiative, the federal government allocated \$2.3 billion to terrestrial protection, which included commitments toward the 25x25 and 30x30 targets.⁵¹

While ECCC and Parks Canada did complete some foundational work, most of the targets set for 2026, which is the end of the funding period, are not on track. Parks Canada finalized only one national park reserve, far short of its target of ten.⁵² In contrast, ECCC exceeded its target of establishing six new National Wildlife Areas, creating ten in total.⁵³ However, it failed to meet its separate target of finalizing the designation of seven National Wildlife Areas, as none were completed during the period.⁵⁴

An important component of the 30x30 target is the protection of freshwater ecosystems. **A 2025 report from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada found the federal government has taken very limited action to protect inland waters.**⁵⁵ Parks Canada, in particular, has made only minimal progress toward its target of creating four new freshwater Marine Conservation Areas by the end of 2026, with only one candidate site identified so far.

Can caribou graze the path to 30x30?



Saving large, highly biodiverse areas is at the core of achieving Canada's commitment to protect 30x30. With ranges spanning much of the country, and their need for vast, connected and intact ecosystems, safeguarding caribou provides a straightforward path to achieving this goal. The perfect example is the historic extension of the Klinse-Za Park in northeastern B.C., which set aside over 200,000 hectares of southern mountain caribou habitat, thanks to the leadership of the West Moberly and Saulteau First Nations.⁵⁶ If we were to take similar land protection approaches for all caribou herds in the country, Canada would be in good shape to achieve 30x30.

2.1.5 Funding gaps reflect commitment gaps



White Lake Grasslands, South Okanagan-Similkameen, B.C. (Charlotte Dawe).

One of the most concerning aspects of the federal government's wavering commitment towards achieving 30x30 is the absence of funding. The funding for the Enhanced Nature Legacy initiative is set to end in March 2026 and no additional funding has been announced. Instead, the federal budget released in the fall of 2025 cut funding to nearly all federal departments, including those in charge of advancing 30x30.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the Department of Defence saw an increase of more than \$81 billion over five years.

While the foundational work undertaken by federal departments is necessary to advance land and water protection, it does not carry the same weight and benefit to biodiversity as actually finalizing and expanding protected areas. Without sustained funding to ensure this groundwork translates into real protections on the ground, and meaningful progress toward the 30x30 target, the time, capacity, and public dollars invested over the past five years will have delivered little tangible improvement for biodiversity in Canada.

2.2 Ontario not pulling its weight in protection



Algonquin Provincial Park wetland, ON (Katie Krelove).

The fourth-largest land base in Canada is found within the borders of Ontario, at 107 million hectares.⁵⁸ However, it ranks eighth nationwide in conservation, with only 10.9 per cent of its land and water protected as of 2025 — an amount that has barely budged in over two decades.⁵⁹ In terms of the amount of area protected, it is outpaced by Quebec, Nunavut, Northwest Territories and the smaller province of B.C.⁶⁰ Any way you count it, Ontario is a laggard when it comes to contributing to the national 30x30 target.

2.2.1 Lack of mandate, target or plan

Ontario is also a laggard in terms of commitment, mandate or intentions regarding the growth of protected areas. It has yet to acknowledge the national 30x30 target let alone set a target of its own for growing the provincial protected area network. **A 2020 report by the Ontario Auditor General found that growing protected areas was not a government priority, despite it being mandated in the provincial Protected Areas and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006.**⁶¹ The report recommended Ontario establish a long-term, area-based target for expanding its protected areas with associated timelines, assess the financial investment required to do so and publicly report on progress. A follow up report in 2023 found the government had made little progress on these recommendations.⁶²

2.2.2 Ignoring its own roadmap

In 2021, the Ontario government appointed a Protected Areas Working Group (PAWG) tasked with identifying opportunities to “protect and conserve more natural areas.”⁶³ However, its recommendations were not made public and, for the most part, have not been acted upon or even acknowledged by the government.

The PAWG report — submitted to the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) in December 2021 — urged immediate action, commitment from the top and proposed a strategic framework for protected areas expansion.⁶⁴ The report included polling showing strong public support for growing protected areas across the province as well as a roadmap to achieve 30x30. Many of the high level recommendations made to the province align with measures environmental groups have long called for, including:

1. adopting the 30x30 target;
2. recognizing the critical importance of Indigenous-led conservation and engaging with First Nation’s proposals for IPCAs in the short and long term;
3. creating a comprehensive provincial protected areas strategy — approved by Cabinet — based on clear objectives, targets and timelines, including a community-driven and collaborative approach to identifying candidate protected areas; and
4. creating a dedicated fund to incentivize action and attract matching funds from the federal government.⁶⁵

The PAWG recommendations provide a decent starting point for Ontario to meaningfully advance the expansion of protected areas in consultation with conservation and biodiversity experts, the public and First Nations communities. Instead, the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks buried the report and in 2023 refused to grant a meeting requested by 124 organizations to consult on its implementation.⁶⁶

2.2.3 Private land protection won’t cut it

Since 2020, protected area growth in the province has been primarily achieved through private land trusts.⁶⁷ With a \$38 million investment from the provincial government to support the acquisition of private lands, this has amounted to the protection of an additional 170,305 hectares, or 0.16 per cent of the province, in the past five years.⁶⁸ While land trusts play an important role in acquiring, protecting and managing key biodiversity hot spots and rare ecosystems, particularly in the south where most land is privately owned, the vast majority—87 per cent—of the province is made up of provincially managed or so called “Crown land.”⁶⁹

Another 25,100 hectares in southern Ontario, approximately 0.02 per cent of the province, have been recognized at the federal level as protected through the OECM classification, due mainly to strong urban and near-urban municipal and conservation authority management plans that meet the criteria for long-term protection.⁷⁰ As noted in the PAWG report, these OECM classifications were achieved without the support of the Ontario government. Instead the province has enacted legislation to undermine the ability of conservation authorities to permanently protect lands and waters from development and consult on land use decisions.⁷¹



North Shore Blanding’s turtle habitat, ON (Rhonda Kirby).

