

# **Input by the Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership (CRP) into Parks Canada's Horizon Scan**

Prepared by Faisal Moola, PhD and Megan Youdelis, PhD  
University of Guelph

The Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership (CRP) was invited by Parks Canada to participate in its Horizon Scan. The CRP was also asked to contribute priority research questions to help inform Parks Canada's broader research agenda going forward.

Members of the CRP Leadership Team met in March 2021 to identify emergent issues that are likely to impact protected areas, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, and to identify a short-list of objectives Parks Canada should incorporate into their research agenda, based primarily on the recommendations of the [Indigenous Circle of Experts Report, We Rise Together](#).

This briefing note provides a summary of the CRP's discussion and pertinent literature with an emphasis on social science issues around governance, cultural keystone species, etc., and other issues emphasized in the ICE Report. As these issues are inherently place-based, and thus most appropriately addressed at the local scale, it is important to emphasize that the CRP's input is not on behalf of any Indigenous Nation in the country. The CRP believes that Parks Canada should engage with every individual Indigenous Nation whose rights, title, interests, and responsibilities have been (and continue) to be impacted by Parks Canada, developing true nation-to-nation, government-to-government, or Inuit-to-Crown relationships.

As the Indigenous Circle of Experts report makes clear, Parks Canada's priority should be to respect Indigenous Peoples' inherent and constitutionally enshrined rights and jurisdiction and elevate all existing parks and protected areas to the status of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs). IPCAs are "Indigenous-led; they represent a long-term commitment to conservation; and they elevate Indigenous rights and responsibilities" in conservation spaces (ICE 2018, p.5). ICE provides several case studies, including Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve and Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, that may be instructive for potential ways forward in existing parks. However, each process will be unique and context-specific, and thus must be driven by local and affected Indigenous Nations.

## **1. Indigenous Peoples are Rights Holders not Stakeholders**

Indigenous Peoples and their governments are often mistakenly thought of as simply stakeholders in conservation, equivalent to corporate, civil society or other organizations, rather than "self-determining nations with inherent rights and governance systems that pre-date colonial structures" (Reo et al. 2017).

Until recently, this viewpoint was commonplace within the conservation sector (both government and non-government) in Canada, leading to missed opportunities for meaningful

collaboration with Indigenous partners, and in some cases, even conflict over the protection of wildlife habitat (e.g., woodland caribou) and the establishment of new protected areas (e.g., Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement; Smith 2015).

Indigenous Peoples have been stewarding their lands and waters for thousands of years and Aboriginal rights jurisprudence in Canada provides clear direction that First Nations, Inuit and Métis need to be recognized and treated as decision-makers, with political authority and rights, over their own traditional territories (Reo et al 2017; Artelle et al. 2019). Throughout much of Canada, Indigenous Peoples' land and other rights are enshrined in historical and modern treaties. In some parts of the country, First Nations have gained new powers under recent land claim settlements as well (e.g., *Tsilhqot'in Nation v British Columbia* 2014 SCC 44; Reo et al. 2017). Indigenous Peoples' existing Aboriginal and treaty rights are also acknowledged and affirmed in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution Act (Constitution Act, 1982). In addition, the collective and individual rights of Indigenous Peoples, including Indigenous governance over traditional lands and waters and requirements for free, prior and informed consent for activities happening in them are protected internationally through the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which Canada is a signatory to but has yet to adequately implement (Smith 2015; Artelle et al. 2019).

Taken together, Indigenous Peoples' political authority, title, rights and responsibilities as well as their laws, values and knowledge systems are critical to the success of conservation and emphasize the importance of developing meaningful, equitable and respectful relationships with Indigenous partners for the protection of wildlife and ecosystems, as well as other environmental values (Smith 2015).

## **2. Indigenous Peoples' Systems and Forms of Conservation Governance is Critical to the Success of Conservation**

Indigenous Peoples are and have been protecting biodiversity since time immemorial through their own cultural, legal, economic and knowledge systems and forms of conservation governance (ICE, 2018). The establishment of Tribal Parks, the protection of sacred forest groves and other forms of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) are therefore new mechanisms to protect and uphold longstanding relationships and customary land use practices that benefit biodiversity, such as cultural burning, traditional aquaculture (e.g., clam gardens), hunting, gardening and fishing technologies, among others. IPCAs have been described as "Territories of Life" by their advocates owing to the fact that their protection and stewardship not only protects biodiversity, but also those elements of cultural diversity that are just as important to Indigenous Peoples as well - such as sacred forests and other spiritual sites, food gathering areas and the places where medicinal plants can be harvested. There is growing awareness of the importance of such biocultural approaches to conservation which protects both biological diversity and the cultural relationships that Indigenous Peoples have with one another and their environment (Zurba et al. 2019). Such biocultural knowledge is often encoded in Indigenous languages, art, song, dance, and other cultural traditions, as well as spiritual practices and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next (Maffi and Woodley 2010). As Anishinaabe scholar Leane Betasamosake Simpson explains, when Indigenous relationships to

the land are disrupted or lands and waters are degraded, so too are Indigenous knowledge systems, as “Indigenous Knowledge must be lived” (Simpson 2004: 381).

