



Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement

Progress report for 2023-24

Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement

Protecting biodiversity and restoring nature in the Yukon

The Yukon is one of the few areas of North America that still contains large areas of uninhabited lands and wilderness that support unique but sensitive ecosystems. In the face of population growth, urbanization, industrial development, global climate change impacts and biodiversity loss, it is more important than ever to protect nature in the Yukon and across Canada.

For Indigenous Peoples in the Yukon, a healthy environment is integral to maintaining and honouring their histories, cultures and ways of life. The leadership of Indigenous governments and communities is essential in preserving the Yukon's natural and cultural landscapes; recognizing this and respecting Final Agreements and Aboriginal rights is central in fostering a concerted approach to address the biodiversity and climate change crises.

To help protect nature, the Government of Canada is working towards conserving 30 per cent of lands and waters by 2030. To this end, the Government of Canada and the Government of Yukon signed onto the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement, which took effect in April 2023. Through the agreement, the Government of Canada is providing \$20.6 million to the Government of Yukon to:

- protect and conserve new areas of the Yukon;
- financially and collaboratively support Indigenous-led conservation efforts;
- increase knowledge collection and data sharing; and
- enhance efforts to monitor and manage species at risk and cumulative effects on the environment.

From April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, the Government of Yukon has made important progress towards the outcomes of the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement. This includes reporting an additional 2 per cent of the Yukon's lands and waters to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database to bring the Yukon's total to 21.1 per cent, the highest percentage of any province or territory in Canada.

The Government of Yukon has also taken steps to advance Indigenous-led conservation initiatives. For example, the Indigenous-led Conservation Capacity Fund was established to fund conservation initiatives led by Yukon First Nation governments and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups.

Under the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement, the Government of Yukon is committed to reporting progress on advancing its conservation priorities. The Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement: Progress report for 2023-24 highlights progress from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024, on nature agreement-related work across the Yukon. In this report, you will find key progress highlights through year one of the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement.

The Government of Yukon expended just over \$4.45M of the agreement funds in 2023-24. Projections for 2024-25 are to expend approximately \$7.5M, including disbursing at least \$1.8M to Yukon First Nations governments and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to support continued Indigenous leadership in conservation.

For more information about the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement and its related projects, please visit: yukon.ca/learn-about-canada-yukon-nature-agreement.

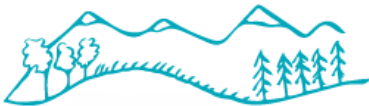
Protecting new areas of the Yukon

The Yukon had 19.1 per cent of lands and waters protected under the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database at the time of signing the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement in December 2022. Areas that contribute to the Yukon's total protected area count are primarily made up of protected lands, which include:

- territorial parks;
- habitat protection areas;
- national parks;
- national wildlife areas; and
- special management areas.

A goal of the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement is to protect and conserve 25 per cent of lands and waters in the Yukon by 2025 and create a pathway to protect and conserve 30 per cent by 2030.

The Yukon First Nations' Final Agreements and the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* include commitments to protect areas. The Government of Yukon is building on these commitments to increase the Yukon's protected areas.



Increasing the Yukon's total protected areas to 21.1 per cent

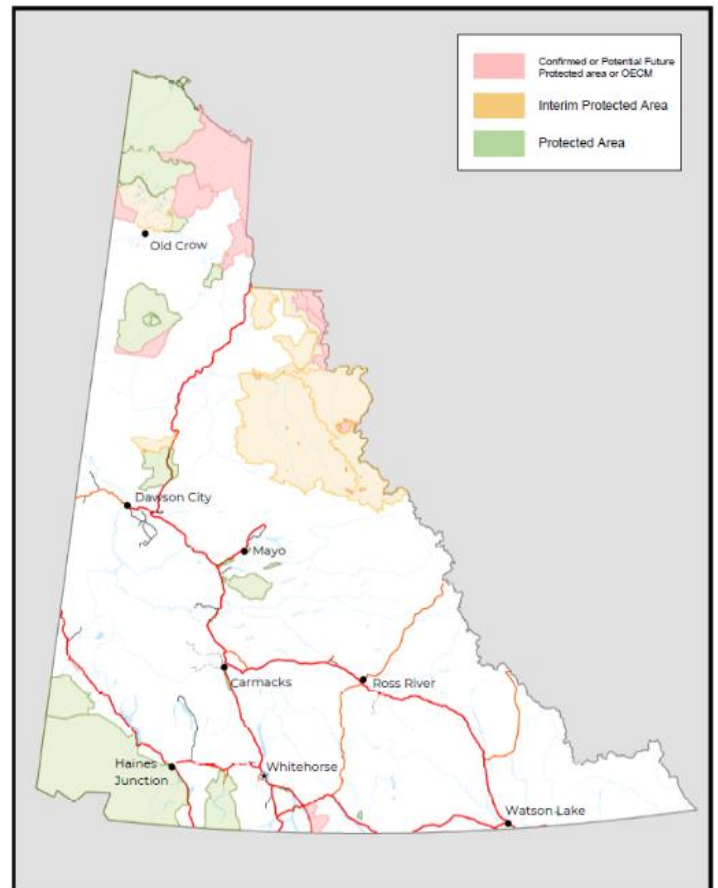
The Yukon has reported an additional 2 per cent of Yukon lands and waters as protected under the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database since the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement took effect in April 2023.