2.2.4 Logging and mining undermine land protection growth

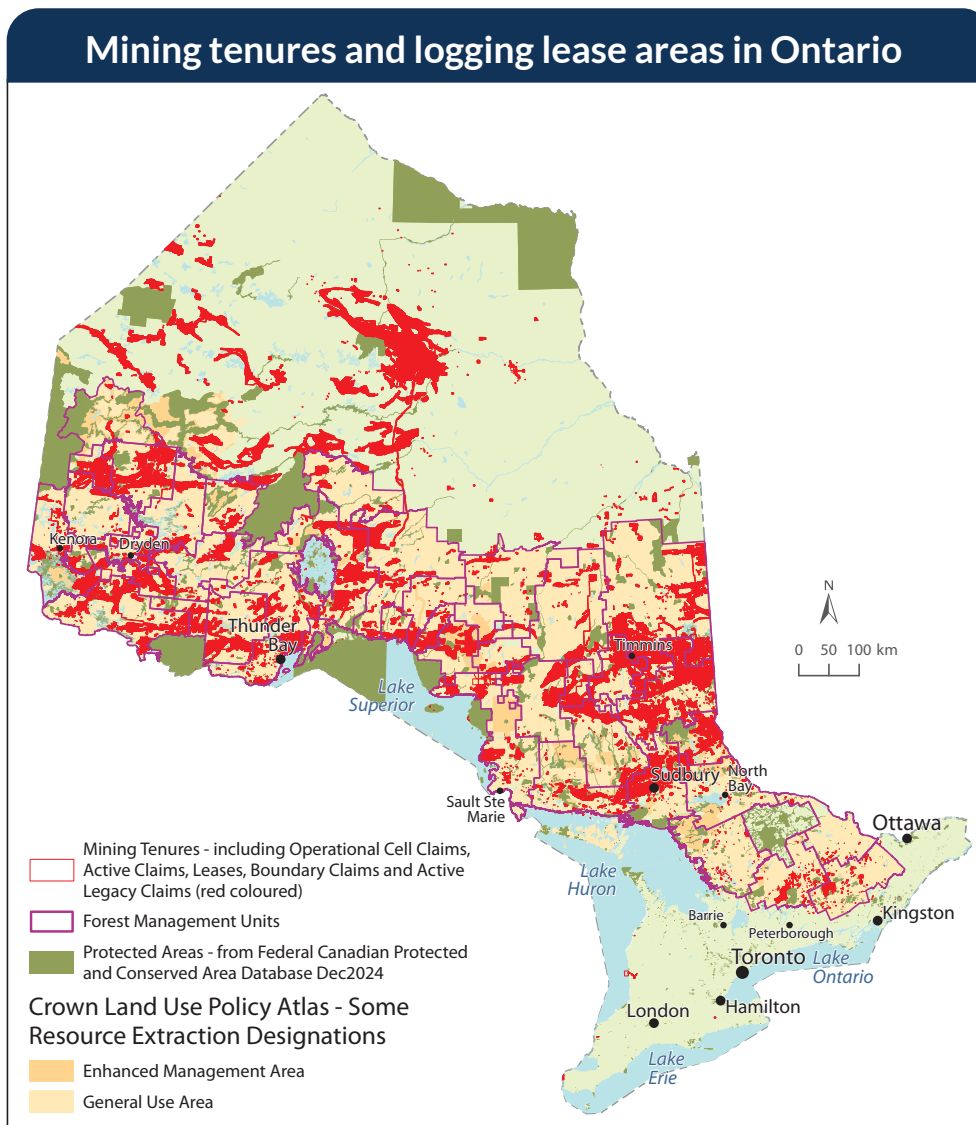
Despite progress in land trust protections, this avenue for meeting significant conservation goals is fundamentally limited by the amount of private land available. Ontario has not made similar investments or the bold steps necessary to grow protected places on Crown land, which would require the removal of lands from logging and mining leases and treaty consultations with First Nations.

The province's unwillingness to secure public lands for protection represents a serious barrier to supporting First Nations' IPCA proposals. It also means key biodiversity needs are overlooked. An example is the lack of progress on expanding protection in boreal caribou habitat, even though federal science maintains that undisturbed intact forest is a fundamental need for the species' survival.⁷² Expansions to two existing provincial parks in caribou ranges, promised as part of the five-year, federal-provincial Conservation Agreement (2022-2027) have yet to manifest in new protections posted on Ontario's Environmental Registry in 2024 and 2025.^{73,74,75}

The amount of Crown land that has been proposed for addition to the protected network in the last five years has been underwhelming in ambition. For the most part, they have consisted of lands previously identified and set aside for protection in the uncompleted 1999 Ontario Living Legacy Land Use process — the last concerted effort the province made at growing protected areas. The new proposals, including expansions to existing parks, amount

to approximately 22,900 hectares or a dismal 0.02 per cent of the province.^{76,77} **At this rate, MECP would need to release a new expansion project of this same size every other day between now and 2030 to meet the federal conservation target.** In other words, the proposals are simply nowhere near the scale required.

Ontario's lack of target, commitment or ambition means it has also missed out on significant funding from the federal government. While it received nearly \$10-million from ECCC to support the protection of remaining Ontario Living Legacy sites in 2023, this funding was minimal compared to the formalized Nature Agreements made with other provinces and territories in the same time period, as part of the Government of Canada 2021 budget commitment to invest \$2.3 billion over five years through its Enhanced Nature Legacy initiative.^{78,79}



2.2.5 Protection going backwards?

More recently, the Ontario government has taken worrisome steps to remove or downgrade land in protected areas. In a controversial move, it used a budget bill to remove approximately 60 hectares of public access beachfront from the popular Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. This park is located on the largest freshwater beach in the world, encompassing rare dune ecosystems and critical habitat for endangered migratory piping plovers.⁸⁰ It has also altered legislation under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006 to permit a new class of “adventure” park that would allow for activities not necessarily compatible with ecological health and biodiversity protection, such as driving motorized recreational vehicles.⁸¹ The amendment does not prevent existing parks from being reclassified into the adventure class, which could potentially remove protected status as defined by federal accounting.

Other recent legislation has undermined biodiversity protections in the province. **Bill 5, passed in 2025 scrapped Ontario’s Endangered Species Act and replaced it with much weaker critical habitat definitions, protections and monitoring for species at risk.**⁸² It also allowed the government to designate “Special Economic Zones” (SEZs) as exempt from provincial laws and regulations as well as First Nations consultation.⁸³ There is nothing in the proposed SEZ designation criteria that excludes protected parks and conservation reserves.⁸⁴

2.2.6 Ignoring First Nations leadership



Grassy Narrows First Nation protest, ON (Grassy Narrows First Nation).

The Ontario government has been unwilling to come to the table with First Nations who have proposals for IPCAs on their traditional territories, even when they have funding and support from the federal government.⁸⁵ These include territory identified by Shawanaga First Nation, Moose Cree First Nation, Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation and Grassy Narrows First Nation.

Ontario has yet to so much as acknowledge these ongoing IPCA projects, despite the Protected Areas Working Group recommendations clearly urging the provincial government to prioritize support for Indigenous-led conservation through Nation to Nation dialogue.⁸⁶ The province’s lack of support has also hindered the establishment of the Mushkegowuk National Marine Conservation Area, which would protect 86,000 square kilometres of federal waters in Hudson and James Bays and 20 kilometres of coastal buffer zones under provincial jurisdiction.⁸⁷

2.3 Manitoba promises without a plan



Proposed Elder Buddy Brass IPCA, MB (Eric Reder).

Manitoba has more wilderness within its borders than most countries in the world, which offers a promising path to achieving 30 per cent protection. Indigenous communities whose territories contain vast, intact ecosystems are working on preserving the lands and waters we all rely on for a healthy environment. Only 11 per cent of the province is legally protected currently, but a new Manitoba government is beginning to act and the public here has always been supportive of preserving nature.⁸⁸ This is a promising position, but there is no concrete plan yet – nor enough resources – with less than five short years to meet the goal.

2.3.1 The commitment

In the run up to the 2023 provincial election, the Manitoba NDP committed to achieve the 30x30 goal.⁸⁹ In contrast, the previous Conservative government, during their seven-year tenure, publicly refused to even push for the 17 per cent goal countries around the world committed to.⁹⁰ In October 2023, the NDP was elected to a majority government and the work towards 30x30 commenced.

Provincial politics have never changed what Manitobans think about protected areas. Going back decades, polling consistently shows broad public support for preserving the nature that makes living here special.⁹¹ With people excited for more protected areas and a commitment from the latest government, the 30x30 goal seems achievable.

2.3.2 Visionary opportunities



Aurora borealis, Shamattawa First Nation, MB (Eric Reder).

