



**12 YEAR IN REVIEW:
2017
PROTECTING
CANADA'S LAND
AND FRESHWATER**

In 2010, the federal government committed to protecting at least 17% of our land and freshwater by 2020, and to improving the quality of our protected areas under the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity*. At the time, Canada was languishing at 9% of our land protected. While the global community has managed to protect 15% of the land and freshwater on earth, Canada currently sits at only 10.6% – not much higher than where we were in 2010.

CPAWS published a report in July of this year, highlighting that Canada trails behind most of the world in the proportion of our landscape protected. This was an important wake-up call for Canadians who were surprised to learn that so much of the wilderness that is at the core of our national identity is still vulnerable to development threats from industries like forestry, mining, and oil and gas development, as well as urban sprawl.

A few months after this report was released, World Wildlife Fund Canada released another stark report, this time on

the status of wildlife in Canada. The report shows that half of vertebrate populations in Canada are in decline, and that among these species, populations have shrunk on average by 83% since 1970¹. Clearly there is a biodiversity crisis in our country, and an urgent need to tackle these dramatic declines. With habitat loss a primary cause of wildlife decline, protecting more habitat is key to the solution.

In spite of this bad news, there is now hope that Canada will make significant progress in protecting more land and freshwater over the next three years to deliver on our governments' commitment to protect at least 17% of Canada's landscape by 2020. In 2017, important processes have been launched to coordinate federal, provincial and territorial government work towards the target, however, progress on the ground remains slow.

As 2017 comes to a close, we highlight what steps have been taken over the past year, and offer key recommendations for what Canada needs to do in 2018 to deliver on its 2020 conservation targets, and to plan for the much larger-scale protection nature and people ultimately need to thrive, based on science and Indigenous knowledge.

Canada has one of the best opportunities in the world to conserve nature, and to ultimately become a world leader in protecting nature. We know what needs to be done. We just have to do it.

¹ wwf.ca/newsroom/reports/lprc.cfm



Photo: Graham Osborne

An aerial photograph of a river meandering through a vast forest. The trees are in various stages of autumn, showing shades of green, yellow, orange, and red. The river is a deep blue, and the surrounding hills are covered in dense forest. The text 'THE YEAR IN REVIEW' is overlaid in large white letters on the left side of the image.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Nationwide Coordination Process Launched

The *Pathway to Target One*¹ process was formally launched in February 2017 at a meeting of federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for parks and protected areas, and Indigenous leaders. Co-chaired by the federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Alberta's Minister of Environment and Parks, this is the first nationwide coordinated effort to create protected areas in over 25 years. Given that 90 percent of Canada's landscape and all of our freshwater is public, managed by governments on behalf of their constituents, and that jurisdiction over land in Canada falls largely to provinces, territories, and Indigenous decision-makers,² collaboration among all governments is critical to success. Since the launch of the Pathway to Target One process in February 2017, government committees and advisory bodies have been hard at work, with reports and plans expected early in 2018.

The Peel River Watershed (Yukon)

In December, after a five-year legal battle, First Nations and environmental groups – including CPAWS Yukon – won a landmark case in the Supreme Court of Canada. The ruling means that consultations will now take place on a land use plan that was developed by an independent planning commission and originally released in 2011. It should lead to the protection of around 80% of the vast and wild Peel Watershed from roads and industrial activity. The Supreme Court ruling also sets an important precedent for the future of land-use planning in the territory, ensuring the integrity of First Nations Final Agreements will be upheld.

South Okanagan Similkameen National Park Reserve (BC)

In October, nearly two decades after the park concept was first announced, the BC and federal Governments joined the Okanagan Nation to announce that they will re-engage in discussions that will lead to the creation of a National Park Reserve in the South Okanagan. The unique and endangered grassland ecosystem of the South Okanagan is not yet represented in our National Parks system and is currently under-represented in British Columbia.

Montagnes Blanches (QC)

In November, the Quebec government announced that it will create a 10,000 km² new protected area to safeguard critical caribou habitat in the Montagnes Blanches region of Quebec. This will make an important contribution to achieving the protected area target and conserving threatened caribou in Quebec, however, the protected area would be more effective if it was expanded to include an additional 2000 km² of important caribou habitat in the Manouane district.

