



Protecting Canada: Is it in our nature?

How Canada can achieve its international commitment
to protect our land and freshwater

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report assesses Canada's progress towards our country's commitment to protect at least 17% of our land and freshwater by 2020, and improve the quality of our parks and other protected areas. Achieving this 2020 target is an important step towards the much larger-scale conservation action that's needed to conserve Canada's ecosystems in the long term.

In 2010, as part of world-wide efforts to stem the tide of biodiversity loss, Canada joined other members of the global community in Nagoya, Japan, in endorsing a 10-year strategic plan under the auspices of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The Plan includes 20 biodiversity targets to be achieved by 2020, known as the Aichi Targets, which cover a suite of actions needed to reverse the decline of biodiversity and advance towards the 2050 vision of *"living in harmony with nature."*

Aichi Target 11 commits countries to protect at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020. It also commits countries to improve the quality of protected areas systems by protecting the most important areas for biodiversity, and by ensuring that protected areas are well-managed, well-connected and well-integrated into broader landscapes.

As 2015 is the halfway point in this 10-year Strategic Plan, it is timely to assess Canada's progress towards meeting the Target 11 protected area commitments, both nation-wide and at the provincial and territorial levels.



Canada now lags behind most other countries on protected areas

Overall Canada is lagging well behind most other countries with only 10% of our landscape protected, versus the global average of over 15%. Worse still, the pace of progress is dismal and Canada has no nation-wide action plan to reach the targets. While a 17% protected area target was embedded in Canadian policy through the federal-provincial-territorial National Biodiversity Targets released in February 2015, the National Conservation Plan announced by the federal government last year is not linked to achieving these targets, which in our view is a missed opportunity.

Meanwhile, many other countries are making good progress towards achieving the 2020 target. Half of all countries have already achieved at least 17% protection. Today, 15.4% of the world's land and inland waters are in protected areas. If this rate of progress continues, the world is within reach of achieving the overall 17% coverage target by 2020.

Canada is not living up to its potential

Canada has one of the best opportunities left in the world to protect large natural areas, but we are not living up to our potential. We are stewards of 20% of the Earth's wild forests, 24% of its wetlands and 30% of its land-stored carbon. We still have large expanses of wilderness remaining in Canada. The health of all Canadian ecosystem types is trending downwards. The number of species at risk is increasing. The greatest threat to biodiversity in Canada, as around the world, is the loss and degradation of habitat. Protected areas are one of the best tools we have to protect habitat and reverse these negative trends.

A full 90% of Canada's land base and 100% of our waters are in the public domain, managed by governments—federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal—on behalf of their constituents. Sound government policies and decisions, including those about protected areas, are critical to sustaining healthy ecosystems in Canada.

Getting to at least 17% by 2020 in Canada IS achievable

If Canada is going to achieve at least 17% percent protection of our landscapes by the year 2020, governments need to dramatically accelerate the pace of establishing new protected areas. CPAWS believes that this is possible. We have compiled a list of government commitments for creating new protected areas from across Canada and found that if these alone were implemented Canada would get to more than 15% protection by 2020. This estimate is on the low end, since there are existing government commitments for new protected areas for which specific areas have not yet been confirmed.

Current status varies dramatically between regions

The percentage of lands and inland waters that are protected varies dramatically across regions in Canada, ranging from just under three percent in Prince Edward Island, to more than 15 percent in British Columbia. Our analysis of how much area has been added to Canada's protected areas system since 2011 shows dismal results. Alberta, the Yukon, and Newfoundland and Labrador have not expanded their protected area estate. In all other provinces and territories, less than 2% more territory has been protected since 2011.



Kejimikujik National Park,
Nova Scotia. Photo Sunetra
Ekenayake

However, these numbers don't tell the full story of how jurisdictions are progressing in creating new protected areas. For example:

- Nova Scotia is in the midst of a major expansion of its protected areas system which, when completed, will result in close to 14% of its land base protected—much closer to the Aichi target than the current 9%.
- Manitoba is moving forward with a commitment to create 15 new parks and protected areas and to expand others.
- Quebec and Ontario have committed to protecting half their northern regions, although implementation of these commitments has been extremely slow.
- Land use planning processes in Alberta, the Northwest Territories, Manitoba and Nunavut show promise for significantly expanding protection. The Yukon could make significant strides through the Peel River watershed land use plan if there was political will to do so.
- Major new national park proposals are nearing completion in Nunavut (Qausuittuq), the NWT (Thaidene Nene), and Newfoundland and Labrador (Mealy Mountains).

There are many opportunities for new protected areas across Canada, but more political will and investment is needed in most areas to pick up the pace in formally protecting these areas.

Most of Canada's protected areas are too small and disconnected to be effective

Large connected protected areas representing all ecoregions are essential to protect the full range of Canada's biodiversity, including wide-ranging species such as grizzly bears, wolves and caribou, and fully functioning ecosystems. Yet, as of 2010, almost three-quarters of Canada's more than 5,000 protected areas were less than 10 km². While these small protected areas can play an important role in conserving rare species, special habitat types and natural features, they need to be integrated into networks anchored by large protected areas, to maintain our country's ecological health. Civil society and First Nations are working on landscape-scale projects to improve ecological connectivity in Canada, but governments have been slow to engage.