Across the province, First Nations communities are actively working on getting legal protection for their territory. Wuskwi Sipihk First Nation, along with neighbouring communities of Sapotaweyak Cree Nation and Minegoziibe Anishinabe, are planning a large protected and conserved area, known as the Elder Buddy Bass proposal, in a vast roadless region west of Lake Winnipegosis.⁹² Community members in Hollow Water First Nation and Sagkeeng First Nation continue to push for protection for their territories. In the far northeast of Manitoba, the initiative to protect Kitaskeenan Kanatenihtakwuk is a collaboration of five Cree communities: York Factory First Nation, Tataskweyak Cree Nation, Fox Lake Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation and Shamattawa First Nation.⁹³ The Hudson Bay lowlands region where their territory is located is a wild and undeveloped region, and one of the greatest terrestrial carbon stores on the planet. From the Our Vision section of their public planning document:

“We will work together to create a protected area in our shared homelands. The Kitaskeenan Kawee kanawaynichikatek initiative will be Ininewuk-led, guided by traditional laws and the wisdom of our elders, youth, and knowledge keepers.”⁹⁴

There is no bigger protected area proposal than the Seal River Watershed in northern Manitoba. Sayisi Dene First Nation, Northlands Denesuline First Nation, Barren Lands First Nation, and O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation are leading the effort to create a protected area encompassing the entire Seal River Watershed.⁹⁵ Roughly five million hectares of intact healthy boreal ecosystems are included in the plan to create an IPCA. Years of work has gone into the proposal, and in January 2024 the Manitoba government finally halted the risk of mineral exploration in the region, albeit temporarily.

2.3.3 Existing parks still threatened by industry



Clearcut in Duck Mountain Provincial Park, MB (Eric Reder).

A relic from the past continues to haunt protected areas in Manitoba: mining and logging in provincial parks.⁹⁶ Most regions in the world ban mineral exploration and logging from protected areas, but Manitoba is still a laggard. Whiteshell, Nopiming, and Grass River Provincial Parks all have massive portions open to mineral exploration and destruction.⁹⁷ Entire cottage lot blocks are controlled by mineral exploration prospectors who have claimed the lands beneath these recreation homes. Cherished hiking trails and beaches are completely encompassed by private prospectors' mining claims.⁹⁸ And Duck Mountain is the last holdout park that allows commercial logging, with 61 per cent of the park open to be clearcut. **Therefore, achieving 30x30 in this province must include an end to mining claims and logging contracts in all areas counted for protection.**

2.3.4 A blueprint for success

One of the greatest environmental achievements in Manitoba was enshrining the community land-use plans of four First Nations into provincial law and creating Pimachiowin Aki.⁹⁹ Recognized as a United Nations World Heritage Site for both natural and cultural significance, the process of taking community wishes and turning it into a protected area was a visionary success and a blueprint for future IPCA establishment. Nearly two decades ago, the Manitoba government introduced legislation that took First Nations community land-use plans and gave them legal protection. The East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Areas Act was a step in the decolonization of protected areas that was ahead of its time.¹⁰⁰ While there were lessons to learn, and growing pains for the provincial and Indigenous governments, the adoption of this legislation and the public attention it brought helped move the needle on understanding IPCAs.

2.3.5 So what's the hold up?



Proposed Owl-Nopiming Caribou Protected Area, MB (Eric Reder).

Currently, just over 11 per cent of Manitoba is protected, in spite of a historical government commitment to reach 12 per cent by the year 2000.¹⁰¹ Promises without follow through have been the constant refrain from successive governments going back more than 30 years. **Slow and stagnant progress on nature care, not at the pace the Earth needs, nor of government commitments, has been a constant plague on progress.**

The damning delay on protected area work happened during the seven-year term of the provincial Conservative government in Manitoba. Not only was it not a priority, the government actively dismantled environmental laws and the protected areas branch itself. Media reports pegged the loss of staff inside the Conservation branch, now the Environment and Climate Change branch, at 70 per cent.¹⁰²

With a new government in place now committed to increasing protection, there are promising signs. But recovering from three-quarter staffing cuts is an enormous task. If there aren't people working on protected areas inside government, there is no way for it to follow through with the conservation wishes of First Nations on the ground. And the only way to build up staff is to increase the budget for the Environment and Climate Change branch, a commitment yet to be seen.

2.3.6 The attack on Indigenous-led conservation

There is perhaps no bigger hold up on care for nature than the rod and gun club lobbyists in rural Manitoba. The Manitoba Wildlife Federation — which receives Manitoba government funding to run exclusive mandated hunter safety programs — is actively campaigning against protected areas and against First Nations control of their own territories.¹⁰³ The blatant anti-Indigenous racism inherent in the messaging must be confronted, but the disinformation being shared across social media and in rural communities will have a lasting effect.¹⁰⁴ At the heart of the matter is a demand that colonial hunting licences for moose be maintained and not modernized, even with growing human populations, collapsing moose populations, and the infringement of constitutional and inherent Indigenous rights.¹⁰⁵ A small subset of the population is using their vocal disinformation to muddle the conversation about growing IPCAs, an initiative supported by a majority of Manitobans.¹⁰⁶



Moose (Eric Reder).

2.3.7 The power of peat

The greatest way Manitoba can move on protected areas and act on climate at the same time is to preserve peatlands. **Peatlands cover three per cent of the world's surface yet contain 30 per cent of the world's terrestrial carbon — making them superstars of carbon storage.**¹⁰⁷ Manitoba's peatlands may not be much to look at: spindly trees, if any, dot these vast wetlands. However, they cover one-third of the province, larger than nearly any other jurisdiction on the planet, and almost half of that peat is made up of carbon.^{108,109} They also provide important habitat for moose and unique plant species like the carnivorous pitcher plant. Preserving peatlands under a Provincially Significant Peatlands designation, according to the wishes of First Nations, will multisolve the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis, while decolonizing our protected area work.¹¹⁰



Creek flowing through intact peatlands, MB (Eric Reder).

2.4 Greenwashing over protection in B.C.



Caycuse Valley clearcut, B.C. (Torrance Coste).

The largest protected area system of any province or territory in Canada is found in B.C., with a little over 14 million hectares, or around 15 per cent of the province protected.¹¹¹ At the end of 2022, the B.C. government officially pledged to double that and protect 30 per cent of land and waters by 2030.¹¹² A year later, in response to warnings from First Nations about pursuing 30x30 without Indigenous leadership and involvement, the province signed the historic Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation, along with the government of Canada and the First Nations Leadership Council.¹¹³

B.C.'s commitment to 30x30 is a promise supported by environmental groups and in alignment with global efforts to fight biodiversity loss and climate collapse. But a few years on, this commitment looks anything but solid. Instead of supporting and investing in Indigenous-led protection of endangered ecosystems, the province is inflating the amount of land it classifies as protected area, making flashy announcements about new protected areas that are small and not actually aimed at protecting the most threatened ecosystems, and allowing industrial activity to continue in some of the most ecologically and culturally significant places in the province.¹¹⁴

This costly, piecemeal approach is nowhere near the scale of what's needed to achieve 30x30, and it does not limit the destructive industrial activity that threatens the target.¹¹⁵ If B.C. continues down this path — treating conservation as a public relations campaign rather than a transformation to actually help people — it will fail to meet 30x30 in both spirit and substance.

2.4.1 Destruction continues in critical species habitat



Quintette caribou herd, B.C. (Isabelle Groc).

The establishment of protected areas in B.C. has long been informed by convenience for resource industries, with many parks safeguarding mountainous areas or shoreline bogs that, while valuable, aren't under threat by logging, mining and other resource extraction.¹¹⁶ The result is a patchwork of unconnected protected areas that do safeguard some important conservation values, but don't help species sliding towards endangerment and extinction. The 30x30 effort must do better and so far there is little indication that the B.C. government understands that.

