

*Canadian*

# WILDERNESS

A publication of CPAWS • Spring / Summer 2018



## Opportunity Knocks: Will Canada Answer?



**CPAWS**  
CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY

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## Being strategic in the cause of national conservation

MIKE ROBINSON

From May 21 to 27, many CPAWS Chapter executive directors, board members, National Office staff and trustees will be gathering in Gwaii Haanas to participate in the annual field trip and National board meetings. This gathering of the CPAWS clans is important for many reasons: it enables face-to-face association of our 13 Chapters, our National Office, and associated staff and board members; it creates opportunities for collective dialogue on governance, strategic planning and national conservation objectives; and it gives us wonderful opportunities to see National Park Reserves like Gwaii Haanas, and to spend time with the Haida Watchmen who are central to the Gwaii Haanas co-management and park planning regimes.

CPAWS National Trustee Kwiaahwah Jones has played a key role in organizing the Gwaii Haanas field trip, and our board meetings in the Haida community of Skidegate, her home town. Raised on her family's fish boat, the 'Kwiaahwah', and well versed in clan dynamics and the Haida matriarchy, Kwi now combines her artistic practice with high profile curatorial consulting assignments (see "Haida Now" at the Museum of Vancouver, March 16, 2018, to June 15, 2019), and CPAWS' volunteerism.

A comprehensive review of CPAWS' 54-year experience with strategic planning will complement the Gwaii Haanas field trip. The goals of this exercise will include a refresh of the existing CPAWS Vision, Mission and Principles, and the creation of a new board and staff working group, to determine a small number of over-arching national objectives and allied strategies. Many of the Chapters already have regionally specific strategic plans, and our goal is to better integrate these within national objectives. We have seen CPAWS create conservation opportunities for Canada by pulling together in the past, and now we will turn our minds to creating the opportunities of the future.

Thank you all for your support of these efforts!

*Mike Robinson, President, National Board of Trustees*



Crossing the Halladale River near Melvich on the North Coast of Scotland. Photo: Lynn Webster

## Canadian WILDERNESS

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# Opportunity Knocks: Will Canada Answer?



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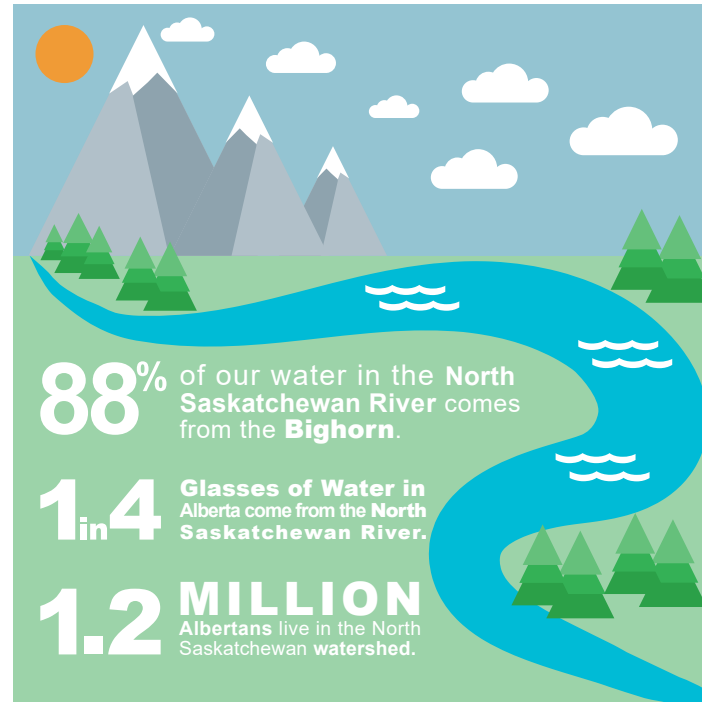
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COVER: Canada Lynx.

Photo by Ryan Peruniak

ABOVE: Barren ground caribou, Seal River Watershed. Photo by Joshua Pearlman

# PROTECTING THE BIGHORN BACKCOUNTRY IN ALBERTA



Conflicting land-uses make the need for protection necessary in the Rockies **BY CHRISTOPHER SMITH**

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the history of conservation in the Bighorn region has been part of a greater unfolding story of conservation and land management throughout the Rocky Mountains. The Bighorn Backcountry is a roughly 6,700 km<sup>2</sup> region comprised of towering mountains, rolling foothills, grassland plains and cascading rivers along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains in central Alberta. The area forms the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River, which runs through Edmonton and into Saskatchewan, providing drinking water to hundreds of communities and millions of people along the way. This same landscape provides high-quality habitat to some of Alberta's most iconic and threatened species, including grizzly bears, wolverines, bighorn sheep, Alberta's provincial fish – the bull trout, cutthroat trout, whitebark pine and limber pine.

