

Building Momentum

A Progress Update on Canada's Nature
Protection Targets

May 2023

 **CPAWS**
CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION



Photo: Gary Gulash

The interlinked nature and climate crises are among the most significant global challenges facing humanity. Action is urgently needed to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity, which is essential for maintaining the health of our planet and securing our own future. Canada has shown leadership by committing to protect at least 30% of land and ocean by 2030, which is a core component of the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This ambitious target recognizes the critical role of protected areas in conserving biodiversity and mitigating the effects of climate change.

To achieve the 30% target, federal, provincial and territorial governments must work together with Indigenous Peoples to change the course for nature in Canada. To succeed, all government departments must contribute to this shared goal.

WHAT ARE PROTECTED AREAS?

Canada has adopted the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition of a protected area: "a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values."

WHAT IS AN OECM?

The Convention on Biological Diversity defines Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) as: "A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem services."

This report looks at progress made by federal, provincial and territorial governments over the past two years towards reaching the target of protecting at least 30% of land and ocean by 2030 (30 by 30). To assess this progress, we not only reviewed additional areas protected on the ground since our 2021 report¹, but also indications of progress towards the ultimate 30 by 30 goal. We considered three criteria:



1. Progress towards the target, including commitments, processes, policies or legislation to support implementation (eg. new ambitious protected area targets), agreements with partners to pursue feasibility studies etc.



2. Support for Indigenous-led conservation, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), through funding, legislation, policy, or other public commitments or mechanisms.



3. Quality considerations, including whether protected areas and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) meet international and Canadian quality standards and have effective management practices in place.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The federal government has made significant investments in nature conservation and has been leading the charge in taking action to stop further loss of biodiversity. Provinces and territories, who hold primary decision-making authority on land, have achieved varying degrees of progress, with some making ambitious commitments and advances over the past year, and others making little or no progress.



¹ The area-based portion of our analysis is largely based on the [Canadian Protected and conserved Areas Database \(CPCAD\)](#) December 2022 update, released February 2023.

Across the country, Indigenous governments have consistently demonstrated their commitment to conserving their ancestral territories on land and at sea, designing innovative plans and initiatives that unite Western science with traditional Indigenous knowledge and wisdom. This commitment and leadership continues to be at the forefront of progress in protecting nature and will be central to halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Canada. However, more comprehensive and consistent support from provincial and territorial governments is critically needed.

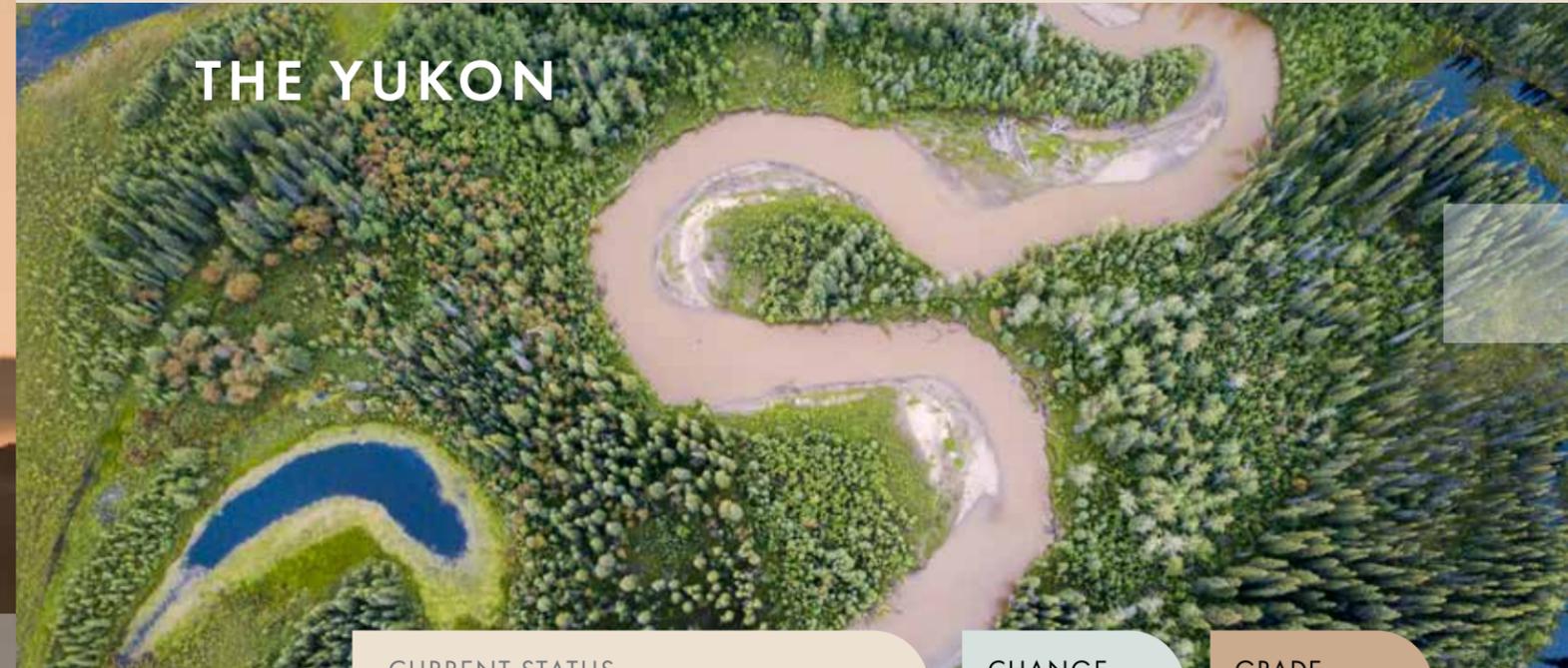


Photo: Erik McLean

PROGRESS ACROSS CANADA

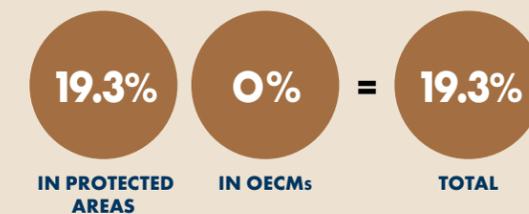
SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