There are few better examples to point to than the plight of the northern spotted owl, one of the most endangered species in the entire country. In June 2025, the federal government designated 400,000 hectares of forests in southwest mainland B.C. as critical habitat for the spotted owl.¹¹⁷ Half of that critical habitat is already protected within provincial parks and other conservation areas off-limits to logging. But the other 200,000 hectares remains open to logging, despite evidence that recovery of the species requires the conservation of all its habitat.¹¹⁸

To get to 30x30 requires the protection of more than 13.2 million hectares of land, in addition to what's already conserved. Aiming this protection at the areas with the most urgent ecological need means setting the remaining critical habitat of the spotted owl off limits to logging.¹¹⁹

The story is the same in the habitat of other species like the southern mountain caribou and marbled murrelet, where clear-cut logging continues despite dwindling numbers of the species.^{120,121} **It's clear the B.C. government is not connecting its 30x30 commitment with the ecological and moral imperative to protect biodiversity and stop species from going extinct.**

These are not just policy oversights. They are active choices to prioritize extraction over recovery — choices that put entire species at risk and undermine Indigenous-led conservation efforts.

2.4.2 New conservation announcements lack context

There have been some new protected areas created since 30x30 became an official commitment in B.C. and Canada. Most of these have been small, adding just a few dozen hectares to the protected area system.¹²²

Notable exceptions include a new conservancy established in the southern Interior's Incomappleux Valley in 2023, followed in 2024 by new conservancies in the legendary Clayoquot Sound on the west coast and an expansion of Klinse-Za Park in the northeast.^{123,124,125} These new protected areas are excellent news, as they were all led by First Nations governments and all protect tens of thousands of hectares of important ecosystems.

But while the B.C. government mentioned the 30x30 target in their announcements for all three, they did not contextualize them in terms of their progress towards that target or explain how much more land needs to be protected to meet that goal. Added together, the Incomappleux and Clayoquot Conservancies, and the Klinse-Za Park expansion, protect 334,000 hectares of land — an impressive number in each region, but combined are just 2.5 per cent of the 13.2 million hectares needed to achieve 30 per cent protection in B.C.¹²⁶ **Put another way, meeting 30x30 in B.C. means finalizing new protected areas totalling the same amount of area as the Incomappleux, Clayoquot and Klinse-Za combined every seven weeks from the start of 2026 until the end of 2030.**

However, since the announcement of the Klinse-Za expansion in June 2024, no terrestrial protected areas over 10,000 hectares have been finalized. Furthermore, the province only provides updates on its progress towards 30x30 once per year and these updates are not widely publicized.¹²⁷ There's limited opportunity for the public to be aware of how their government is doing in order to hold them accountable. While the updates provide data about how much of B.C. is protected and how much funding has been allocated to conservation, they omit how far the new protected areas added each year get us towards 30 per cent protection.

Achieving 30x30 in B.C. requires accelerating the pace at which new protected areas are being finalized, or implementing more interim measures to safeguard biodiversity and at-risk ecosystems in the meantime. A necessary step towards that is for the government to be transparent about the current rate.

2.4.3 Five-year delay on old-growth reform

In 2020, B.C.'s own Old Growth Strategic Review laid out 14 recommendations to shift the province toward ecosystem-based management, transparency, and Indigenous leadership in conservation. The province accepted all of them.¹²⁸

But five years later, not a single recommendation has been fully implemented. Logging deferrals are temporary and full of loopholes. The draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework — meant to prioritize ecosystem integrity — has been delayed for more than two years.¹²⁹ First Nations communities are still being forced to defend their territories case by case, while the province continues to issue logging permits.¹³⁰

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3. Doubling Down on Nature Destruction

The most concerning part of Canada's slow progress toward 30x30 is not that lands and waters aren't being protected quickly enough to meet the target, but that they continue to be degraded and destroyed at a faster pace than being conserved.¹³¹ This imbalance is not new, but it is accelerating. With just five years left to achieve 30x30, 2025 became the year when governments across the country turned away from their biodiversity goals and doubled down on extractivism.

Supercharged by the instability of US and Canada economic relations in the spring and summer of 2025, governments across the country passed multiple bills designed to fast-track major industrial projects at the expense of environmental protections and Indigenous rights. **Bills 14 and 15 in B.C., Bill 5 in Ontario and federal Bill C-5 signalled a coordinated attempt to usher in a new era of Canadian extractivism that's long driven environmental destruction, conflict and human rights violations.**¹³²

The most dangerous aspects of these bills revolve around removing or weakening environmental and Indigenous rights' protections, which are not only interconnected but are a fundamental part of achieving the correct 30x30 that will actually work at tackling the biodiversity crisis.

Though each bill differs in scope and jurisdiction, across the board they all:

- make it easier to approve industrial projects by cutting or eliminating environmental assessments and permit processes, as well as weakening Indigenous consultation and ignoring the right to free, prior and informed consent;
- centralize power in the hands of cabinet and the prime minister/premiers, allowing them to unilaterally approve projects they deem of interest;
- were rushed through the legislative process in a matter of weeks, with no meaningful consultation with Indigenous Nations;
- sparked widespread public opposition from environmental, Indigenous, legal and civil society groups and municipalities;
- are vague and broad in nature, leaving the door open for unchecked environmental destruction for current and future governments; and
- prioritize short-term economic growth over land, water and Indigenous rights protections.

The promise of 30x30 cannot be used to greenwash unsustainable resource extraction that drives biodiversity loss. It must instead be used as a tool to confront the activities that harm biodiversity and directly limit their impact. Yet it remains unclear how federal and provincial governments in Canada expect to achieve 30x30 while simultaneously prioritizing and investing in the industries that jeopardize ecosystems.

3.1 Build Canada faster, ask later

When Prime Minister Mark Carney took office in the spring of 2025, the federal government's priorities became clear almost immediately. The absence of any reference to the global 30x30 pledge in his election platform or campaign commitments was quickly overshadowed by repeated emphasis on industrialisation, "progress," and the fast-tracking of major resource projects across the country.¹³³



LNG Canada construction, B.C. (WC Files).

One of Prime Minister Carney's first major actions was the introduction of Bill C-5, the One Canadian Economy Act. Passed through the House of Commons in less than three weeks, one of its pieces of legislation, the Building Canada Act, grants sweeping authority to the federal cabinet to expedite projects deemed to be in the "national interest."¹³⁴ Projects designated under this provision would be able to bypass fundamental processes such as full environmental assessments, public comment periods and Indigenous consultation processes. Since then, and in the backdrop of massive public, environmental and Indigenous-led opposition across the country, the federal government has already referred 11 megaprojects to the newly created Major Projects Office for potential approval as "national interest" projects. Most are fossil fuel and resource extraction projects, including LNG expansion on the West Coast, large-scale mining proposals, and major energy developments.¹³⁵

Even more concerning, this new designation would allow projects to skip the Impact Assessment Act's planning phase, where public and Indigenous consultation typically occur.¹³⁶ It remains unclear how the federal government intends to fulfil its legal duty to consult Indigenous Peoples, let alone uphold their rights to free, prior, and informed consent under UNDRIP.

Amidst the passing of Bill C-5 and the rush to recommend projects to be expedited, there have been no equivalent announcements reaffirming Canada's commitment to 30x30, nor any new measures to ensure the most biodiverse ecosystems in Canada are protected from this new push for industrial development.¹³⁷ There have been vague commitments to create new national parks, but no real action to ensure at-risk species in Canada and their habitat are adequately protected to contribute to the 30x30 target. Instead Bill C-5 and the push to speed up megaprojects across the country allows ministers to override the federal Species at Risk Act, the Fisheries Act, and the Migratory Birds Convention, ignoring critical protections for at-risk species and allowing the degradation of critical habitat that would not otherwise be permitted.¹³⁸

Bill C-5 represents a decisive shift away from Canada's 30x30 pledge. If the federal government approves and accelerates all of the projects it has advanced for "national interest" consideration, achieving the land and water protection required to halt the biodiversity crisis will be functionally impossible.