Dumoine, Noire and Coulonge watersheds (QC)

In western Quebec, work continues to secure large, interconnected protected areas in portions of the Dumoine, Noire and Coulonge watersheds. While no announcements of final boundaries or full protection have been made, there have been important steps forward in 2017. In particular, the Dumoine interim protected area was expanded and connected to a smaller protected area to the northeast, bringing the total area between these two interim protected areas to about 2200 sq. km. We look forward to the government making an announcement of full protection in the spring of 2018.

The Castle Wilderness Area (AB)

In January, CPAWS and partners welcomed the formal designation of the Castle Wildland and Provincial Parks in southwestern Alberta after an almost 40-year public campaign. The proposed management plan for the park includes a well-grounded decision to phase out off-highway vehicle use in the region and expand protection for the area's headwaters. The Castle parks protect a critical corridor for wildlife in the Yellowstone to Yukon region, allowing them to move between Waterton-Glacier National Park and the Rocky Mountain Parks further north.



Photo: Graham Osborne

1 conservation2020canada.ca

2 Sections 35, 91 and 92 of the Constitution of Canada

Lake Winnipegosis Islands (MB)

In June, the Manitoba government announced the creation of Goose and Grand Island Provincial Parks. CPAWS worked with and coordinated the efforts of Sapatawayak Cree Nation, Pine Creek First Nation, and Chemawawin Cree Nation for the protection of these eight islands in Lake Winnipegosis, which were identified as candidates for protection by these Indigenous Nations as far back as 2001.

Nova Scotia New Protected Areas (NS)

In March, the Nova Scotia government formally established 15 new protected areas, including Walton River Wilderness Area, which protects a Bay of Fundy tidal river system, and Chignecto Isthmus Wilderness Area, which protects an area that is crucial for wildlife movement near the Nova Scotia/New Brunswick border. Additional protected areas in Nova Scotia are expected in the near future. The Minister of Environment has indicated that the *Nova Scotia: Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan* will continue to be implemented, with a focus on the most ecologically significant areas. Approximately 100 proposed protected areas have gone through public and stakeholder consultations and are still awaiting legal protection.

The Rouge National Urban Park (ON)

In February, a law was passed by Parliament to strengthen protection for the Rouge National Urban Park and expand it by 16 km². Then in October, the Ontario government transferred 23 km² of land, increasing its size to 70km². This National Urban Park (the first of its kind in Canada) is a wilderness area on the doorstep of 7 million Canadians, that gives urban dwellers an important opportunity to connect to nature.

Natural Areas System Plan (NL)

In May, the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly unanimously adopted a motion supporting the creation of more protected areas and recognized that the province has some catching up to do. The two-hour debate highlighted the importance of protected areas to the environment, but also to support the economies of local communities looking for a sustainable future. This is hopefully a signal that the Natural Areas System Plan will soon be released publicly, something that CPAWS has been calling on the Newfoundland and Labrador government to do for many years.

Restigouche River Wilderness (NB)

In August, after many years of work by CPAWS and local groups, the Premier of New Brunswick publicly stated that government is interested in the Restigouche wilderness waterway park idea to help improve quality of life and help with tourism experiences and jobs. Since then, the provincial government has begun to study the potential benefits and feasibility of this proposal. This is a positive sign for the future of the wilderness in the Restigouche. Next, a public and Indigenous engagement process is needed.

Awaiting Important Caribou Habitat Protection (AB)

In 2016, the Alberta government announced their commitment to permanently protect 1.8 million hectares of caribou habitat in Northern Alberta. Once legally protected, these areas would contribute significantly to the survival of the caribou as well as to achieving the province's protected area commitments. 2017 saw no advancement on this file and Albertans are still awaiting the provincial government's next steps towards legislation that will protect this area from further disturbance.

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve and Territorial Park (NWT)

The government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is working with partners to develop a new protected area legislation that will enable the creation of territorial protected areas that are co-managed by the GNWT and Indigenous Governments. This legislation is needed to complete the establishment of Thaidene Nene around the East Arm of Great Slave Lake and other currently proposed protected areas in the NWT.