THE YUKON



SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

CURRENT STATUS



CHANGE



GRADE RECEIVED IN REPORT CARD 2021

B-

Photo: Malcolm Boothroyd

Photo opposite: Jeff Smith

PROGRESS: A new Nature Agreement was signed between the Government of Yukon and the federal government, which includes commitment to protect 25% of the territory by 2025, working towards 30% by 2030, and funding for Indigenous conservation planning. The territory has taken many positive steps forward for nature, including the protection of over 37,000 km² of the Peel River Watershed in 2022. However, many ecologically and culturally vital landscapes remain to be protected, and the territory must ensure they are not eroded by over-prioritizing mining.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: Peatlands hold immense ecological and cultural importance in the Yukon, and protecting these carbon-rich landscapes could be one of the territory's largest contributions to global climate change efforts and biodiversity protection.

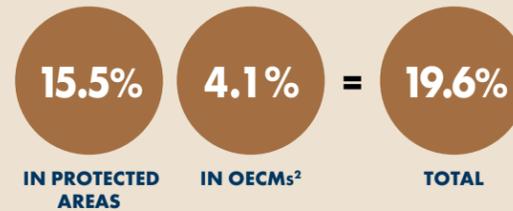
SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

BRITISH COLUMBIA



SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

CURRENT STATUS



CHANGE



GRADE RECEIVED IN REPORT CARD 2021

C

Photo: Adam Combs

PROGRESS: In December 2022, British Columbia committed to protecting 30% of BC’s land base by 2030, including IPCAs. The province also committed to and initiated modernizing land-use planning, co-led with First Nations, and developing a conservation financing mechanism, critical to advancing conservation proposals on the ground. British Columbia would greatly improve its current conservation outlook by developing a pathway to support and recognize IPCAs and ensuring that all protected and conserved areas meet agreed upon standards of protection.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: The Kaska Dena’s 40,000 km² IPCA, Dene K’éh Kusān, contains BC’s largest piece of intact wilderness, hosting a largely roadless, diverse landscape of wetlands, glaciers, plains, barren mountain summits and more. This area shelters seven Woodland Caribou herds and thousands of migratory birds and is the spiritual and cultural core of the Ancestral Territory of the Kaska Dena in British Columbia.

² BC’s claimed OECMs do not presently meet international or Canadian quality standards.

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

QUEBEC



SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

CURRENT STATUS



CHANGE



GRADE RECEIVED IN REPORT CARD 2021

A-

Photo: Maridav

PROGRESS: The Government of Quebec reiterated its commitment to protect 30% of the province by 2030 and has an on-going commitment to protect 50% of the northern territory through the Plan Nord. In December 2022, the premier announced \$650M to deliver on the 30% by 2030 target, including support for Indigenous-led conservation. In addition, ten new protected areas covering over 300 km², have been designated in southern Quebec, which is critical to support ecological connectivity and species at risk habitat. By supporting Indigenous-led near urban conservation, Quebec continues to be a leader in the protection of its ecologically and culturally important values.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: The Plein Aire initiative is funded by the Quebec government and coordinated by CPAWS Quebec. With a goal to create protected areas or ecological corridors south of the 49th parallel in close collaboration with local stakeholders, this initiative has prompted or reignited dozens of projects that will improve access to nature for Quebecers.

³ Quebec is reporting 10 OECMs, however, their combined total area is less than 5 km², which is too small to show up in the percentage measure.

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

NOVA SCOTIA



SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

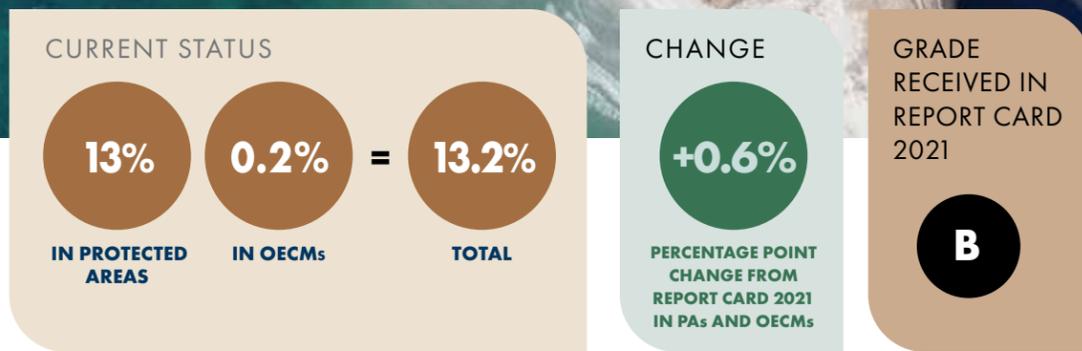


Photo: CPAWSNS

PROGRESS: Over the past year, the Nova Scotia government has established 15 new and expanded protected areas, including Owls Head Provincial Park and Sackville River Wilderness Area. The provincial protected areas target is to protect at least 20% of the provincial landmass by 2030, including with IPCAs. The Nova Scotia government has invested \$20 million in funding to accelerate private land conservation and recently affirmed that West Mabou Beach Provincial Park would not be downgraded as a protected area.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: The Nova Scotia government needs to speed up the full implementation of the *Nova Scotia Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan*. These batches of new protected areas need to be larger and come in more frequent intervals.