3.2 Ontario puts mining, logging and sprawl first



Nelson Aggregate Co. gravel mine, ON (Alex Tsui).

The Ontario government has not adopted the 30x30 target or any other target to expand protected places. Instead, since the 2018 election — and subsequent re-election — of conservative premier Doug Ford, it has systematically dismantled legislative and regulatory protections for nature and biodiversity in order to fast-track development and resource extraction.¹³⁹

The sweeping omnibus Bill 5, Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025, was rushed into legislation in June 2025 as a response to US tariffs, with the goal of speeding up development projects by removing environmental assessments and regulations, and bypassing Indigenous and public consultation.¹⁴⁰ The bill repealed the provincial Endangered Species Act, replacing it with much weaker protections, and gave the government the ability to designate Special Economic Zones (SEZ) that can exempt projects from provincial laws and assessments, and fast-tracked specific mining approvals.¹⁴¹

The bill has drawn strong criticism from Indigenous communities and leaders, environmental organizations, and labour unions for weakening environmental protections, violating First Nations rights and creating unprecedented powers for cabinet to grant favours to “trusted proponents” with very little accountability.¹⁴² The criteria for SEZ designation is vague and does not preclude destruction to current protected areas, critical habitat for endangered species, significant wetlands and waterways, or First Nations treaty territory.¹⁴³

3.3 B.C.'s fast-track threatens conservation promise

The B.C. government has emphatically used the impacts of US tariffs as rationale to downplay and contravene environmental commitments. Since reelection in 2024, the BC NDP government has talked much less about biodiversity and conservation and much more about increased logging, mining and oil and gas development. The mandate letter to the minister responsible for 30x30 explicitly states that new conservation must be worked around the development of critical minerals, as opposed to protected areas being implemented where they are most needed.¹⁴⁴



Northeast B.C. oil and gas exploration (Agathe Bernard).

After committing to biodiversity protection and pledging half a billion dollars towards it in the Tripartite Nature Agreement in 2023, the province has swiftly returned to the hundred-year-old mindset that resource extraction comes first and all other values must fit in around it. After significant conservation announcements in 2023 and 2024, 2025 passed with only one new major protected area finalized.¹⁴⁵

Instead of investing in and working with First Nations on the development of new protected areas, **the B.C. government spent most of 2025 passing controversial new legislation like Bill 15 to give itself sweeping powers to fast-track resource extraction projects and side-step important environmental regulations.**¹⁴⁶

In addition to increasing barriers to and reducing the priority of new conservation, this policy direction also threatens a key condition necessary for progress towards 30x30. As examples like the Clayoquot Sound conservancies and the Klinse-Za park expansion demonstrate, First Nations leadership is the key to increased conservation in B.C. First Nations' leaders clearly stated the rushed passage of Bills 14 and 15, and the way they offer no assurances that B.C.'s commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) will be protected, directly jeopardize the relationship between the province and the more than 204 First Nations whose territories overlap it — and this impact could be irreparable.¹⁴⁷

Plans and policy commitments made by the B.C. government to prioritize ecosystems and biodiversity, and protect old-growth forests, are stalled with promised actions and legislative changes undelivered.¹⁴⁸ While the government has been one of the most enthusiastic in Canada about the importance of biodiversity and the goal of 30x30, its actions haven't displayed the willingness to really invest in making this shift happen.

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4. Protected Area Criteria: Why What Counts Matters



Boreal caribou, northern ON (Hidero Otake).

As we track Canada's progress towards the 30x30 target, it's crucial to monitor the quality of protection and not just the number of new protected areas or the percentage protected. **Beyond the number, 30x30 is only meaningful if existing and new protected area designations are actually effective at halting and reversing biodiversity loss over the long term.**

Canada, like most countries, has adopted the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of protected areas as: clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature.¹⁴⁹

Let's break this down. In general, legal means of protection are achieved through federal, provincial or territorial government designations with the authority to restrict activities that negatively impact biodiversity, such as logging, mining, and oil-and-gas development. The IUCN further defines "other effective means" as measures that achieve the effective conservation of biodiversity within a geographically defined area.¹⁵⁰ In theory, these "means" offer an opportunity for Indigenous communities, municipal and rural governments, and NGOs to contribute to the 30x30 goal more quickly and cost-effectively. But they also provide an opportunity for bad actors to take advantage of what constitutes "de facto" conservation.

Mentioned earlier, the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) is the federal repository that has tracked and described the protected areas meeting this criteria since 2018. The database is managed by ECCC, which also receives and evaluates data submissions from various sources for potential addition, including federal, provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous governments, communities and organizations, local governments, environmental non-governmental organizations and private landowners.¹⁵¹

As government pledges and commitments to the 30x30 goal are translated into actual protected designations, we must remain vigilant and ensure strong criteria and thorough evaluation processes are in place.

4.1 The “Other Effective Conservation Measures” loophole

As pledges and commitments to the 30x30 goal develop, some governments pay particular attention to the “other effective means” part of that definition. This has given rise to an emerging land status called Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures, or OECMs.¹⁵²

Governments appear to look to OECMs for different reasons. In good faith examples, these designations can identify and recognize jurisdictions like municipal governments and local conservation authorities. They can provide them more leeway to implement land use changes that achieve the same results as protected areas, even if the rationale for these is recreation or another public priority. OECM designations meet the conservation standards to achieve the preservation of biodiversity set out by Canada, and align with standards used internationally.



Catchacoma old-growth forest, ON (Nina Munteanu).

Some newly designated OECMs do this. The classification is especially important where local governments are keen to pursue 30x30 while the provincial government above them remains uncommitted. In Ontario, OECM designation has been used to motivate municipalities, conservation authorities and private landowners, such as universities, to strengthen management plans and on the ground conservation efforts in local significant natural areas.¹⁵³ The keys to OECM qualification in CPCAD are that management delivers conservation outcomes, it's permanent and year-round, and there is an authority with effective means to control activities that negatively impact biodiversity.¹⁵⁴ It's also crucial the management of OECMs that are counted in the database as contributing to 30x30 be monitored and reviewed to ensure long-term adherence to the criteria. As of now, it remains unclear how recognized OECMs will be held accountable.

Unfortunately the designation is also vulnerable to abuse by governments looking to take credit for protecting biodiversity without actually limiting the industrial activities that threaten it. By including areas designated for other uses that don't meet Canadian or international conservation standards, governments can effectively “pad their stats” or inflate the total amount of protected area within their jurisdiction to a figure closer to 30 per cent, without the essential and important effort of working with Indigenous Title-holders to create new protected areas.

According to the Government of Canada, areas managed for diverse purposes, such as military training or cattle grazing, may qualify as OECMs.¹⁵⁵ Environmental groups and others worry this definition could be further broadened to include areas open to resource extraction or other ecologically harmful activities.¹⁵⁶

4.2 The bad faith OECM actor

The B.C. government has committed to 30x30 and regularly touts the importance of protecting the ecosystems and biodiversity the province is famous for. It claims OECMs can help achieve 30x30, and it classifies more than 3.8 million hectares or 4.1 per cent of B.C. under this designation, lifting B.C.'s total from 15.6 to 19.7 per cent.¹⁵⁷

The problem is 97 per cent of these 3.8 million hectares do not meet Canadian or international standards for what constitutes effective conservation, and the remaining three per cent has not been assessed.¹⁵⁸ In an effort to signal progress towards 30x30, the B.C. government is significantly inflating the percentage of the province it calls protected, including using designations that don't even represent what it says they do.



