

# **ASSESSMENT BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**ON THE PATH TO 2030: A REPORT  
CARD ON PROGRESS TO PROTECT  
LAND AND OCEAN ACROSS  
CANADA**





# ON THE PATH TO 2030

## BRITISH COLUMBIA ASSESSMENT

A REPORT CARD ON PROGRESS TO PROTECT  
LAND AND OCEAN ACROSS CANADA

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) has reviewed progress made from 2022 through 2024 by federal, provincial, and territorial governments towards Canada's commitment to effectively protect at least 30% of land, freshwater, and ocean by 2030.

This section presents the grade and the complete assessment of the Government of British Columbia for their terrestrial conservation efforts.

THE GRADE STEMS FROM  
HOW WELL BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ACCOMPLISHED SIX  
CONSERVATION PRINCIPLES:



**1. Collaboration to achieve Canada's 30% targets**



**2. Setting ambitious regional targets**



**3. Prioritizing Indigenous-led conservation**



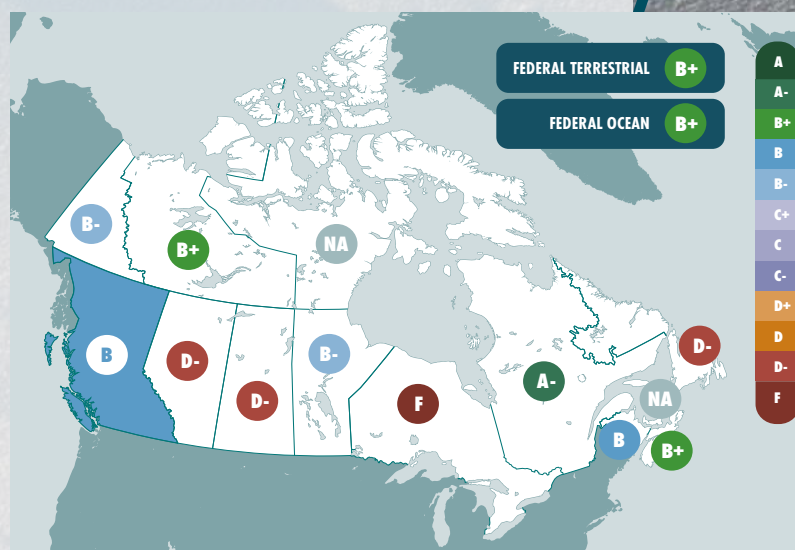
**4. Completing existing conservation projects**



**5. Identifying additional high-quality areas for protection**



**6. Increasing long-term conservation funding**



Our assessment reinforces the importance of prioritizing meaningful conservation efforts by emphasizing not only the quantity of land and freshwater conserved, but also the selection of key areas and the mechanisms used to ensure long-term, effective, and equitable protection.

This land and freshwater conservation assessment was a collaborative effort between the CPAWS British Columbia Chapter and the CPAWS National Office. For a review of Canada's ocean conservation, [please see the Federal Ocean section](#).

The full report can be found here: [On the Path to 2030: A Report Card on Progress to Protect Land and Ocean Across Canada](#).



# BRITISH COLUMBIA

2024  
**B**

2021  
**C**

## Highlights and Lowlights



**2022: B.C. committed to protecting 30% of lands by 2030** – announced by Premier David Eby during COP15 through the Minister of Water, Lands & Natural Resource Stewardship’s mandate letter.<sup>42</sup>



**2023: B.C. Conservation Fund** – B.C. Parks Foundation and the Province of B.C. jointly announced the new \$300 million B.C. Conservation Fund. This Fund matches funding from public and private sources to advance conservation that recognizes and promotes First Nations leadership and co-governance.<sup>43</sup>



**2023: Draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework** – released for consultation after months of stakeholder engagement; the Framework outlines a paradigm shift to prioritize biodiversity and ecosystem health across all natural resource sectors in the province.<sup>44</sup> This set the stage for the B.C. government to deliver an implementation plan and co-develop legislation to advance and enshrine this work in law.



**2023: Great Bear Sea Project Finance for Permanence (PFP)** – B.C. announced a \$60 million contribution to the Great Bear Sea PFP and the Marine Plan Partnership to protect vital coastal ecosystems and advance sustainable economic opportunities in partnership with First Nations and donors.



**2023: Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation** – an over \$1 billion historic investment in conservation in B.C. was signed between the governments of B.C. and Canada and the First Nations Leadership Council. The agreement restates their shared commitment to protecting 30% of lands by 2030 in partnership with First Nations and rooted in the principles of UNDRIP. A further announcement in 2024, as part of the agreement, allocated \$49 million from the federal Nature Smart Climate Solutions fund to address climate change by protecting carbon-rich ecosystems.<sup>45</sup>



**2024: B.C.'s first-ever Coastal Marine Strategy** – a comprehensive provincial plan, co-developed with First Nations, was released to improve coastal management and protection in B.C.