SOME PROGRESS

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES



SOME PROGRESS



Photo: skiserge1

PROGRESS: Federal Funding is supporting advancement of IPCA projects in the different regions of the territory with each proposed IPCA being in a different stage of consideration. For example, in the Dehcho Region, candidate areas are nearer a decision on how each community IPCA might be designated, much of the information and knowledge gathering was completed through the former NWT Protected Areas Strategy. Other projects are in the beginning stages of discussion, such as in the Akaitcho Region, where Deninu Kųę First Nation (DKFN) and Fort Resolution Métis Government (FRMG) are considering a Slave River Delta/Talston River IPCA. As well, discussions regarding a Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) Fund are ongoing, which could provide longer term investments into NWT IPCAs.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: In NWT, conservation zones in completed land use plans co-developed by Indigenous nations and Crown governments through modern land claim processes have been recognized as OECS. These areas have strong measures to conserve ecological and cultural values and prohibit industrial activities. Supporting the completion of land use plans in the Dehcho, Akaitcho and Tųchų regions offers an opportunity for significantly more OECS and/or IPCAs.

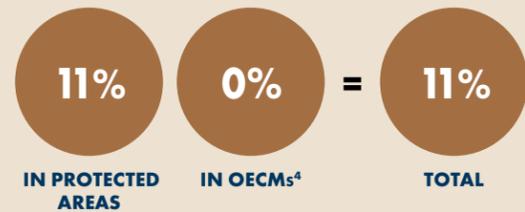
SOME PROGRESS

MANITOBA



SOME PROGRESS

CURRENT STATUS



CHANGE



GRADE RECEIVED IN REPORT CARD 2021

C-

Photo: Joshua Perlmann

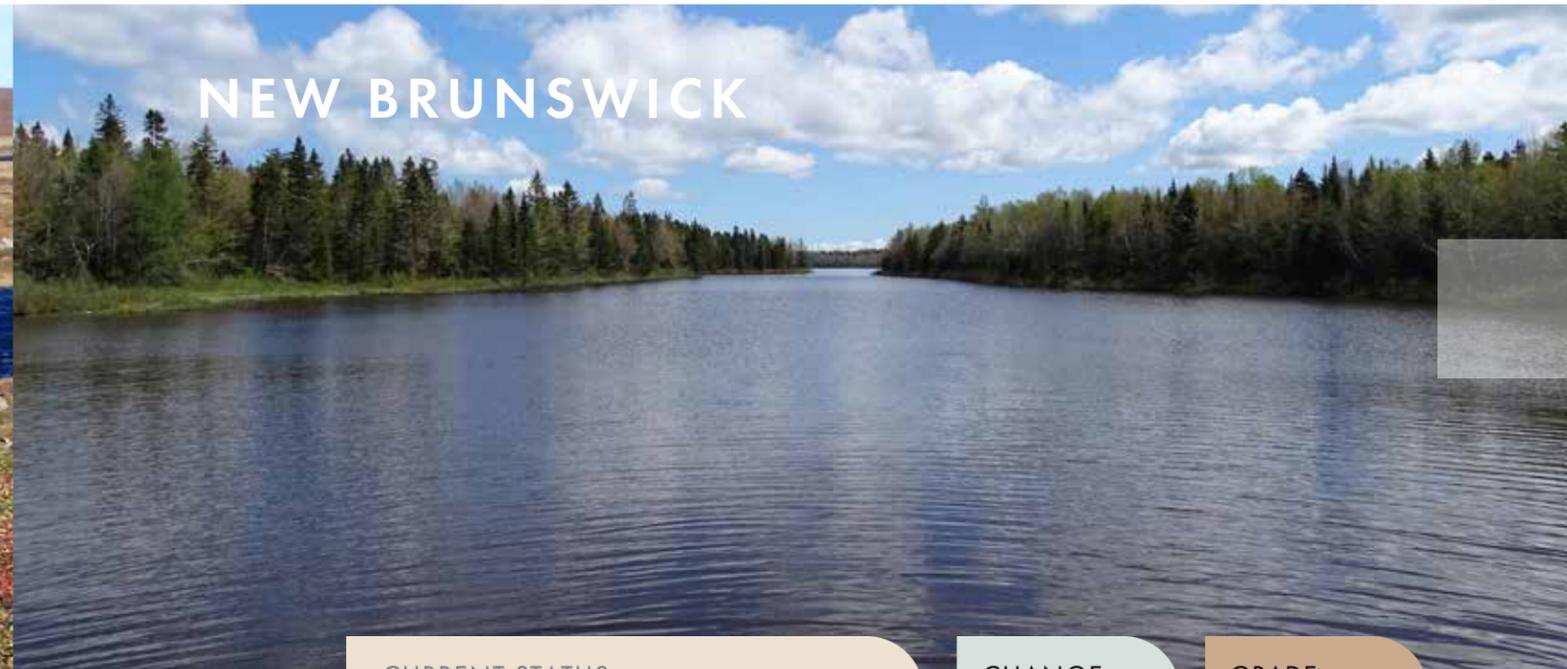
PROGRESS: Although it has no current commitment to conservation targets, the Government of Manitoba committed in December 2022 to advance the 50,000 km² Seal River Watershed IPCA, together with Parks Canada and Seal River Watershed Alliance (representing First Nations in the region). The Manitoba government has also given support to the Fisher River Cree Nations Conservation Areas Initiative.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: The 50,000 km² Seal River Watershed is one of the most ecologically intact watersheds and richest carbon sinks in the world. Protecting this ecologically and culturally important watershed through an Indigenous protected area could contribute 0.5% towards Canada's 30% by 2030 target.

⁴ MB is reporting one OECM, however its area is too small to show up in percentage measures.

SOME PROGRESS

NEW BRUNSWICK



SOME PROGRESS

CURRENT STATUS



CHANGE



GRADE RECEIVED IN REPORT CARD 2021

B-

Photo: Steve Reid

PROGRESS: New Brunswick nearly reached its target of protecting 10% of its territory (doubling previous protection) by the end of 2022, fulfilling a government commitment, and have committed to setting a new area-based protection target by 2024. However, the process to reach the original target did not adequately involve First Nations, which needs to be addressed as they move forward.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: Areas that provide drinking water to Saint John, Moncton, Edmundston, Dalhousie, and Bathurst, currently designated under the Watershed Protected Area Designation Order could have their protection standards on Crown land upgraded to meet OECM criteria.