Eden Grove old-growth (Em Hoffpauir).

A particularly egregious example is the 2024 analysis that found less than one-third of the area B.C. classifies as Old Growth Management Areas, which comprise 37 per cent of B.C.'s OECMs, contains old-growth forests.¹⁵⁹ This suggests the province is not only failing to accurately assess old-growth, but is actively obscuring the reality of its protection efforts. To claim progress while knowingly using flawed data moves past negligence into deliberate misrepresentation, violating the trust of the constituents they serve.

Furthermore, this bad faith use of OECMs distracts from how far the province has to go to get to 30 per cent protection of lands and waters in its jurisdiction. This approach breeds cynicism around conservation efforts, and represents yet another example of governments in Canada prioritizing resource extraction and profit over biodiversity and ecosystems.

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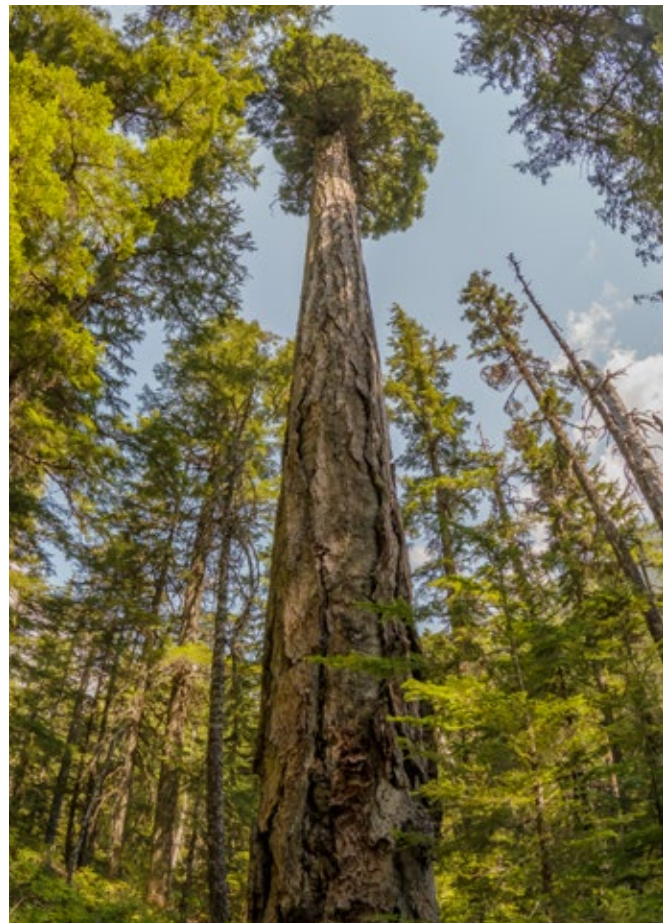
5. Conservation and Climate: A Two-Way Street

While sometimes framed by governments as two separate goals or initiatives that may have to come at the expense of the other, conservation remains an essential pillar of climate action and vice versa. **Setting aside more nature for protection, especially carbon-rich ecosystems such as old-growth forests and peatlands, is a key measure to ensure carbon is absorbed and stored in the biosphere instead of entering the atmosphere.**¹⁶⁰ Conversely, reducing carbon emissions and fighting climate change will ensure the biodiversity safeguarded by protected areas is less affected by rising temperatures or more extreme weather.¹⁶¹ Governments across Canada need to do more to pair nature protection efforts with climate action, as solid conservation plans are threatened by runaway climate change, and plans to reduce emissions are less effective if the amount of protected areas in Canada remains low.

5.1 Old-growth

Old-growth forests store immense amounts of carbon in tree trunks, deep root systems and centuries of soil accumulation.¹⁶² When these forests are logged, most of the stored carbon is released and it takes centuries for replanted forests to recover that loss.¹⁶³ Logging is also greenhouse-gas intensive, requiring heavy machinery, road building and transportation, as well as massive waste wood burns.¹⁶⁴

Moreover, replanting trees doesn't replicate the complexity of old-growth ecosystems. These new forests are often single-species or profit-driven commercial species, more vulnerable to pests, disease, drought and fire — all of which are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change.^{165,166} Protecting intact ecosystems is therefore both a climate and biodiversity imperative. Natural climate solutions, alongside the rapid wind down of fossil fuel production, are the most effective ways governments can take real climate action. Rather than fast-tracking carbon capture projects or new extractive developments, a more meaningful climate strategy would include conserving old-growth and biodiversity-rich areas.



Teapot Valley, B.C. (Joe Foy).

5.2 Critical minerals

While efforts to meaningfully reduce carbon emissions languish, one area where the federal and many provincial and territorial governments are apparently committed to combatting climate change is in pursuit of a potential critical minerals boom. In the name of “clean technology” and “economic security,” Prime Minister Carney has ramped up Canada’s support for critical minerals — defined as those essential to national security and the transition to a low-carbon economy.¹⁶⁷ Some minerals, like copper and lithium, are indeed important for renewable energy technologies like EV batteries and transmission lines. While others like gold may not yet be listed as “critical,” the industry lobby argues it should be, further eroding the argument critical minerals are clean technology.¹⁶⁸



Mount Polley mine spill, B.C. (WC Files).

Moreover, transparency is completely lacking. Most of the minerals mined in Canada are processed abroad, where traceability is lost. The U.S. Department of War, for example, has signed a deal with Vancouver-based mining company Trilogy Metals and there is no mechanism to know if these minerals are being used for the energy transition or to fuel the operations of the U.S. military.¹⁶⁹ If these materials are truly critical to the energy transition and our economy, there should be clear evidence of what they are actually being used for.

Mining is a land-and-water-intensive industry. It fragments habitat, erodes soil and produces vast quantities of both toxic waste and wastewater stored in tailings ponds. Take for example the 2014 Mount Polley disaster in B.C., when a tailings pond breach spilled millions of cubic metres of contaminated waste into nearby lakes and rivers, continuing to affect fish populations nearly a decade later.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, Teck Resources' coal mining operations have poisoned the Elk River in B.C. with dangerously high levels of selenium.¹⁷¹

The current rush for critical minerals to advance the low-carbon energy transition, framed as climate action, misses a core truth. Real climate solutions cannot be achieved by simply swapping fossil-fuel technologies for “cleaner” versions. Reducing overall energy use and current levels of consumption must be a bigger focus.¹⁷² The government’s fixation, for example, on electric vehicles — and mining the components for them — over systemic changes to the transportation systems reduces climate action to individual consumer choices rather than the broad, sweeping changes necessary to meaningfully reduce emissions. While the mining for, and usage of some of these minerals will be important for the energy transition, there must be rigorous standards and clear accountability mechanisms.¹⁷³ Furthermore, critical minerals development must not come at the expense of biodiversity and should never be used to justify diverting conservation away from the most ecologically important areas. It’s important that any new mining project be planned around protected areas, not the other way around.

5.3 Fossil fuels

Fossil fuel development poses a significant threat to conservation efforts. Pipelines, wells and related infrastructure stretch for thousands of kilometres, fragmenting vital ecosystems and watersheds.

