



The Thaidene Nēné Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area in the Northwest Territories is underpinned by a \$30-million trust that supports Indigenous co-governance. © Pat Kane



Diversify policy options and broaden funding for Indigenous Nations and communities wanting to conserve nature, reverse biodiversity loss, mitigate climate change and enhance their local economies through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).

As part of the 2022 Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Canada has committed to conserving 30% of lands and waters by 2030, while respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples. As of December 2022, 13.6% of Canada's terrestrial area, and 14.7% of marine areas were protected. These figures must double to meet our goals. With at least 40% of lands and waters in Canada under Indigenous treaties or modern land claim agreements, and much more subject to claims, Indigenous-led conservation is critical to meeting these targets. IPCAs are Indigenous-led, represent a long-term commitment to conservation, and reinforce Indigenous rights. They provide the means for protecting nature and unlocking their potential to tackle climate change, while recognizing stewardship as a cultural value and public good.

Policy Obstacles

A growing number of Indigenous governments and organizations are seeking to establish IPCAs, but they are confronted with obstacles in three key areas:

- A lack of recognition of Indigenous rights to lands, territories and resources, as afforded under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), hinders progress in establishing IPCAs. Crown governments must also integrate the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- Short-term, project-focused funding models lack the certainty that communities need for investing in developing and implementing stewardship plans over time. This amounts to a significant financial risk for Nations and communities considering IPCA establishment.
- Indigenous governments seeking to establish protected areas are confronted with legal and regulatory barriers related to natural resource rights, and they are burdened with buying out forestry or mineral claims.

A 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and accountability legislation provides a historic opportunity to elevate Indigenous rights and sovereignty, and to expand and diversify policy and funding avenues for Indigenous governments and organizations seeking to establish IPCAs.



Indigenous Guardian programs across Canada — including the program led by the Kitsoo/Xai'xais First Nation in the Great Bear Rainforest, British Columbia — result in a range of ecological, economic and community benefits. © Jason Houston

Financing Indigenous-Led Conservation at Scale

In Canada, there are several IPCAs that combine ecological outcomes with economic benefits for Indigenous and local communities:

- The Great Bear Rainforest Agreements, signed in 2008, represent the world's first Project Finance for Permanence (PFP), which provides equitable and integrated Indigenous-managed finance and long-term funding for stewardship and economic development. These agreements protect and sustainably manage 19 million acres while leveraging threefold a public-private investment, resulting in \$361 million invested to date in conservation, cultural revitalization and sustainable economic development.
- In the Northwest Territories, Thaidene Nëné was established as an IPCA in 2019 through co-management agreements between the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, and the federal and territorial governments. A \$30-million endowment fund — initially raised by Nature United and the federal government — will support long-term conservation and sustainable economic development led by Lutsel K'e. An analysis of two Guardian programs in the NWT showed they generate \$2.5 for every \$1 of investment¹.
- A new PFP led by the Mushkegowuk First Nations Council in Northern Ontario is projected to create up to 252 jobs and \$304 million annually for local communities. With more than 120 Guardians programs and pilots across Canada, further investments in Indigenous-led PFPs can lead to transformative action for climate and community development².

¹ SVA Consulting (2016). *Analysis of the Current and Future Value of Indigenous Guardian Work in Canada's Northwest Territories*

² Twigg, M, Awan, T, Sushant, and Paige Olmsted (2023). *The Case for a Conservation Economy in the Mushkegowuk Region of Ontario*. Smart Prosperity Institute. Submitted for publication.



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These steps will ensure that Indigenous Nations and communities are supported as they move towards establishing IPCAs:

- Eliminate legislative and policy barriers that hinder Indigenous authority and decision-making in their territories, and work with Provinces and Territories to clear legal avenues for the establishment of IPCAs.
- Establish long-term, flexible funding mechanisms for both the establishment and long-term stewardship of IPCAs.
- Elevate Indigenous land-use rights, duty to consult, FPIC, and ecological integrity within new systems for the equitable co-management of natural resources.



Indigenous-Led conservation provides dynamic approaches to stewardship by bringing Indigenous knowledge together with western science. © Erika Nortemann/TNC



The Indigenous Guardians Technical Support Team, which is run by Nature United and provides targeted support to Indigenous Guardian programs across Canada, facilitates Guardians breakout sessions in Manitoba. © Pamela Vernaus