SOME PROGRESS

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

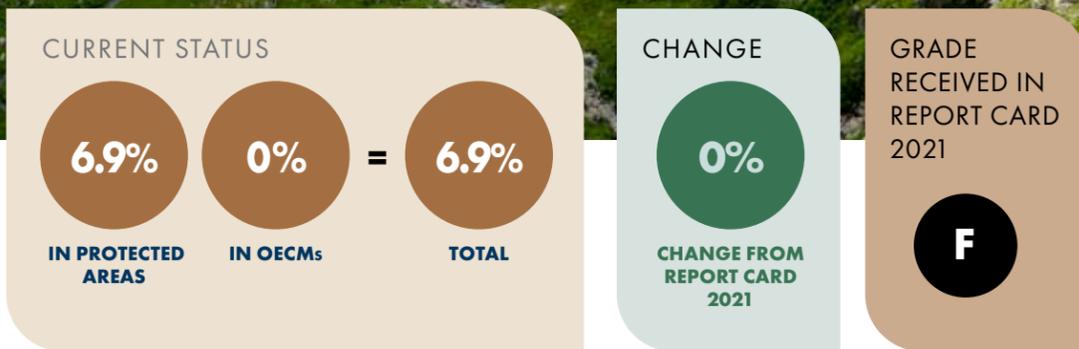


Photo: Victor Posnov

PROGRESS: In April 2022 the Governments of Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador announced they would accelerate the creation of new protected areas in the province. This includes completing the Eagle River provincial protected area with First Nations, and considering a new national park along the south coast of Newfoundland. However, the provincial government has not taken any further public actions to support these announcements. At the time of publication, there is no Memorandum of Understanding signed between all the interested parties to assess the feasibility of a South Coast Fjords National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) and potential National Park in the Burgeo region, which needs to be done to advance this file.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: Creating a co-managed NMCA in the South Coast Fjords, and adjacent national park with local First Nations offers a huge opportunity for Newfoundland and Labrador to advance conservation and advance reconciliation with First Nations.

MINIMAL PROGRESS

ALBERTA

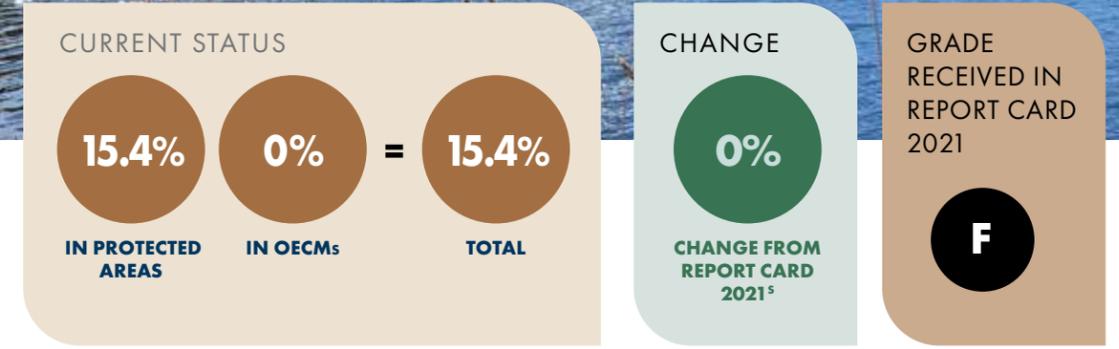


Photo: Kacia Kerr

PROGRESS: Despite excellent opportunities and broad public support for conservation, the Government of Alberta continues to avoid protecting its abundant nature and has no active commitments to conservation targets. One notable exception to the lack of progress is that in February 2022, thanks to continued pressure from the Mikisew Cree First Nation and its partners, Alberta's Kitaskino Nuwenēné Wildland Provincial Park was expanded to include almost 1,520 km² of newly protected boreal forest, wetlands, and critical habitat for at-risk woodland caribou and wood bison.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: Protection of the region surrounding Bistcho Lake in north-west Alberta, as proposed by the Dene Tha' First Nation, is an exceptional opportunity to protect fairly intact boreal habitat that is home to several species at risk, including boreal caribou. The area is extremely important to the Dene Tha', who requested protection of the area as an IPCA in the subregional planning process for the Bistcho area. Exploring the idea of an IPCA in the region was unanimously supported by a multistakeholder task force that provided advice to the Government of Alberta. Unfortunately, protection, or a plan for protection, was not included by the Government of Alberta in the Bistcho Subregional Plan.

⁵ The Kitaskino Nuwenene Wildland Park expansion does not show up as gain in PAs due to it being offset by the removal from CPCAD of certain portions of AB's provincial protected areas with petroleum and natural gas leases.