Despite environmental assessments, the sheer scale of these industrial projects makes meaningful habitat protection nearly impossible. For example, the recently approved Prince Rupert Gas Transmission fracked gas pipeline in northern B.C. will span 750 kilometres, crossing hundreds of rivers and streams. Several First Nations and local community members along the route have voiced strong opposition, citing the disruption of critical salmon habitat and the clearing of old-growth along the pipeline corridor, among other concerns.¹⁷⁴ Both the B.C. premier and the prime minister have cited ongoing efforts to establish new protected areas elsewhere in northwestern B.C. in their defence of this destructive project and its impact.¹⁷⁵ While these initiatives are critical, addressing the biodiversity crisis requires a unified approach, not an either/or choice, and the notion of fossil fuel sacrifice zones must be abandoned.



Woodfibre LNG project, B.C. (WC Files).

Other major projects being discussed, such as the East-West Canadian Energy Corridor, and port outlets on James Bay and Hudson Bay, follow the trend. The Ontario government's James Bay proposal directly undermines work between the federal government and the Mushkegowuk Council, representing seven First Nations, on a proposed national marine conservation area. Furthermore, the feasibility study for the Indigenous protected area cites the coast as unsuitable for large shipping infrastructure due to shallow waters, tides and ice cover.¹⁷⁶

Prioritizing economic development — whether through oil and gas, or mining and transmission lines — inevitably deprioritizes biodiversity and ecological needs. If governments are serious about 30x30 commitments, new conservation efforts must focus on areas of highest ecological importance, regardless of the resources near and around them. That will likely mean designating protection in places where new fossil fuel infrastructure, mines or other industrial projects are proposed, effectively preventing those developments. Biodiversity protection should be the foundation of 30x30, not a secondary consideration.

Finally, several provinces have stated 30x30 goals around carbon sequestration, meaning conservation should target ecosystems with the highest carbon storage potential.¹⁷⁷ Those areas often overlap with places under pressure from logging, mining, and oil and gas development. True climate action will require governments to make good choices — prioritizing ecological health and planetary stability over short-term industrial expansion. Protecting what remains, especially the most carbon-rich and biodiverse areas, is the only path forward.

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6. 30x30 in the Global Context



Mesoamerican Caravan for Life and Climate, El Salvador (Karen Castillo/Observatorio Memoria y Libertad).

Canada's responsibility and impact on global biodiversity protection is not limited by its political borders. Achieving 30x30 solely through domestic action will not be enough to halt the global biodiversity crisis. Many of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems are located in so-called "developing" countries, where competing development pressures make it far more difficult to achieve 30x30 targets without external support from richer countries.^{178,179} The lack of resources, deep socio-economic inequalities, and widespread ecological degradation these countries face are not accidental, they are the direct result of centuries of extraction by the Global North.¹⁸⁰ **Today, research suggests the Global North drains commodities worth approximately \$2.2 trillion every year from the Global South.**¹⁸¹

Canada is a global mining giant and the activities of Canadian mining companies in countries like Brazil, Serbia, Ecuador, Chile, Guatemala and more have been linked to extensive environmental and human rights violations.¹⁸² These extractive activities in the Global South damage and degrade entire ecosystems without contributing to the long-term economic development of the countries they happen in. Most of the profits of these activities return to corporate shareholders and do not stay in the local communities impacted by the destruction.¹⁸³

Target 19 of the Kunming-Montreal Framework was designed to address this imbalance by intending to mobilize more than \$200 billion in global biodiversity finance, including \$30 billion in international funding annually to developing countries.¹⁸⁴ It recognizes the responsibility of wealthier countries to provide adequate financial support for biodiversity conservation in the Global South, and to confront the ongoing impacts that Global North consumption and extraction have on ecosystems worldwide. Canada's achievement of the target is essential for a truly equitable and achievable global 30x30. The failure to mobilize adequate international finance was widely cited as a key reason the 2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets were never met.¹⁸⁵



Mining protest in Ch'orti territory, Guatemala (Karen Castillo/Observatorio Memoria y Libertad).

In 2022, when Canada signed the Kunming-Montreal Framework, it pledged \$350 million to support the Global South to advance conservation efforts.¹⁸⁶ However, the federal government has not publicly disclosed how much of this has actually been delivered.¹⁸⁷ While international funding for protected areas has increased over the past four years, it still falls short by about \$4 billion of what is needed towards the global 30x30 target.¹⁸⁸ At the current pace, funding for protected areas worldwide would need to increase by 33 per cent every year to close the gap.

Moreover, existing biodiversity finance is inconsistent and unevenly distributed. Marine protected areas receive only 14 per cent of total conservation funding, while small island states and other ocean-dependent regions remain severely underfunded.¹⁸⁹

At a time when Canada has yet to clearly define how much funding it will allocate domestically to meet its national 30x30 commitments, its international obligations are even less certain. This uncertainty is particularly worrisome in the context of the rapid expansion of Canadian mining operations abroad.¹⁹⁰

Without environmental and human rights protections of equal or greater scale, the continued expansion of Canadian extractivism, both domestically and internationally, will result in irreversible harm that will make it impossible to achieve the global 30x30 goal.

The federal government must recommit to their responsibilities under Target 19 of the Kunming-Montreal Framework, halt the violent surge of Canadian extractivism in the Global South and help finance the creation and management of protected areas in those counties.

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7. IPCAs Key to Expanding Land Protection



Clayoquot Sound, B.C. (Wayne Barnes).

By Saya Masso, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation

For decades, Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation has protected and stewarded the lands through what we call Tribal Parks. These are now known as IPCAs, although we were using that approach long before governments started using the term.

Across so-called British Columbia and Canada, there's growing attention on protected areas. But for protection to be real — not just a line on a map — it must come from the people who have been in relationship with those lands for thousands of years. That's why IPCAs, and specifically Tribal Parks like ours, are not just tools for conservation. They are pathways to Indigenous self-governance, land restoration and sustainable futures.

If governments are serious about protecting more land, they need to stop managing Indigenous visions from the sidelines and start recognizing what has already been built.

What's an IPCA?

IPCA's are Indigenous-led visions for the future of their land. In our case, that vision has existed since at least 1984, when our elders first declared Meares Island a Tribal Park to protect it from industrial logging. Since then, we've expanded that vision across our entire territory — expressing what areas should be protected, what areas are for sustainable use and what areas are for community needs.

An IPCA isn't just about what's not allowed. It's about what should happen on the land. It's about restoration, stewardship, and healing — for ecosystems, but also for relationships. It's about holding space for abundance to return.

But here's the challenge: until Canada or B.C. recognizes that vision formally, and until they make the necessary tenure changes, that land remains tied up in colonial systems. Tree farm licenses, mineral claims and Crown roads are all still active unless we raise money to buy them out or convince governments to relinquish them.

That's not what reconciliation looks like. That's just bureaucracy as usual.

Conservancies aren't enough

In 2024, B.C. agreed to new conservancies that overlap with some of our Tribal Park areas. While that's a positive step, it's also only partial recognition. It doesn't reflect the full scope of our land vision — or our governance.

Conservancies are a Crown designation. They're a tool to help reduce infringement, but they don't replace our Tribal Parks. They don't bring to life our laws, our stewardship plans or our connection to place. In fact, probably half of the protected areas we've declared are still missing from the conservancy system.

What we need is not just a few conservancies here and there, but a full recognition of Tribal Parks as IPCA's in their own right, with stable funding, tenure reform, and shared governance.

Real protection means managing what happens on the land

For us, protected areas are not about "locking the gate" or excluding people. We welcome visitors. What we ask is for respectful use, grounded in planning and stewardship. In a fully implemented Tribal Park system, we would:

- restore rivers and clam gardens, bringing back the salmon runs and coastal food systems that supported our people for millennia;
- manage tourism and float homes in ways that don't displace traditional uses,
- deactivate old logging roads to reduce wildfire risk and protect sacred areas; and
- designate formal campgrounds, rather than letting unregulated access damage sensitive ecosystems.

