

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE



Credit: Taylor Roades

Indigenous-Led Conservation

JOB AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES THAT WORK FOR NATURE



Credit: Pat Kane

New federal investments in Indigenous Guardians and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas will create immediate, vital new jobs in Indigenous communities across the country.

Indigenous Guardians are employed in and by Indigenous communities to help care for the lands and waters, including identifying areas for conservation and sustainable economic development. New investments in their work will help transform local and regional economies — particularly in remote and Northern communities — towards a more sustainable future.

It will offer new job opportunities for youth, create new business opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses alike, and help build new, more resilient economies. Investments in IPCAs and Guardians will also advance reconciliation, support climate change mitigation and adaptation, and contribute to the cost-effective achievement of Canada's domestic and international commitments to nature conservation.

BACKGROUND

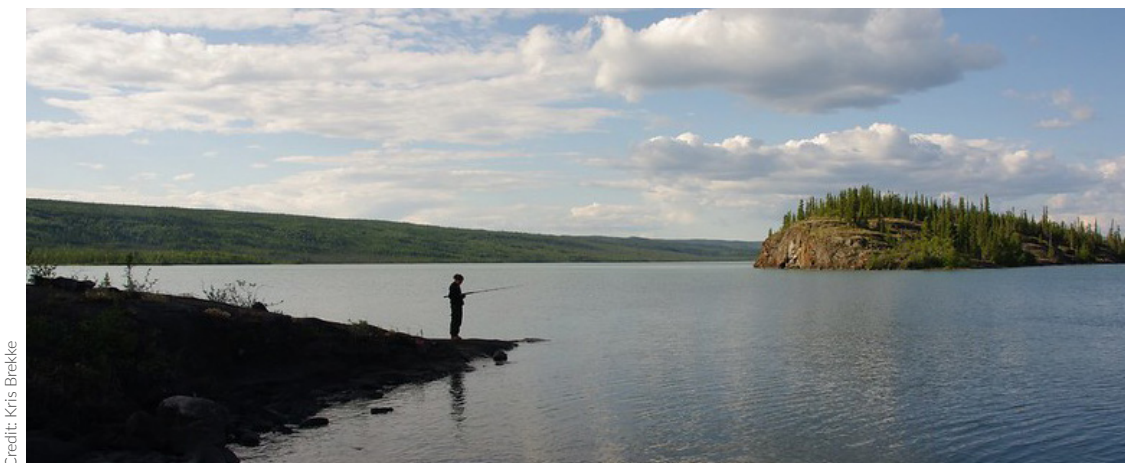
Indigenous nations are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in remote parts of the country. Many Indigenous communities are responding to the current crisis by going on the land, which has sustained them in good times and in bad. In many of these places, Indigenous Guardians are there, playing critical support roles that range from helping to map emergency support services to running emergency operations teams to patrolling lands and waters to ensure social distancing measures are respected.

Indigenous Guardians are trained experts that care for the land and water. Supporting Guardians programs help Indigenous nations create more resilient futures, by providing good local jobs that contribute to more vibrant local economies — and a sense of pride and possibility for Indigenous youth.

New investments in Indigenous Guardians and IPCAs will help transform local and regional economies— particularly in remote and Northern communities— towards a more sustainable future.

Indigenous Guardians support land use planning efforts, which identify areas for both conservation and sustainable development, thereby providing certainty for resource development and support for stronger rural and northern communities. Guardians often work with industry and regulators to support monitoring and implementation of environmental agreements at mining sites and other resource development projects. In a time of increasingly constrained travel, they are poised to be increasingly critical partners in on-the-ground monitoring and research for industry and academia alike.

Indigenous Guardians also help establish and manage Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) – places that sustain healthy populations of caribou and salmon, clean water, and a more stable climate through protection of some of the largest carbon storehouses on the planet.



Credit: Kris Brekke

The creation of IPCAs is also the single most important pathway for Canada to achieve its international and domestic nature conservation goals – in particular, the Speech from the Throne commitment to protect 25% of Canada’s lands and inland waters by 2025. Indigenous-led land use plans and IPCAs will be essential to Canada’s ability to bridge the gap from current protection levels to 25% and beyond.

CASE FOR SUPPORT

Investments in Indigenous Guardians and the design, establishment and management of IPCAs have an immediate, tangible, and outsized impact on job creation and local Indigenous economies.

For example, east of Yellowknife, the Łutsël K’e Dene First Nation guardians (NiHat’Ni) monitor caribou and respond to climate impacts. They employ 10 people in the summer and 4 in the winter. In a community of 300, these jobs have a profound impact far in excess of their actual number, sustaining families and circulating money through the local economy through personal purchases.



Credit: Keith Koch

Indigenous peoples in Canada have historically experienced unemployment levels more than twice the national average. Creating new Guardians jobs for Indigenous peoples can help close a gap that is at risk of widening in the wake of COVID-19.