MINIMAL PROGRESS

SASKATCHEWAN



MINIMAL PROGRESS

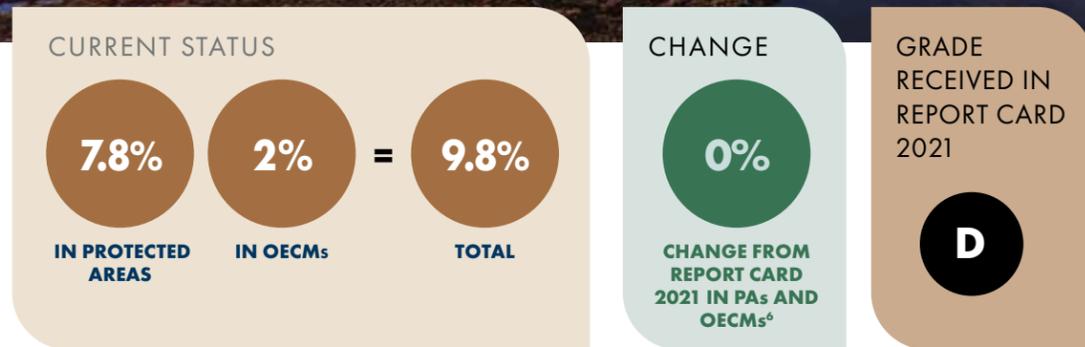


Photo: Prairie Rising

PROGRESS: The Government of Saskatchewan continues to work towards its 30-year-old target of protecting 12% of the province, as part of its commitment to support the 30% by 2030 national targets. While this is welcomed along with a signaled interest in IPCAs, there remains uncertainty regarding the province’s commitments to delivering effective conservation outcomes and its inconsistent approach to the fundamental principles of IPCAs, where Indigenous communities must play a shared and equitable leadership role.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: The Cumberland House Cree Nation has declared environmental and economic jurisdiction and protection of Kitaskinaw (the Saskatchewan River Delta). One of the largest inland deltas in North America, and one of the most biologically rich landscapes in Canada, the Saskatchewan River Delta is a 10,000 km² network of waterways, wetlands and low-lying forests, and an internationally recognized “Important Bird Area.”

⁶ Part of SK’s PAs (former community pastures) were reclassified to OECMs, in line with Canadian and international quality standards.

MINIMAL PROGRESS

ONTARIO



MINIMAL PROGRESS

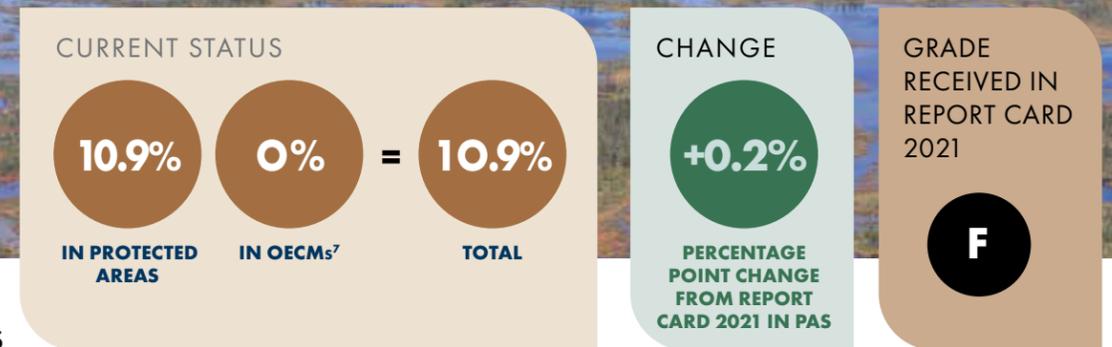


Photo: Anna Baggio

PROGRESS: Recent steps by the province in support of local initiatives (i.e., designating a ~16 km² conservation reserve in Prince Edward County, supporting the creation of Ojibway National Urban Park in Windsor and establishing the first urban provincial park in Uxbridge) while welcome, do not make up for the overall harmful impact of the government’s development-first approach. The rolling back of safeguards and environmental protections continue. The irreplaceable Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve is being sacrificed for housing, and habitat and restorative green spaces are being targeted for costly, climate polluting highways. Conservation authorities are being compelled to identify and give up lands for housing, and intact northern forests and wetlands (important for community well-being, climate, migratory birds and caribou and remote tourism) are being irrevocably damaged by logging and mining operations.

A new ten-year logging ban in the Grassy Narrows traditional territory and the federal government’s announcement of support for Indigenous-led conservation projects in the Hudson Bay Lowlands including coastline and off-shore areas (up to \$800M was announced in December 2022⁸) are important and hopefully these can be built on.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: There are many opportunities for advancement in Ontario (see [Peoples Summit](#)), including in the Hudson Bay Lowlands and Great Lakes, with 20% of the world’s freshwater. Working in partnership with Indigenous peoples could lead to many gains, support reconciliation, and improve community well-being.

⁷ Ontario is reporting five OECMs covering 43 km². This area is too small to show up in the percentage measure.

⁸ The \$800M investment is for a total of four Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) projects announced in December 2022, across four jurisdictions.