None of that is anti-access — it's pro-planning. But the current system, whether it's Crown land, tree farms or other overlapping jurisdictions, doesn't allow for Indigenous management to lead. That's what needs to change.

Funding the future

Protecting land doesn't happen for free. Stewardship requires boots on the ground, training, equipment and long-term funding.

We've been fortunate to partner with fundraising groups — not just to buy out tenures, but to build an endowment that supports Indigenous stewardship jobs, guardian programs, and restoration projects. Through our Tribal Park Allies program, we've asked local businesses to contribute to this work. The principle is simple: if you benefit from our lands, you leave something behind for future generations. It's rooted in our potlatch law and our values of reciprocity.

But not every Nation has that capacity and many are in areas with even more aggressive resource extraction industries pulling the strings. We shouldn't have to fundraise just to exercise our responsibilities on our own lands.

This isn't charity. It's governance. And if we're serious about Indigenous stewardship, then IPCAs need real, consistent, Indigenous-controlled funding mechanisms.



Walbran Valley trail building, B.C. (Agathe Bernard).

The mining question

One of the biggest challenges ahead is expanding IPCAs to cover areas with mineral tenures. In our Tribal Parks, mining is not permissible. Our people have made that clear.

But the province of B.C. hasn't yet shown a willingness to confront mineral claims in IPCA planning. Companies like Imperial Metals are still holding onto claims in our territory, despite our legal and cultural opposition.¹⁹¹ And while B.C. has started to talk about IPCA expansion, it's avoided the most important conversations where industrial interests are still active.



Wild sockeye salmon, B.C. (John E. Marriott).

Creating IPCAs in areas currently zoned for logging is one thing. Creating IPCAs that honour Indigenous law where mining claims exist is the next hurdle. And it's one we'll need to cross if we're serious about expanding protection in meaningful ways.

What it all comes down to

Our Tribal Parks are deeply supported by our people — from the elders who first declared them to the youth Guardians who restore trails, protect watersheds and learn about healthy rivers. Our Nation is asserting our rights, our responsibilities and our vision for the land. IPCAs are how we bring that vision to life.

They're not about meeting targets or checking boxes. They're about managing our ancestral lands according to our laws, and creating futures where ecosystems are thriving, people are working, and Indigenous Nations are leading.

Governments say they support IPCAs. That's good. Now it's time to act and:

- recognize Tribal Parks as IPCAs in law and policy;
- remove the barriers that prevent Indigenous Nations from stewarding our own lands;
- fund Indigenous governance, not just projects; and
- commit to expanding protected areas in ways that are led, designed, and sustained by Indigenous Peoples.

That's how we protect more land. That's how we create lasting change. And that's how we move forward.

About the Author:

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Conclusion

Efforts to combat the biodiversity crisis need to be transformative — global in scope and systemic in reach. The commitments laid out in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to both halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 are bold. And they are possible.

Protecting 30 per cent of lands and waters by 2030 is not just a target, it's a survival strategy. But as of January 2026, Canada is not on track to meeting its 30x30 targets in either a quantitative or a qualitative way. Solving the biodiversity crisis requires more than shallow commitments to numerical targets; it requires intact ecosystems, stopping species extinction, and prioritizing life over profit. Preserving biodiversity requires bold action, funding and enforceable targets, not just promises.



Burrowing owl, B.C. (Jared Hobbs).

As we turn the corner with less than five years left to achieve this protection, too many governments have fallen into old habits, placing resource extraction and industrial megaprojects far above protecting biodiversity on the priority list. Transformative change cannot happen while Canada continues to put industrial development above ecological health while inflating protected area numbers and remaining non-transparent about its true conservation progress towards achieving 30x30.

Indigenous-led conservation the way forward

There are approximately 476 million Indigenous Peoples in the world and they currently manage or have tenure rights to around one-quarter of the planet's land area, comprising a significant amount of the world's biodiversity and over half of the planet's remaining intact forests.¹⁹² In light of this, Indigenous-led conservation initiatives are the best way to meet targets for protecting nature as well as support Indigenous rights to land.

Indigenous-managed lands play a critical role in helping biodiversity survive and thrive. A study from Australia, Brazil and Canada found the total numbers of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles were the highest on lands managed or co-managed by Indigenous communities. It's the land-management practices of many Indigenous communities that are keeping species numbers high.¹⁹³

In Canada, there are more than 1.8 million Indigenous People and almost 700 First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.¹⁹⁴ There isn't a one-size-fits-all model for land protection — it's up to Indigenous communities to decide and the rest of us to amplify and support their vision. IPCAs are governed by Indigenous Nations according to their laws, responsibilities, and relationships to the land. **They offer not only the highest levels of biodiversity protection, but also cultural revitalization, community well-being, and long-term stewardship.**

But IPCAs still lack durable legal status, stable funding and consistent provincial cooperation. Indigenous Nations shouldn't have to fight for legitimacy and funding while their territories are being degraded. Putting Indigenous-led conservation and the return of land to Indigenous Nations at the centre of 30x30 efforts across Canada is the right way — and the only way forward.

Most importantly, real conservation cannot be achieved without Indigenous governance at the forefront. Indigenous Nations are transforming what conservation looks like across Canada and have shown real leadership all along. The question is whether the country is ready to follow suit.

What's needed next

While the primary purpose of this report is to track Canada's progress, or lack thereof, toward 30x30, it also serves as a reminder of why this commitment matters.

Several centuries of capitalism have created the framing that protecting lands, waters or wildlife is bad for the economy and therefore, bad for human society.¹⁹⁵ This framing of conservation as a sacrifice rather than a life-giving benefit continues to dominate mainstream political conversations that are leaving ecosystems in Canada and around the world to be sacrificed in the name of unchecked economic growth.^{196,197} We must reframe the conversation from the tired "nature versus the economy" binary.



Catchacoma Wetland Water Ceremony, ON (Katie Krelove).

Canada must reject unchecked extractivism facilitated by laws such as federal Bill C-5, Bill 15 in B.C. and Bill 5 in Ontario, and accept that protecting lands and waters now is one of the few tools capable of steering us away from a catastrophic trajectory. With less than five years to achieve 30x30, Canada needs to focus on designating protected areas that meet the Kunming-Montreal Framework quantitative and qualitative criteria and designate an adequate budget for the achievement of the target and for the future management and maintenance of new protected areas.

The point of the Kunming–Montreal Framework is not only to meet a numerical target, but to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. Protecting 30 per cent of lands and waters is one of dozens of targets under the framework, some extending as far as 2050. However, 30x30 is a critical step we cannot afford to miss.

Collectively, we can hold our governments accountable to 30x30 in the same vein: for the sake of the target itself, but also as a foundation for the work of transforming our societal worldview from one where conservation is a sacrifice to one where protecting biodiversity is a life-giving necessity. Ultimately, our goal must be to avoid protecting 30 per cent of the planet while sacrificing the remaining 70 per cent, and instead shift to a set of values that places human systems as part of nature, not separate from or superior to. This is an ambitious goal, but so too is doubling the amount of protected area across an area as large as Canada in under five years.

Achieving 30x30 will require defeating powerful and well-funded political narratives, overcoming the decades-long inertia of slow-moving government process and mobilizing unprecedented amounts of funding. To succeed, we must match the imagination and fortitude shown by communities fighting for conservation around the globe. It's up to us to ensure governments here adopt this will for a better world, and the stakes could not be any higher.

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