**2024: Klinse-za Park expansion** – a 1,700 km<sup>2</sup> addition announced with West Moberly and Saulneau First Nations and the governments of B.C. and Canada created the largest provincial park established in B.C. in a decade.



**2022: OECM standards** – B.C.'s claimed OECMs do not meet international or Canadian quality standards for biodiversity conservation. To meet the standards of conservation, upgrades are needed, or the areas must be removed from the province's protected area accounting.



**2024: Lack of funding for natural resource management and land-use planning** – the Ministry tasked with carrying out land-use planning and action on biodiversity goals suffered from insufficient funding to deliver on these goals. This resulted in delays in the launch of key processes to advance nature conservation, such as land-use planning.

## Promising Commitments, but Enhanced Actions Necessary in B.C.

British Columbia has a huge diversity of species and ecosystems, and currently, 15.6% or 147,214 km<sup>2</sup> of land is protected through legislated, long-term mechanisms. An additional 4.1% of the land is designated as OECMs which do not meet international or Canadian standards. The inflated accounting of conserved areas in B.C. is a barrier to



progress that needs to be addressed by upgrading the level of protection of OECMS or removing them from reporting.

In 2023, just weeks before the signing of the historic \$1 billion Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation, the province launched the made-in-B.C. Conservation Financing Mechanism in partnership with the B.C. Parks Foundation. This \$300 million fund is a significant step and is expected to provide much-needed funding for the ongoing management of new protected areas created in partnership with First Nations.

As a result of consistent public pressure, the provincial government has also committed to a full review and working on upgrading the level of protection for OECMs working in collaboration with conservation groups and First Nations. However at the time of writing, the non-compliance of the suite of OECMs has not been rectified.

Despite delays from the provincial government in advancing ambitious new protected areas on the ground, First Nations continue to advance Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship efforts in their traditional territories.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Any projects listed in this section do not necessarily reflect CPAWS involvement and are highlighted to support but not appropriate IPCA work.



Photo: Adam Combs

## EXAMPLES OF INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION INITIATIVES IN B.C.

Northern B.C. hosts conservation opportunities that are remarkable on a global scale. The Dene K'eh Kusān IPCA – covering 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> of intact forests and supporting wildlife populations, including caribou and thinhorn sheep is led by the Kaska Nation through the Dena Kayeh Institute.

In the northeast, Tsay Keh Dene Nation continues to work towards the protection of the Ingenika IPCA, a core cultural and ecological area for them. In addition, 6,500 km<sup>2</sup> have been identified to address the infringement of Treaty 8 rights of Blueberry River First Nation as part of the precedent-setting *Yahey v British Columbia* court case.

In northwest B.C., Wilps Gwininitxw, of the Gitxsan Nation, declared their lands — the ancestral Maxhla Didaat and Galaanhi Giist territories — to be protected in 2022. This includes 1,700 km<sup>2</sup> in the upper Skeena River watershed. Nearby, the Gitanyow Nation, represented by the Simgigyet'm Gitanyow (Gitanyow Hereditary Chiefs), declared interim measures for mineral tenure establishment and exploration in 2024 on the Wii Litsxw Meziadin Indigenous Protected Area (540 km<sup>2</sup>), established in 2021. This was done out of concern that the provincial government was not addressing concerns about consent to mining activities. Concurrently, the Gitanyow also signed a federal funding agreement to restore self-government on these ancestral lands.

Also in the northwest, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation declared 60% of the T'akú watershed protected in January 2023. This includes salmon rivers and spawning areas, and landscapes needed for wildlife, clean water, and Lingít Kusteeyí (the Tlingit way of living). The Tahltn Stewardship Initiative intends to establish IPCAs covering at least 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Tahltn Territory through the Tahltn Land Stewardship Planning process.

The Southern Rocky Mountains in southeast B.C. hosts transboundary rivers and wildlife corridors, recognized as the most important basin for large carnivores, with the highest density of grizzly bears in inland North America. The traditional territory of the Ktunaxa people is identified as important for Indigenous-led conservation efforts following the successful completion of the Qat'muk IPCA in the Purcell Mountains.

In 2022, the sməłqmíx (Lower Similkameen Indian Band) declared the nʔaysnúlaʔxʷ (Ashnola) watershed to be protected as a sməłqmíx Protected and Conserved Area. Also, in the Similkameen Valley, the proposed Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Reserve remains in establishment negotiations between First Nation, provincial and federal governments.