NOT ASSESSED⁹

NUNAVUT

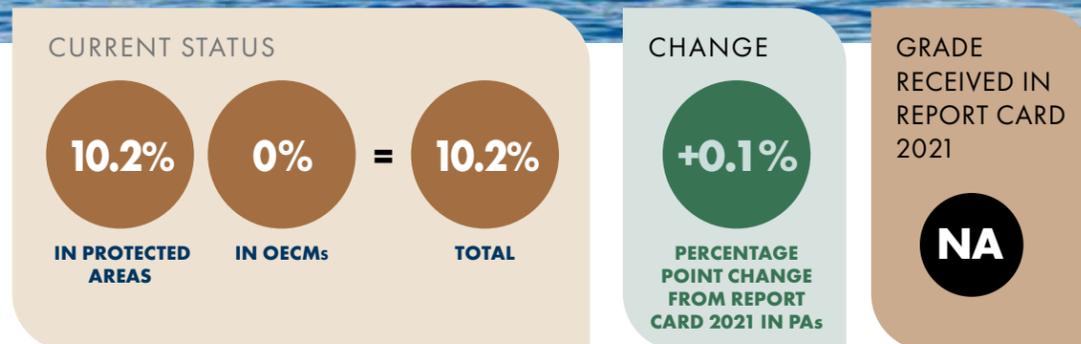
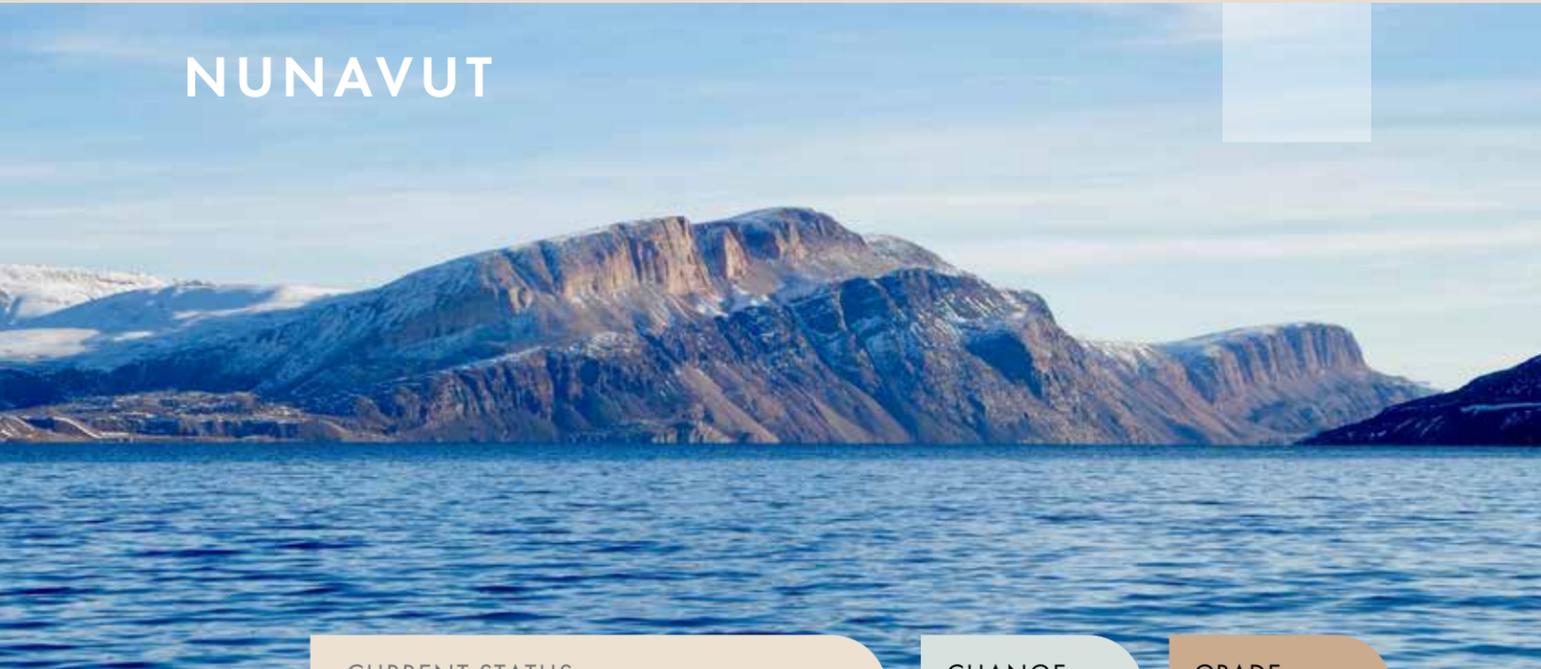


Photo: Isaac Demeester

PROGRESS: The draft Nunavut Land Use Plan is the largest conservation opportunity in the territory, and one of the largest in the world. Linked to this opportunity, the federal government’s announcement in December 2022 of up to \$800M over seven years through the Project Finance for Permanence includes Indigenous-led conservation projects in the Qikiqtani Region.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: Finalizing the draft Nunavut Land Use Plan could contribute more than 4% towards Canada’s 30% conservation target in partnership with Inuit. A whole-of-government approach and investment in territorial and Indigenous community priorities would help secure approval for this plan and enhance food security, community well-being, and economic development.

⁹ CPAWS does not have Chapter offices in Nunavut and Prince Edward Island. Given our lack of on-the-ground presence we are not assigning a progress score for NU and PEI. Our overview is based on publicly available information about recent progress and opportunities to advance protection.

