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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE [EMBARGOED UNTIL Feb 15 '22]

Report: BC government is putting nature at risk by labelling lands open for industrial development as “protected”

The province’s rich biodiversity is in danger without government action, a new report from CPAWS-BC and Ecojustice reveals

Tuesday, February 15, 2022, traditional unceded Coast Salish Territory/Vancouver, BC – A new report from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society British Columbia (CPAWS-BC) and Ecojustice exposes troubling flaws in BC’s accounting for its protected and conserved areas.

Right now, 15.5 per cent of the province’s landbase is protected in robust designations such as provincial parks and conservancies. However, the BC government has been reporting an additional four per cent as “other conserved” areas for a claimed total of 19.5 per cent. Unfortunately, BC’s claimed other conserved areas do not meet Canadian standards. On paper, this additional four per cent promotes BC’s progress towards Canada’s goal of protecting 25 per cent of lands and waters by 2025, but these designations fail at what they’re meant to do: defend biodiversity.

“Biodiversity is the backbone that our economy, health, and climate resiliency are built upon,” says Tori Ball, Terrestrial Conservation Manager (Acting) at CPAWS-BC. “The world is driving towards ambitious biodiversity conservation targets right now. We need to ensure that all the tools in our toolbox, including other conserved areas, will deliver on our shared goal to protect biodiversity.”

The report provides examples of these faulty designations, including Wildland Zones—some of which are in southern BC’s renowned Sea-to-Sky area. Though these places are managed with conservation in mind, they still permit mining, oil, gas, and other industrial activity that harms at-risk species like grizzly bears, marbled murrelets and spotted owls. According to the international and Canadian standards that BC has adopted, harmful industrial activities must be prohibited in all areas set aside for conservation.

“The BC government is misleading the public into thinking biodiversity is protected in large areas of the province when in fact, it is not,” says Sean Nixon, lawyer at Ecojustice. “The province still allows harmful industrial activities like logging, oil and gas, and mining in BC’s

‘conserved’ areas, which threatens wildlife and natural habitats. BC needs to change its flawed accounting to avoid undermining its present and future conservation efforts.”

How BC can clean up its protected area accounting and conserve 25% of its landbase by 2025:

- 1) Remove BC’s claimed “other conserved” areas from Canada’s protected area database. Protected areas are meant to safeguard ecosystems and the species they contain. When areas are included in protected area totals that don’t actually accomplish this, it artificially inflates the province’s estimates of its protected land and stunts support for protected area expansion, including Indigenous-led conservation proposals.
- 2) Upgrade the protection in other conserved areas to match international and Canadian standards. Depending on the area, this could include creating firm boundaries, barring industrial activity that harms biodiversity, and ensuring protection is long-term.
- 3) Invest in legislated protected areas and support Indigenous-led conservation proposals. Dozens of proposals from First Nations have been put forward to protect natural and cultural values. Supporting these proposals would advance the government’s goals to conserve biodiversity and further reconciliation.

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Download: [An Honest Accounting: Improving BC’s Approach to Claiming Other Conserved Areas](#)

About CPAWS-BC and Ecojustice

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - British Columbia ([CPAWS-BC](#)) is part of one of Canada’s oldest non-profit conservation groups. We protect wilderness in every corner of BC and deep into the ocean. We have been defending BC since 1978, and are dedicated to keeping BC’s natural environment thriving forever. Our work to safeguard large parks, protected areas and wildlife corridors has been instrumental in protecting precious places across the province.

[Ecojustice](#) uses the power of the law to defend nature, combat climate change, and fight for a healthy environment. Its strategic, public interest lawsuits and advocacy lead to precedent-setting court decisions and law and policy that deliver lasting solutions to Canada’s



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most urgent environmental problems. As Canada's largest environmental law charity, Ecojustice operates offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, and Halifax.

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