

 **CPAWS·SNAP**  
CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY      SOCIÉTÉ POUR LA NATURE ET LES PARCS DU CANADA

# Report Summary

# WIDELY ENJOYED BUT INADEQUATELY VALUED

*UNDERSTANDING THE ECONOMIC,  
ENVIRONMENTAL, AND HEALTH BENEFITS  
OF CANADA'S PROTECTED AND  
CONSERVED AREAS*

2026

# Executive Summary

## Notes on Content & Approach

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.

In the face of accelerating biodiversity loss and climate change, in 2022 the Canadian federal government committed to protect 30% of Canada's land and freshwater, and 30% of its ocean by 2030. With four years left to meet this target, long-term and reliable federal conservation funding is critical to ensure the effective protection of nature and to meet these commitments. **Globally, there is increasing recognition of nature-positive economies where protection of nature and economic growth go hand-in-hand.** While investing in nature and protected areas is broadly viewed as positive, the specific economic and social benefits of doing so in Canada have remained unclear and under-recognized. As a result of this, funding for nature is often deprioritized when the economy tightens. Consequently, Canada may not experience the full benefits of its natural wealth and a fully supported protected area network.

This report offers new evidence for the economic, environmental, and perceived health benefits provided by protected and conserved areas in Canada. While assessing the true value of nature is a complex and ongoing effort, this study seeks to explore a wide range of benefits, while examining the ways that nature is intertwined with multiple aspects of our economy and quality of life. Our analysis of the available data clearly demonstrates that **investing in nature is synonymous with investing in Canada's economic growth.** Furthermore, **investments in protected areas compound and deliver recurring and increasing benefits over time.**

The report finds that **Canada's protected and conserved areas network is key to ensuring economic prosperity, stemming biodiversity loss, and to safeguarding the health of communities, thus highlighting the need for ongoing investment.** The findings of this report are meant to equip policymakers with a detailed account of the benefits of protected and conserved areas, as well as with a clear course of action based on seven recommendations.

Photos (cover): Olya Humeniuk (Shutterstock) (*children in the snow*), Tim Foster (Unsplash) (*kayaker*), Louis Paulin (Unsplash) (*mountain town*), Osvaldo Escobar (Unsplash) (*man with lobster*), Julia Verea (Unsplash) (*sunset horizon*)  
Photos (this page): Wenhao Ji (Unsplash) (*Lake Louise, AB*)

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WIDELY ENJOYED BUT INADEQUATELY VALUED: CANADA'S PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS

Canada's investments in establishing parks, protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (referred to collectively as "protected and conserved areas") have created profound and sustainable economic opportunities, while protecting biodiversity and promoting community resilience to climate change. This report provides comprehensive estimates of the impacts of protected and conserved areas in Canada, which cover 13.8% of land and freshwater (after this termed "terrestrial"), and 15.5% of Canada's ocean as of December 2024.

The available data shows that protected and conserved areas provide important benefits to Canada's economy, environment, and public health. These can be summarized as follows:

## ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year Canada's terrestrial and ocean protected and conserved areas provided:

**+\$10.9B**

TO CANADA'S GDP compared to \$1.8B in expenditures by the federal government

**+150,000**

JOB

**+\$6.6B**

TO LABOUR INCOME

**+\$1.4B**

IN TAX REVENUE

From 2008-2024, a 50% increase in expenditures in Canadian park agencies corresponded with a 51% - 250% increase in their contributions to GDP, labour income, and tax revenue.

## CARBON AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICE VALUES

**51,400Gt**

NEARLY 51,400 GIGATONNES OF CARBON ARE CONTAINED in protected areas: 93% of this is held in soil, 5% in vegetation and 2% in seabed sediment.

**\$156-\$588B**

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES PROVIDE RECURRING ECONOMIC VALUE: Parks Canada estimates this at \$156 to \$588 billion per year for National Parks and National Marine Conservation Areas, which make up only 25% and 13.5% of Canada's terrestrial and ocean protected areas.

**\$51.1T**

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.

## HEALTH & WELL-BEING

A growing body of Canadian research, including a 2023 pan-Canadian survey, shows that **PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS PROVIDE WIDE-RANGING HEALTH BENEFITS, AND SUPPORT SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING.**

**HEALTHY, WELL-MANAGED ECOSYSTEMS ARE STRONGLY LINKED TO HUMAN HEALTH BENEFITS** and support both public health and conservation outcomes.

**ACCESS TO PROTECTED AND CONSERVED AREAS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A COST-EFFECTIVE STRATEGY** for advancing Canada's economic, environmental, and public health outcomes.

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Protected areas also contribute to diversifying local economies while improving the quality of life of nearby communities. This report presents three case studies from the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia, the Saguenay-St Lawrence Marine Park in Quebec, and Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland and Labrador to illustrate valuable and practical lessons in replicating and scaling socio-economic successes.

The scope of socio-economic benefits presented in this report reflect varied perspectives on the value of conserved areas, ranging from cash-flow to ecosystem service-based values. This approach is intended to offer meaningful reference points for a wide array of policy insights and to familiarize readers with the productive and sustainable activities that protected and conserved areas can support and enable.

The estimates and calculations in this report are conservative and likely underestimate the full socio-economic value of protected and conserved areas. Nonetheless, this work provides policymakers with a baseline measure of the very significant socio-economic benefits derived from protected areas, and of how conservation helps sustain Canada's economy and healthy communities.

To support the growth of Canada's protected and conserved area network, we provide the following key recommendations that both recognize the value of nature and aim to maximize its interrelated socio-economic benefits.

## Key Recommendations

1

**Ensure Long-Term Funding:** Expand federal support for protected areas through direct funding, partnerships, and innovative financing. Stable investment will sustain economic benefits, including jobs and tourism revenue.



2

**Adopt Natural Capital Accounting:** Work towards a national framework considering the value of public natural assets—lands, waters, and oceans—on Canada's balance sheets, recognizing their economic and social contributions.



3

**Strengthen Monitoring:** Develop site-specific monitoring programs for protected areas that capture both ecological and socio-economic impacts, with active involvement of Indigenous peoples, stakeholders, and local communities.



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## Key Recommendations (continued)

4

**Integrate Ecosystem Services & Blue Carbon:** Incorporate the value of ecosystem services and carbon storage into planning, for example, by prioritizing protection of carbon-rich coastal and seabed areas.



5

**Protect Carbon-Rich Landscapes:** Prioritize conservation of carbon-dense ecosystems (e.g., wetlands) to secure climate, ecological, and economic co-benefits.



6

**Elevate Social Capital in Conservation:** Integrate health and well-being outcomes into conservation policy across all levels of government, ensuring social benefits are valued alongside economic and ecological ones.



7

**Advance Equity in Access:** Expand and diversify protected areas to ensure equitable access for underserved communities, enhancing social, cultural, and health benefits.



Photo: Christopher (CPAWS)





## 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.

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