In Nootka Sound, the Nuu-chah-nulth Salmon Parks initiative has also received federal investment to protect and restore areas of forest habitat surrounding key salmon streams. Led by the muwačəth (Mowachaht/Muchalaht) First Nation, protection from headwaters to the sea aims to secure a strong future for salmon in the Ḥəḥəhuuti (chiefly territories) for all. Also, on Vancouver Island, new conservancies covering 760 km<sup>2</sup> were announced by Ahousaht and Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations and the B.C. government in June 2024 to protect ecologically rich old-growth forests in Clayoquot Sound.

Photo: Adam Combs

Despite these tangible advancements, the B.C. government has been slow in establishing the necessary planning procedures and sufficient funding to advance conservation objectives. With a newly elected B.C. government, the province has the opportunity to make progress with planning and proper engagement processes that result in protections on the ground.

In January 2025, the B.C. government restated its commitment to protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030 as well as to carry out land use planning with First Nations, industry, and local communities. Clear process, well-resourced teams and conservation objectives will all be important to guide B.C.'s revitalized land use planning and advance biodiversity goals.

## B.C. COASTAL MARINE STRATEGY – A NEW ERA OF COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT

In July 2024, the B.C. government released its first-ever **Coastal Marine Strategy**, a comprehensive provincial plan, co-developed with First Nations, to improve coastal management and protection. It's a 20-year vision and roadmap with set activities to ensure coastal areas remain healthy and resilient to climate change, support community well-being, and ensure a sustainable ocean economy. Until now, the coast was governed through a patchwork of regulations and laws overseen by different provincial ministries and departments with no overarching vision for management decisions. Now, the Coastal Marine Strategy must be actioned, including the development of a law, to ensure its long-term implementation.

Photo: Bryce Evans

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively, equitably, and transparently advance conservation commitments, CPAWS recommends that the Government of B.C.:

- Immediately advance its commitment to protecting 30% of lands by 2030 in partnership with First Nations. This process must incorporate a range of conservation values including rare ecosystems and ecosystem representation; habitat for wildlife and species at risk; ecological connectivity and climate resilience; and key large, intact areas.

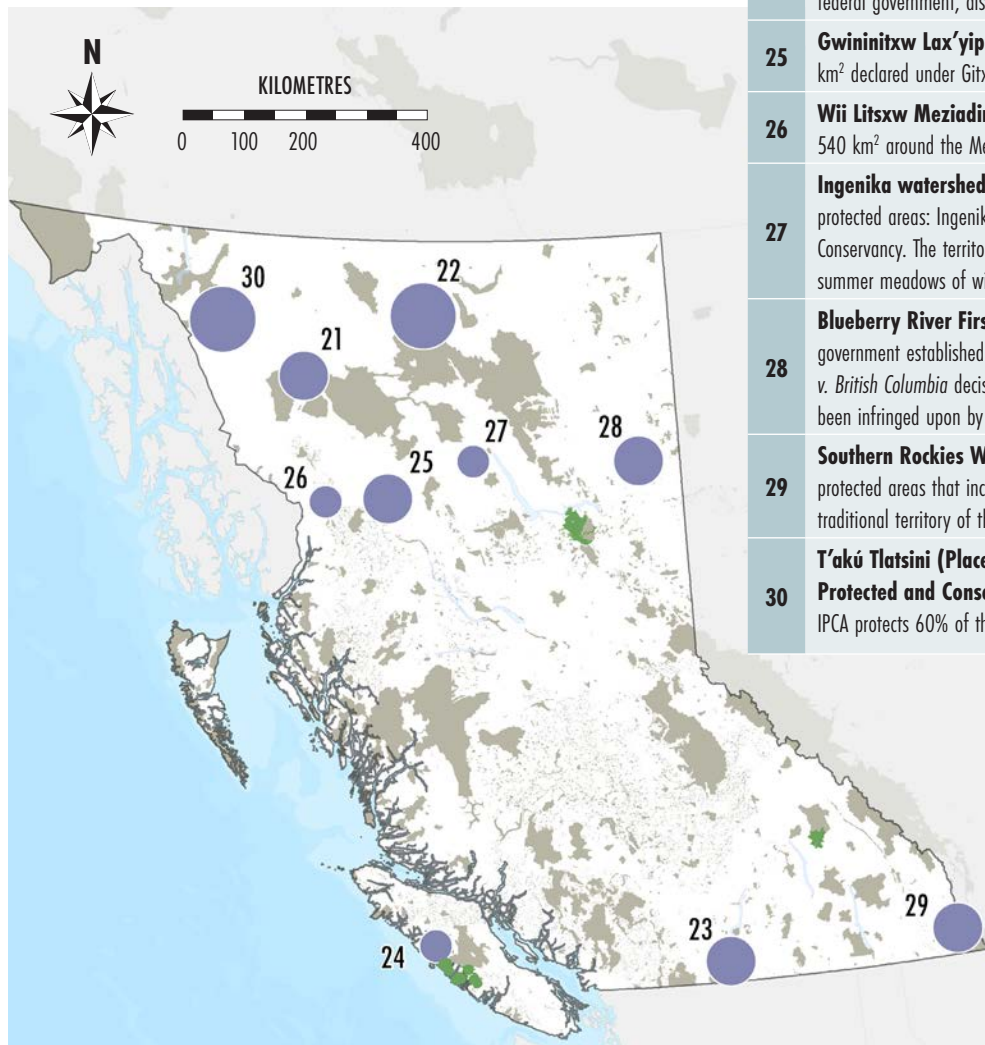
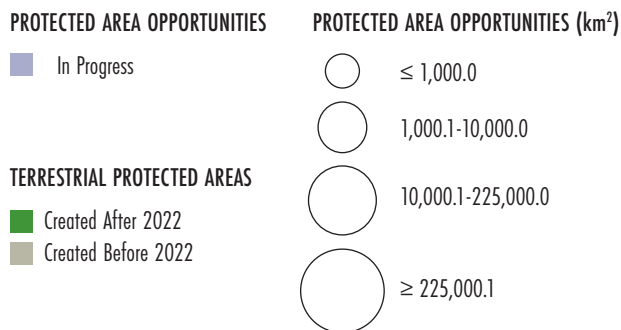