Elsewhere in the world, governments are showing much more leadership on ecological connectivity. Bhutan, India and Tanzania have identified major national-scale conservation corridors. In Australia, biodiversity corridors are recognized in national strategic plans for biodiversity conservation, climate change and the National Reserve System strategy. In Europe, more than 50 countries are involved in some type of connectivity conservation work and special legislation has been developed in eight countries. Canadian governments need to learn from these other countries' experiences, and commit to developing our own ecological connectivity strategies.

Land use planning offers a way to integrate protected areas into landscape management

In Canada, regional land use planning processes and commitments provide a mechanism to implement protected area plans and ensure they are well-connected and integrated into the sustainable management of the surrounding landscape. Opportunities currently exist for new large-scale protection through land use planning in the NWT, Nunavut, Yukon, Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba and Quebec.



Hemlock Falls, Nova Scotia.

Photo Irwin Barrett



Saskatchewan River Delta.

Photo Chris Miller

Indigenous peoples are demonstrating leadership on conservation

Across Canada, Indigenous peoples are leading efforts to protect large areas of their traditional territories from industrial development to safeguard natural and cultural values. This is particularly notable in areas where land claims are settled and Aboriginal title is clear, and where there is space for nation-to-nation relationships and dialogues. For example, in the Northwest Territories, Indigenous community and regional governments have identified large areas for protection through the NWT Protected Areas Strategy, land use plans and as national parks. The James Bay Cree (Eeyou Istchee) are working to create a 13,000 km² protected area in the Broadback River watershed, which is important habitat for boreal woodland caribou. First Nations in Manitoba and Ontario partnered with provincial governments to protect vast areas of a boreal landscape called Pimachiowin Aki on the east side of Lake Winnipeg and are very close to having it designated as a World Heritage Site.



Protecting nature pays off

A 2015 study found that protected areas around the world receive about eight billion visits per year, 3.3 billion of which are in North America. These visits generate about US \$600 billion per year in direct in-country expenditures. Meanwhile, the total cost of safeguarding the world's protected areas is less than US \$10 billion. These findings underscore the huge economic value of protected areas, even without counting the enormous value of the ecosystem services provided for people by intact natural areas, including cleansing our air and water and moderating the climate.

In Canada, research has shown that national, provincial and territorial parks support 64,000 full-time equivalent jobs across Canada and contribute six dollars to the Canadian economy for every dollar spent by governments.

Manigotagan River,
Manitoba. Photo Joshua
Pearlman

Target 11 is a next step, not an endpoint

The Aichi Biodiversity Targets are interim political targets designed to encourage countries to make ambitious, but achievable, progress on conservation by 2020. Beyond 2020, much larger scale action will be needed. CPAWS has long understood the need for much bigger thinking to successfully conserve the diversity of life on earth. In 2005, we set a goal of protecting at least half of Canada's public land and water in response to growing scientific evidence that this is the scale of protection needed to conserve nature and support human well-being. Since then, momentum has been building in Canada and beyond in support of this vision.

In summary, Canada is lagging well behind most other countries in our progress towards protecting at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020. But it's not too late to turn this around. If Canadian governments completed all currently proposed protected areas, the percentage of land protected in Canada would increase from 10% to over 15%, which would bring us close to the 2020 target.



**Massif des Chic Chocs,
Bas-St-Laurent, QC.**

Photo Louis Fradette

Overarching Recommendations:

1. All Canadian jurisdictions should work together to immediately develop a coordinated action plan to achieve Aichi Target 11 by 2020, and invest adequate resources for its implementation.
2. As a starting point, governments should implement their existing commitments to new protected areas. By doing so, Canada could get very close to protecting at least 17% of our landscape by 2020.
3. Canada's governments should look "beyond Aichi" and implement systematic conservation planning in all regions to complete a network of large interconnected protected areas that protects biodiversity and ecosystem services. Building on efforts by Quebec and Ontario to protect half their northern territories, this plan should recognize the latest scientific findings that protecting at least half is likely needed to conserve healthy ecosystems to sustain wildlife and people in the long term.
4. Canada's governments should recognize and support Indigenous leadership on protecting lands, including by removing legislative and political barriers where they exist.
5. When considering what to count as "other effective area-based conservation measures" under Aichi Target 11, governments should focus on Indigenous, co-managed and privately owned protected areas that meet effective protection standards (as proposed by the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas) but are not currently counted as part of Canada's "formal" protected areas estate.

Recommendations by jurisdiction are presented in Part 7.



Pages 10–11: Bald eagle,
Haida Gwaii, BC. *Photo Markus
Thompson*

Page 11: Yukon fireweed.
Photo Peter Mather

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The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society is Canada's voice for wilderness. Since 1963 we've played a lead role in creating over two-thirds of Canada's protected areas. Our vision is that Canada will protect at least half of our public land and water. As a national charity with 13 chapters, over 50,000 supporters and hundreds of volunteers, CPAWS works collaboratively with governments, local communities, industry and indigenous peoples to protect our country's amazing natural places. We're also on guard to ensure that our parks are managed to protect the nature within them.



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