The increase in protected areas in the Yukon is due to the protection of lands following ratification of the Aullaviat/Aunguniarvik Traditional Conservation Area Agreement in the Yukon's Eastern North Slope, and accounting for a number of other small parcels in the Peel watershed region.

The additional 2 per cent of protected lands and waters in the Yukon raises the Yukon's total to 21.1 per cent. The Yukon currently has the highest percentage of protected areas reported to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database of all provinces and territories in Canada.

Next steps

The Government of Yukon will continue to work towards protecting areas in the Yukon that are of important ecological and cultural value. New areas for conservation will always be collaboratively identified and planned for with Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups. The Government of Yukon continues to work with Indigenous partners and Government of Canada to advance protected area planning in various parts of the territory, such as in the Peel watershed exploring the feasibility of establishing a new national park with the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun; the Pickhandle Lakes Habitat Protection Area with Kluane First Nation and White River First Nation; and the Chasàn Chuà/McIntyre Creek area with Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.



Map depicting protected areas, future protected areas, and interim protected areas in the Yukon.

Aullaviat/Aunguniarvik Traditional Conservation Area Agreement: a new Indigenous-led conservation area in the Yukon

Photo credit: Peter Mather



The Government of Yukon signed onto the Aullaviat/Aunguniarvik Traditional Conservation Area Agreement together with Inuvialuit Parties and the Government of Canada in 2024.

The Aullaviat/Aunguniarvik Traditional Conservation Area covers almost 8,500 km² total land and supports conservation and protection across the northern Yukon. The agreement establishes a Trust that will support an Inuvialuit-led monitoring program, called the Aullaviat/Aunguniarvik Stewardship and Guardians Program, which will support management and monitoring of the area and enable on-the-land cultural engagement across generations of Inuvialuit.

Signing onto the agreement supported reporting this area of the Yukon's Eastern North Slope to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database to increase the Yukon's total reported protected areas to 21.1 per cent.

Developing tools to support conservation

The Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement is supporting the Yukon to develop the tools it needs to protect against biodiversity loss and conserve the natural environment and the species that rely on it. Adequate tools are needed to better understand the impact of development on species and their habitats and to identify key areas that should be protected.

Ecological cumulative effects decision support tool for caribou

Funding from the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement is supporting efforts to protect all caribou populations in the Yukon, including the Porcupine caribou. Of the three types of caribou in the Yukon, the Northern Mountain Population of Woodland Caribou is listed as a species of Special Concern under Canada's Species at Risk Act.

In 2023-24, funding from the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement supported the Government of Yukon to develop an ecological cumulative effects decision support tool for Northern Mountain caribou.

This will increase the understanding of cumulative effects on caribou through developing habitat disturbance relationships. It will generate new information on caribou responses to landscape change. Targeting for completion by April 2026, this information can support decision-making in environmental assessment of cumulative effects and inform land use planning and monitoring programs.



Mapping surface disturbance in the Southern Lakes and Teslin planning areas

Across 2023-24, the Government of Yukon completed surface disturbance mapping for the Southern Lakes and Teslin planning areas. This effort provides crucial information about the extent of human impacts in the most heavily populated region of the Yukon. It will directly inform regional land use planning and wildlife management discussions. Reprocessing and imagery correction of the territory-wide satellite imagery archive was also conducted and will be used to complete territory-wide disturbance mapping. All completed surface disturbance data layers are available on GeoYukon. Making data publicly available is a commitment in the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement.