2. Invest in land-use planning to support and advance Indigenous-led conservation and engage stakeholders, experts, and communities.
3. Ensure all areas that count as protected meet the international and pan-Canadian criteria for protected and conserved areas.
4. Advance the commitments made in the tripartite nature agreement, including developing a mechanism to support and acknowledge IPCAs in partnership with First Nations.
5. Continue work that will result in a legal tool to protect habitat for species at risk to support the over 1,700 species at risk of extinction in the province.
6. Continue work to bring the Biodiversity & Ecosystem Health Framework into law in partnership with First Nations. This is necessary to balance an overwhelmingly industry-centered approach to land and resource management.

In conclusion, British Columbia has demonstrated significant commitments to conservation, establishing the historic tripartite nature agreement and launching the Conservation Financing Mechanism. Partnerships and co-development with First Nations and communities are positive, but the lack of investment in land use planning inhibits further progress, with harm happening on the ground in the absence of critical decisions and funding. B.C. has massive conservation opportunities with expansive areas in the north and, in the south, places ready for restoration and connectivity to support high biodiversity or species at risk. The time is now to put an effective province-wide protected areas strategy in place.



# Mapping out 30% by 2030 in British Columbia



## Opportunities for Protection: Areas Previously Identified

### Information on Progress to Protected Area Status

21	<b>Tahltan IPCAs through the Tahltan Nation Land Use Plan</b> First Nation continues to lead in the protection and stewardship of approx. 10,000 km <sup>2</sup> .
22	<b>Dene K'eh Kusān (Kaska Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area)</b> Kaska continues to advance the protection and stewardship of 39,136 km <sup>2</sup> .
23	<b>South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Reserve and Similkameen Valley smᵃqlmix Conservation Areas</b> The South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Reserve negotiations continue between B.C., Canada and the Okanagan Nation Alliance, and the Lower Similkameen continued to protect the smᵃqlmix Protected Areas for a total of 2,682 km <sup>2</sup> .
24	<b>Nuu-chah-nulth Salmon Parks</b> First Nation is engaged with the federal government, discussing an area of about 650 km <sup>2</sup> .
25	<b>Gwininitxw Lax'yip: Indigenous Protected Area</b> IPCA of 1,700 km <sup>2</sup> declared under Gitksan law, or Ayook.
26	<b>Wii Litsw Meziadin Indigenous Protected Area</b> An area of 540 km <sup>2</sup> around the Meziadin River declared in 2021.
27	<b>Ingenika watershed</b> Tsay Keh Dene Nation has established two protected areas: Ingenika IPCA (about 790 km <sup>2</sup> ) and the Chuyaza Conservancy. The territory is home to grizzly bears, wolves, moose and summer meadows of wild berries.
28	<b>Blueberry River First Nation</b> A 2023 agreement with the B.C. government established zones to be protected as a result of the <i>Yahey v. British Columbia</i> decision acknowledging the FN's Treaty 8 rights had been infringed upon by cumulative impacts from industrial development.
29	<b>Southern Rockies Wildlife Corridor</b> A key linkage to existing protected areas that includes the Flathead Valley located within the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa people, approx. 6,500 km <sup>2</sup> .
30	<b>T'akú Tlatsini (Places that Make Us Strong) Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area</b> Taku River Tlingit First Nation's IPCA protects 60% of the T'akú watershed at approx. 10,800 km <sup>2</sup> .