### **3. Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Two-Eyed Seeing**

In addition to IPCAs, Indigenous Peoples are fostering innovation in other areas of conservation practice. One of the most exciting recent developments in conservation has been the rise of Indigenous Guardians networks across Canada concomitant with the resurgence in Indigenous-led stewardship of customary lands and waters. Indigenous Guardians are guided by both Indigenous knowledge systems and Western science. They are involved in the monitoring of wildlife populations, assessing the impacts of climate change on ecosystems and communities, conduct water testing, track hunting and other activities on the land and carryout other types of research and stewardship in the management of Indigenous territories, including existing and proposed IPCAs.

As noted by Indigenous fisheries scientist Andrea Reid (Reid et al. 2020), Western science has not only taken precedence over Indigenous knowledge systems in conservation and other areas of public policy, but it has also tended to reinforce embedded power imbalances to the detriment of local communities. This "serves only to strengthen Western science for its own ends and "to concentrate power in administrative centers, rather than in [Indigenous] communities" (Nadasdy, 1999).

The coexistence and complementarity of both Western science and Indigenous knowledge systems in the management of IPCAs and other types of Indigenous-led conservation (e.g., Indigenous-led caribou recovery planning) is an important departure from how knowledge generation is typically employed to inform conservation decision-making. As noted by geographer Robin Roth, colonial conservation policy and practice, such as actions to recover endangered species or the day-to-day management of parks and protected areas, has long reinforced the misguided belief that management expertise should be exclusively informed by Western science.

In recent years, Indigenous-led frameworks that braid together both Western science and Indigenous knowledge systems have emerged and are being explicitly used to guide conservation activities, such as the management of IPCAs as well as to generate new research on wildlife populations, the impacts of climate change and other environmental areas. One such conceptual framework is Etuaptmumk (Mi'kmaq for 'Two-Eyed Seeing'), developed by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall in 2004 for unifying knowledge systems (Reid et al. 2020). Elder Marshall describes Two-Eyed Seeing as: "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all" (Ibid).

#### **4. Priority Research Questions Identified by the CRP**

The CRP recommends that Parks Canada address the following research question as part of its emerging research agenda. These research questions should be pursued in Ethical Space and by using a Two-Eyed Seeing approach in partnership with local Indigenous Nations.

1. How can existing parks recognize existing Section 35 jurisdiction through park re-establishment agreements?
2. What legislative changes are necessary to support appropriate recognition of Section 35 rights within parks and to elevate all existing parks to the status of IPCAs, as laid out in the ICE report?
3. How can existing parks work to recognize and right the history of wrongs committed against Indigenous peoples?
4. What changes are necessary to ensure existing parks respect Indigenous protocols, ceremonies, and knowledge systems as being equally valid and authoritative as western science?
5. How can existing parks take the lead from Indigenous partners in creating a framework of Ethical Space?
6. How can existing protected areas document and work to conserve cultural keystone species, regardless of their species at risk status?
7. What changes are necessary to make space for Indigenous economies to thrive within parks?
8. What funding mechanisms can be made available for Indigenous-led conservation?
9. What programs can be made available for capacity development for IPCA management, where Indigenous governments dictate what training will be most relevant to their needs?
10. How can existing parks support Indigenous nations and governments creating IPCAs?
11. What is Parks Canada's role in narrating a new conservation story within Canada?

## 5. Literature Cited

- Artelle, K., Zurba, M., Bhattacharyya, J., Chan, D., Brown, K., Housty, J., & Moola, F. (2019). Supporting resurgent Indigenous-led governance: A nascent mechanism for just and effective conservation. *Biological Conservation*, 240, 108284–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2019.108284>
- Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE). (2018). *We Rise Together: Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 through the Creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the Spirit of Practice of Reconciliation. The Indigenous Circle of Experts' Report and Recommendations*. Available at: <http://www.conservation2020canada.ca/>
- Maffi, L., & Woodley, E. (2010). *Biocultural diversity conservation a global sourcebook*. Earthscan.
- Nadasdy, P. (1999). The politics of TEK: Power and the "integration" of knowledge. *Arctic Anthropology*, 36, 1–18.
- Reid, A. J., Eckert, L. E., Lane, J., Young, N., Hinch, S. G., Darimont, C. T., . . . Marshall, A. (2020). "Two-Eyed seeing": An Indigenous framework to transform fisheries research and management. *Fish and Fisheries*. doi:10.1111/faf.12516
- Reo, N. J., Whyte, K. P., McGregor, D., Smith, M., & Jenkins, J. F. (2017). Factors that support Indigenous involvement in multi-actor environmental stewardship. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 13(2), 58-68. doi:10.1177/1177180117701028
- Simpson, L. (2004). Anticolonial strategies for the recovery and maintenance of indigenous knowledge. *American Indian Quarterly*, 28(3/4), 373–384.
- (Peggy) Smith, M. (2015). A Reflection on First Nations in their Boreal Homelands in Ontario: Between a Rock and a Caribou. *Conservation and Society*, 13(1), 23. doi:10.4103/0972-4923.161214
- Zurba, M., Beazley, K. F., English, E., & Buchmann-Duck, J. (2019). Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), Aichi Target 11 and Canada's Pathway to Target 1: Focusing conservation on reconciliation. *Land*, 8(1), 1–20.