

# Whitepaper: Media Factsheet

**“Widely Enjoyed but Inadequately Valued:  
Understanding the Economy, Environmental,  
and Health Benefits of Canada’s Protected and  
Conserved Areas.”**

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This whitepaper provides a baseline measure and positions nature as a national priority for Canada, essential to our **economy**, **ecosystems**, **wildlife** and the **people** and **communities** who depend on them everyday.



# ECONOMIC BENEFIT:

**Takeaway:** Greater federal spending in protected and conserved areas has been shown to **support local economies** through tourism and other related industries. If we were to invest long-term in protected and conserved areas, Canada would stand to gain so much more - economically and environmentally.

## Validation:

- In the 2023-24 fiscal year, protected and conserved areas contributed **\$10.9B to Canada's GDP, created 150,000 jobs, provided \$6.6B** in labour income, and generated **\$1.4B** in tax revenue from visitors.
- Over the course of nearly fifteen years (2008-2024), national, provincial and territorial park agencies increased their spending by 45%. The spending paid off, spiking tax revenue (mainly from visitors) **by 250%**, increasing labour income for conservation workers **by 51%**, and growing park contributions to Canada's **GDP by 55%**.
- In 2023-2024, for every government dollar spent on protected and conserved areas, **\$0.62 returned as tax revenue.**

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# ECOSYSTEM SERVICES:

**Takeaway:** When nature is protected and conserved, **Canada benefits from services provided by ecosystems** that mitigate the costs of climate-related damage, food insecurity and strains on the public health system, while supporting economic stability for resource development. Furthermore, **ecosystem services aren't just preventative - they're also productive.** Protecting and conserving nature offers organic infrastructure to communities through water filtration, air purification and erosion prevention.

## Validation:

- Forests cover **15%** of Canada's network of National Parks and this area offers an ecosystem service value estimated between **\$33B and \$226B** annually.
- Forested areas in national parks offer services like preventing soil erosion, climate regulation, shielding communities from floods, purifying water, filtering the air, capturing and storing more carbon, and offering habitat to many species.
- The land, freshwater and ocean ecosystems within National Parks and National Marine Conservation Areas are under recognized powerhouses that provide ecosystem service values quantified at between **\$156 billion and \$588 billion annually.** This is **recurring** economic value.

Remarkably, these figures consider only a fraction of Canada's land and seascapes that are under some form of conservation (only a quarter of all protected lands and freshwater, and just 13.5% of the protected ocean). **The true economic value of nature in our country is immensely higher than we can currently measure.**

# ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFIT:

**Takeaway:** Increasing *protection in these areas is essential to prevent the release of stored carbon*, maintain long-term sequestration capacity, and safeguard the biodiversity and ecosystem services that underpin climate resilience, water and food security, and community wellbeing.

**Validation:**

- Nearly **51,400 gigatons of carbon** are contained in protected areas: **93%** of this is held in soil, **5% in vegetation and 2% in seabed sediment**. That's the equivalent to the **emissions of 57.8 billion cars per year!**
  - Canada's protected and conserved areas hold carbon valued at **\$51.1 trillion**, based on the 2025 social cost of carbon established by the Canadian federal government.
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# HEALTH BENEFIT:

**Takeaway:** Canadians believe that nature is deeply tied to our collective identity, and protected and conserved areas play a vital role in sustaining personal, societal, and public health. Protected and conserved areas offer a cost-effective and scalable way to advance a range of health objectives.

**Validation:**

- Improvements to physical and mental health were leading reasons people visited protected and conserved areas.
- Over **84% surveyed in a Canada-wide study** reported that protected and conserved areas improve their mental, physical, spiritual and social well-being, along with their overall sense of being restored.
- More frequent visits to protected and conserved areas are linked with greater feelings of health and well-being benefits, highlighting the importance of social equity and access so benefits are shared broadly across society.

# METHODOLOGY:

This is a technical report informed by, and referencing, research conducted using western science methods and methodology. CPAWS acknowledges that other relevant perspectives on the socio-economic benefits of protected and conserved areas exist, based on knowledge foundations, including but not limited to Indigenous knowledges and Traditional Ecological Knowledges. These forms of expertise should be equitably consulted and incorporated both when planning and evaluating places as protected areas, and when considering the socio-economic benefits therein.

This research was led by Jason Wong, Economic Analyst at CPAWS, with contributions from Catherine Reining of Wilfrid Laurier University.

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## ABOUT CPAWS

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society 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. We are Canada's leader in conservation with 60 years of success based on our expertise, public education and advocacy, relationships and local knowledge. We are a credible, trusted, knowledge-based, nationally coordinated, collaborative organization, focused on conserving nature to respond to the dual crises of accelerated biodiversity loss and climate change. 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.