NOT ASSESSED

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

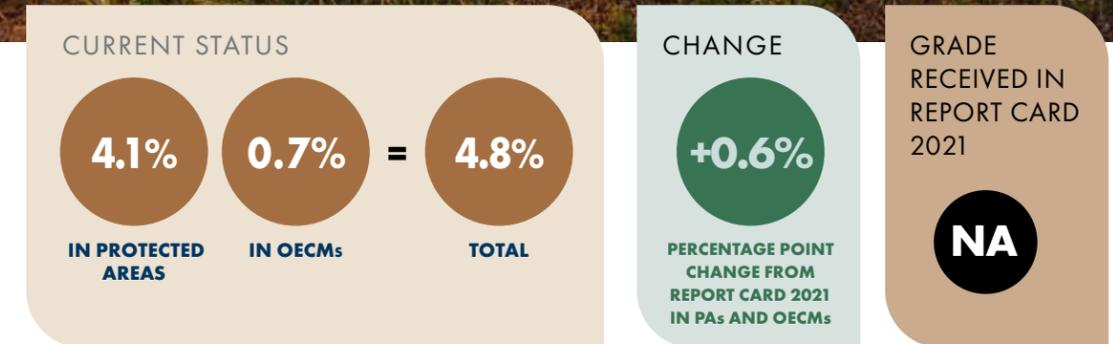
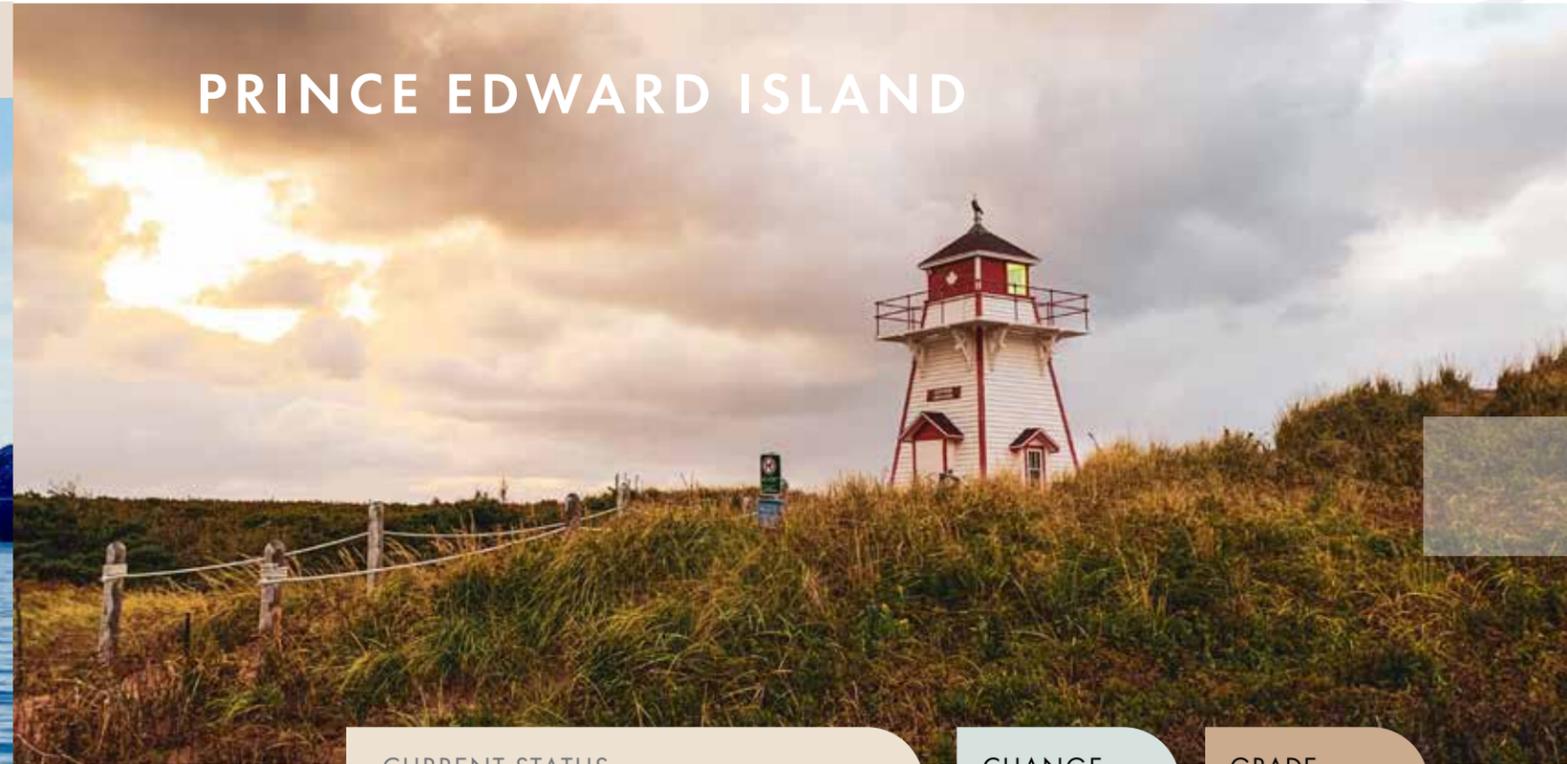