The NiHat’Ni Guardians also co-manage one of the largest protected areas in the country. The Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area protects 26,376 square kilometres of boreal forest and is playing a significant role in advancing Canada towards its 25% goal. This winter alone, Łutsël K’e spent \$500,000 on capital expenses to support ecological monitoring and the park-related creation of tourism opportunities, all of which were sourced in the Yellowknife area, and also recently bought a fishing lodge close to Thaidene Nënë that will serve as an important anchor for the nation’s move towards a conservation economy.

New IPCAs managed by Indigenous Guardians can help lay the groundwork for a range of new business opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs and the communities they help sustain.

Thaidene Néné also underscores another key aspect of economic recovery – the potential role of nature-based tourism, particularly in the north. Post-COVID, many experts anticipate an enhanced focus on domestic over international travel, as well as increased interest in nature-based tourism as an opportunity for connection to nature while maintaining social distance. New IPCAs managed by Indigenous Guardians can help lay the groundwork for a range of new business opportunities for Indigenous entrepreneurs and the communities they help sustain, while contributing to reconciliation and connecting Canadians to nature.

In addition to creating immediate jobs across the country with multiplier effects for local and regional economies, investments in Indigenous Guardians and IPCAs can also offer savings to governments and taxpayers through reduced pressure on the judicial, social service and health care systems. Studies in Australia – which has committed more than \$1.5 billion since 2007 to similar Indigenous Rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas initiatives – estimated that the **true cost of their program was 17% to 23% lower than its budgeted cost due to both reduced welfare costs and increased tax revenue.**



Credit: Taylor Roades

Guardians programs offer a unique opportunity to empower Indigenous women living in remote communities through enhanced, flexible employment. Women now hold more than a third of all ranger positions in Australia, including almost half of all casual positions.

When examined through a Social Return on Investment (SROI) lens, evaluations of the Australian program confirm that every **federal dollar (\$1) invested generates almost \$3 in social, cultural and economic return.** Similar research into nascent Guardians programs in the NWT found an SROI of \$2.5 in value created for every dollar invested.

As such, investments in Guardians and Indigenous-led conservation can help lay the groundwork for more resilient economies, stronger communities, and environmental sustainability.

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CURRENT SUPPORT

The Government of Canada has made initial investments in this vital work. For example, more than 25 IPCA proposals are moving forward with support from the Challenge stream of the Canada Nature Fund announced as part of Budget 2018. These represent highly cost-effective and impactful investments in advancing Canada's progress on protected areas.

Many of these areas are large intact landscapes that can help meet Canada's nature conservation goals while also protecting major storehouses of carbon. For example, the community of Deline's IPCA proposal would protect more than 4.5 billion tonnes of soil organic carbon — equivalent to 23.5 years of Canada's annual industrial GHG emissions. As such, **they represent a vital and significant natural climate solution.**

In addition, the \$25 million National Indigenous Guardians pilot project launched in 2017 is helping some of the almost 60 Guardians programs across the country care for their lands and waters.

However, these programs are short-term in nature and could only respond to a small fraction of the Indigenous communities that expressed interest in creating IPCAs and/or Guardians programs. In particular, the Challenge Fund has primarily focused on the costs of establishing protected areas, with limited funding for their stewardship and management through Guardians and other similar initiatives.

Indigenous-led conservation lies at the heart of Canada's ability to meet its international and domestic biodiversity commitments. It also represents a highly cost-effective approach to both the establishment and management of protected areas, particularly compared to conservation of private lands and/or areas with significant existing or overlapping industrial interests.

Indigenous-led conservation represents a highly cost-effective approach to both the establishment and management of protected areas.

Given the key role that Indigenous Guardians play in both creating and managing IPCAs, early and sustained funding for both will be essential for Canada to meet its future targets while also contributing to reconciliation and to climate protection.

The Challenge Fund provides essential existing infrastructure for delivering on expanded priorities that contribute to direct and indirect job creation and economic recovery. Existing projects are building capacity required to advance IPCAs and design Guardians programs that can manage these areas now and in the future.



Credit: Jordan Melograna



Credit: Pat Kane

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

New federal investments will expand the benefits of Indigenous-led conservation. While detailed work is underway to confirm the jobs and associated economic benefits linked to a major new investment, we anticipate that this funding will:



Create thousands of jobs in more than 100 Indigenous communities, many of which are in remote northern locations that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19



Support associated indirect job creation and opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs in both traditional sectors and the emerging conservation economy



Support economic recovery and transformation at the community and regional level, with particular benefits for Indigenous youth



Support achievement of Canada's international domestic and biodiversity commitments, in particular, the Government's commitment to protect 25% of Canada's lands and waters by 2025, on the path to 30% by 2030

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

The Indigenous Leadership Initiative is a network dedicated to supporting Indigenous Nations in honouring the cultural responsibility to lands and fostering Indigenous Nationhood.

The Indigenous Leadership Initiative

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