Next steps

To further support efforts to protect areas that are deemed both ecologically and culturally important, the Government of Yukon will initiate engagement with First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups on the development of an Ecological Cumulative Effects Framework. The framework will act as a roadmap for considering ecological cumulative effects in land use planning, project assessment and decision-making processes. This work is planned for 2024-25.

Supporting Indigenous leadership in conservation

Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups have relied on the Yukon's lands and waters for generations. They have long been leaders in protecting the Yukon's natural environment and have worked to include protected areas in their Final Agreements. The Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement provides funding to support continued Indigenous leadership in conservation.

Workshop on Indigenous-led conservation

In January 2024 the governments of Canada and Yukon co-hosted a workshop with Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups. This two-day event enabled a discussion on the challenges and opportunities around conservation in the Yukon. The Government of Yukon continues to work directly with Indigenous governments and groups on concerns raised in the meeting.



Indigenous-led Conservation Capacity Fund

\$3.6 million under the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement's Indigenous-led Conservation Capacity Fund is designated to help advance Indigenous-led conservation initiatives. Proposals received under the fund promote and support conservation, climate change adaptation, habitat and species protection, transfer of Indigenous knowledge and regional land use planning. The Government of Yukon will work with successful applicants of the Fund to finalize funding agreements and will provide ongoing support as these Indigenous governments and groups implement their conservation initiatives.

Working together to protect Chasàn Chuà/McIntyre Creek

Photo credit: Erik Pinkerton



In April 2024, the Government of Yukon, Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, the City of Whitehorse and Parks Canada signed a Memorandum of Understanding to protect the Chasàn Chuà/McIntyre Creek area.

McIntyre Creek is a wildlife corridor that runs through the City of Whitehorse. It is on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Its Southern Tutchone name is Chasàn Chuà. The area supports a diverse ecosystem of species and habitats and is valued as an accessible recreational area.

The Memorandum of Understanding commits the parties to work together to establish an official protected area boundary, determine a protected area designation and identify a governance model for managing the area into the future.

Species at risk

Climate change and human impacts on the environment change ecosystems. They put Yukon species and their habitats at risk. The Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement includes funding to help protect species at risk and their critical habitat. The funding will support:

- collaboratively developing a management approach for protecting species at risk in the Yukon with Indigenous governments and groups;
- increasing assessment, monitoring, and conservation of species at risk; and
- recovery activities for Boreal Caribou, Barren-ground Caribou, and Wood Bison.

Impacts of winter recreation on Southern Lakes caribou

In 2023-24, work was completed to advance research on Northern Mountain caribou. This included research on the impact of winter recreation on Southern Lakes caribou population within the range of an alpine-dwelling (lbex) and forest-dwelling (Carcross) population. The project was done using existing data, in conjunction with Yukon University, and in collaboration with the Southern Lakes First Nation Caribou Working Group. Preliminary research results were shared in a one-day workshop with the working group.

In addition, work was completed to develop a final report on trail-use in the range of the Southern Lakes caribou and a statistical analysis was undertaken of stress and nutritional condition data.

Monitoring the Collared Pika

Collared Pika are listed federally as a species of Special Concern. The species is a key ecological indicator of the impact of climate change on alpine ecosystems in northwestern Canada. The Government of Yukon has been monitoring Collared Pika occupancy at three locations in the Yukon (Tombstones Territorial Park, Kusawa Territorial Park, and Dàadzàii Vàn Territorial Park). Repeated surveys at close to 300 sites at these locations have been done annually to estimate population trends across their range and clarify climatic and other factors that may be responsible for population change. Detailed modeling will occur in early 2025, once the data from the 2024 field season are available.

Identifying and protecting species at risk

In 2023-2024, the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada took initial steps towards developing a Memorandum of Understanding that will outline how we work together to support species at risk conservation under environmental assessment processes as required under Section 79 of the Species at Risk Act.

Next steps

Protecting species at risk in the Yukon cannot be done without the insight and support of Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups. Looking ahead to 2024-25, the Government of Yukon is planning to initiate pre-engagement work with Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to determine how we can best work together to develop an approach to protect species at risk in the Yukon, including the potential to co-develop legislation.



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