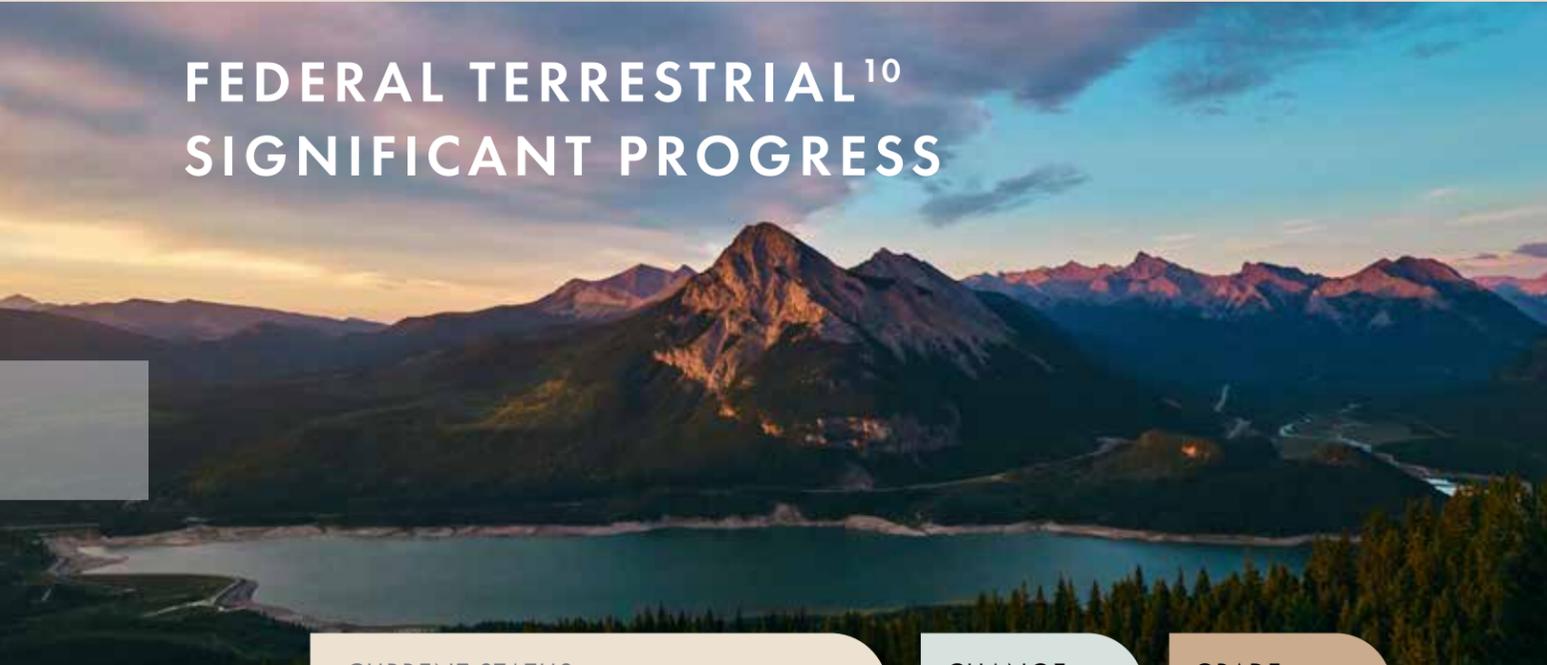
Photo: Tobias Negele

PROGRESS: Although it has the smallest proportion of land area protected of all Canadian jurisdictions, Prince Edward Island (PEI) reported establishing 17 new protected areas and interim protected areas and 11 new OECMs and interim OECMs in 2022. Private land protection and non-governmental land trust organizations continue to play a pivotal role in establishing protected areas on the island, and Indigenous-led initiatives are helping to drive progress.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVANCEMENT: A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between Parks Canada and the Epekwitk Assembly of Councils to establish a new national park reserve on the Hog Island Sandhills off the North Shore of Prince Edward Island.

FEDERAL SECTION

FEDERAL TERRESTRIAL¹⁰
SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS



SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

CURRENT STATUS



CHANGE



GRADE RECEIVED IN REPORT CARD 2021

A-

Photo: Haley Truong

PROGRESS: In December 2022, Canada’s federal government played a key leadership role in securing an ambitious new Global Biodiversity Framework at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal. The Framework includes four goals and 23 targets that, if fully implemented, are designed to stop the decline of nature and get on a path to recovery by 2030. The Framework also includes a commitment to effectively conserve and manage at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas in protected areas and OECMs, recognizing Indigenous rights and territories (Target 3). The federal government also committed to developing an action plan to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, and to a new federal Biodiversity Accountability Act. During COP 15 and in Budget 2021, the federal government also committed significant new funds to support conservation initiatives across the country.

¹⁰ We assessed the federal government on its contribution to the terrestrial target based on criteria that reflect its limited jurisdiction over land management.

¹¹ There are 18 federal OECMs with a total area of 158 km², which is too small to register in this percentage measure.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT:

Implementing federal commitments to:



10 new National Parks by 2026 co-managed with Indigenous Peoples, with a goal of doubling the area of the National Park system (currently 3% of Canada);



15 new National Urban Parks by 2030;



New Great Lakes National Marine Conservation Areas (NMCAs) (freshwater protected areas will count towards the terrestrial targets);



Parks Canada-led ecological corridors program to enhance ecological connectivity;



Significant new federal funding to support Indigenous Nations, provincial and territorial governments, and other partners to help deliver on the targets.



Photo: Todd Sterile

FEDERAL MARINE¹² SOME PROGRESS



SOME PROGRESS



PROGRESS: In February 2023, just weeks after success at COP15, Canada hosted the 5th International Marine Protected Area Congress (IMPAC5), the largest ever gathering of marine protected area professionals. Several announcements were made, including the proposed pathway to protect 25% of Canada’s ocean by 2025, although no new sites were officially designated at IMPAC5. Significant progress was announced on two large sites in British Columbia (BC) which are both co-led by First Nations partners. At COP15 Canada had announced \$800 million through a new funding model to support Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, including marine protected areas in BC, Nunavut, and Hudson Bay/James Bay. Other announcements at IMPAC5 included policy guidance for the implementation of minimum protection standards for federal marine protected areas and management of NMCAs, and an “effective moratorium” on deep sea mining in Canadian waters, all of which will support the designation and management of new marine protected areas. The only new site to be designated since the 2021 ReportCard was the Eastern Canyons OECM.

Photo: Luc Tribolet

¹² For the ocean component of the target, we only assessed the federal government because most marine activities are under federal jurisdiction, and federally designated marine protected areas are the primary conservation tool for ocean ecosystems.
¹³ Other designations include protected areas established by municipalities, non-governmental organizations and private land owners.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT:

- Implementation of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network plans for the Great Bear Sea (BC) and Maritimes MPA networks with the establishment of new protected areas, and release of MPA network plan for Newfoundland and Labrador Shelves.
- Completion of other long-standing areas of interest including the Southern Strait of Georgia National Marine Conservation Area Reserve (NMCAR) in British Columbia, Fundian Channel-Browns Bank MPA, and Tallurutiup Imanga NMCA (which is currently being counted towards Canada’s marine conservation targets).
- Governments announce plan to expand the boundaries of the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park.
- Federal departments work with Indigenous leaders to develop policy and guidelines to support the establishment and recognition of marine Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas.
- Establishment of 10 new NMCAs, including in the Great Lakes.¹⁴
- Expansion of pathway with additional sites to achieve 30% by 2030 target for ocean.
- Minimum protection standards are explicitly recognized in MPA regulations, including NMCA regulations currently being developed, including clear and strong standards regarding dumping and discharge developed by Transport Canada.

¹⁴ Freshwater protected areas will count towards the terrestrial targets



Photo: Nick Martin



ABOUT CPAWS

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) is Canada's only charity dedicated to the protection of public land, freshwater and ocean with a strong national and regional presence across the country. Working in a way that respects the sovereignty and leadership of Indigenous nations, we are focused on conserving nature to respond to the dual crises of accelerated biodiversity loss and climate change.

With 60 years of success, we are Canada's leader in conservation and have played a lead role in protecting over half a million square kilometres! Our vision is that at least half of land, freshwater and ocean in Canada is permanently protected to sustain nature and people for current and future generations.

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