Draft Nunavut Land Use Plan (NT)

For many years, the Nunavut Land Use Planning Commission, a co-management institution established under the Nunavut Land Claim Agreement, has worked to develop a land use plan for the territory. Consultations on the 2016 draft plan continued in 2017. This plan, once finalized, could make a significant contribution to Canada's protected area system.



WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE IN 2018?

To step up to the challenge of protecting at least 17% of Canada's lands and inland waters by 2020, all levels of government need to pitch in, now. The designation of new protected areas takes time., This process requires assembly of solid science, building partnerships with Indigenous peoples, and conducting public consultations. Fortunately, there are many proposed protected areas and planning processes across Canada where significant work has already been done. Governments can make significant progress towards the target by completing these proposed protected areas. With 2020 just around the corner, we need to accelerate progress now.

1. A Substantial Financial Investment

The federal government needs to make a significant financial investment in the 2018 federal Budget to accelerate federal action and incent action by provinces, territories and Indigenous governments to reach the target. A federal investment of at least \$1.4 billion over three years followed by \$470 million per year, is needed to deliver on the terrestrial protected area target nationwide. This funding would support new national parks and national wildlife areas, and provide matching funding for provinces, territories and Indigenous governments to plan, establish, and manage protected areas that contribute to the 2020 target.

2. Focusing on What Nature Needs

There is a growing scientific consensus that ultimately, at least half of ecosystems need to be protected in an interconnected way to sustain nature and people in the long term. Protecting at least 17% of Canada's land and freshwater is a good next step, but as we face the growing impacts of climate change, we will need to scale up our efforts considerably. As we work towards the 2020 interim targets, governments need to also plan for what's needed to conserve nature in the long term, based on science and Indigenous knowledge. This long-term landscape scale planning will help ensure Canada's protected area network will be effective in conserving nature, and meet the quality measures outlined in the target, including that it is representative of all ecosystems, well-connected, and integrated into the broader landscape.



Photo: Irwin Barrett

3. Conservation action not accounting

The political target of protecting at least 17% of our landscape by 2020 is meant to drive progress in conserving biodiversity. However, it can also result in pressure to pursue “creative accounting”, lowering standards of protection so more existing areas can be counted towards the target. Conserving biodiversity requires protecting much more habitat. Creative accounting will make no progress towards this goal and must be avoided.

The international and Canadian targets specify that protected areas and “other effective area-based conservation measures” (OECMs) can count towards the 17% protection. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) released guidance in November 2017 defining what should qualify as an OECM. In Canada, the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas has convened a broad group of experts from governments, non-government organizations, and academia to develop guidance for how this would apply in Canada. Canada should formally adopt and apply this international and national guidance as the minimum standard for what counts towards Target One.

4. Reconciliation is Key

The Pathway to Target One process is fortunate to have the experience and expertise of Indigenous communities. Indigenous leaders sit on the Steering Committee and National Advisory Panel, and an Indigenous advisory body called the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE) is preparing advice for governments.

Crown governments and all Canadians need to be conscious of the mistakes of the past and find a path forward that reflects reconciliation efforts and embraces the opportunity to work in partnership with Indigenous peoples to protect land. Reconciliation is inextricably linked to the land which is at the heart of Indigenous knowledge, culture and practice. As Crown governments establish protected areas across the country, they should do so within a framework of reconciliation, encouraging partnerships with Indigenous peoples, incorporating Indigenous knowledge and western science, and building models of shared governance and management.

SUMMARY

2017 has been an important year for Canada to begin to reverse its poor international reputation on protecting nature. Governments are collaborating in very encouraging ways and protected areas across the country are starting to move towards establishment.

In 2018, governments need to ensure that the funding is in place to deliver, that 2020 is the first step on a longer journey towards what nature needs, that Canada attains the target by permanently protecting more land and freshwater and adopting minimum standards of protection, and to do all this with in a spirit of reconciliation in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

With 2020 fast approaching, time is of the essence. Failing to meet this protected area target would mean missing the opportunity of a generation to conserve Canada’s precious wilderness and wildlife, and would have serious consequences for nature and for humanity. The time is now. Let’s get to it.



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