For a number of years in the early 1900s, parts of the Bighorn region were included both within Jasper National Park and Rocky Mountains Park (now known as Banff National Park). However, as time went on the park boundaries were consolidated and the Bighorn was excluded. It was eventually designated as part of the Rocky Mountain Forest Reserves in the 1940s. This designation was primarily to ensure the protection of Canada's old forests and the production of new forests, but also to safeguard watershed conditions and ensure current and future water yields in the grassland prairies of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the agricultural heartland of our country.

Since 2002, about 75% of the area has been managed under six separate Public Land Use Zones, which are designed primarily to protect areas containing sensitive resources and manage conflicting land-uses, including industrial and recreational activities. Unfortunately, the Bighorn Access Management Plan which established these areas also lifted the restriction on motorized vehicles, and did not provide mechanisms to effectively manage their impact. The area is currently vulnerable to future industrial development from oil and gas, forestry and coal, as well as increasing usage by high impact recreational activities.

As a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Canada, and in turn the provinces, made a commitment to conserve at least 17% of terrestrial areas and inland water through networks of protected areas and other effective area-based measures by 2020. Although the Public Land Use Zones provide integrated management options, they were never designed to prioritize environmental protection or conservation values, and they lack many of the legislative tools available to parks that help ensure rigorous protection into the future. With its long history of recognition as a valuable area to conserve, outstanding natural values and relative intactness and extent, the Bighorn Backcountry deserves to be protected: if not for those of us here today, then for those who will follow.

To learn more about conservation efforts in Alberta's headwaters, and to speak up for the protection of the Bighorn Backcountry, visit [www.loveyourheadwaters.ca](http://www.loveyourheadwaters.ca).

Facing page: Siffleur River. Photo: T. Russell



# DEEP-SEA NOMINEE

Globally unique reefs may be the next World Heritage Site

BY ELIZABETH GOOD

Estimated to be over 9,000 years old, the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound glass sponge reefs are one of the oldest ecosystems on earth. The globally unique reefs are recognized as an international treasure and have been added to Canada's tentative list for World Heritage Sites.

The reefs were nominated by the Central Coast First Nations, specifically by the Chiefs of the Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xai'Xais, Wuikinuxv and Nuxalk Nations, and supported by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and CPAWS.

While the reefs were discovered by Canadian scientists in 1987, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) has worked to protect these reefs for over 15 years. In February 2017, conservationists celebrated the protection of these reefs with the announcement of the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound glass

sponge reef marine protected area. In December 2017, Parks Canada selected eight out of 43 nominated sites to include on Canada's tentative list for World Heritage Sites. World Heritage Status will be determined by the World Heritage Committee over the next few years.

Glass sponge reefs are entirely made of glass (silica), making them fragile to fishing gear and anchors. Designating the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte reefs as a marine protected area prohibits bottom contact fishing within a 100 km radius of the reefs. A World Heritage Site designation would provide international recognition to the reefs, as well as help ensure their protection so that future generations may experience their unique values.

Glass sponge reefs were previously thought to have gone extinct 40 million years ago. Scientists studied their

## WHAT IS A WORLD HERITAGE SITE?

In 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted a convention to preserve and protect cultural and natural heritage sites around the world that are of outstanding value to humanity. Canada is proud to be home to 18 World Heritage Sites, including Nahanni National Park, the Rocky Mountain Parks, and Gros Morne National Park.

fossilized cliffs across Europe prior to identifying living glass sponge reefs in British Columbia. The glass sponges were one of the first forms of complex life to evolve, giving the reefs a significant role in the evolution and development of marine ecosystems, both ancient and modern.

The Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound glass sponge reefs are found more than 100 metres below the surface and cover a discontinuous area of 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Glass sponges can be found around the world, but glass sponge reefs are unique to British Columbia and southern Alaska. The sponges fuse their skeletons together to build a rigid but delicate framework, reaching heights of a 7-storey building. As the largest known living glass sponge reefs, the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound reefs provide scientists with a unique window into prehistoric ecosystems, and biological processes.

Glass sponge reefs provide important deep-sea habitat for a host of species, from prawns to 100-year-old rockfish and sharks. The reefs are also designated as a "Marine Sanctuary" by Central Coast First Nations due to their ecological and cultural importance. CPAWS looks forward to helping progress World Heritage Status with the Central Coast First Nations in the hopes that the globally unique reefs receive the international recognition they deserve.



Canada's public lands and waters: more than just a place for adventure. Photo: Adobe Stock

## THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

Taking our duty seriously – Why CPAWS works to protect *public* lands and waters

BY ALISON RONSON

The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society advocates for the protection and conservation of public lands and waters. Unfortunately, not many Canadians understand the difference between public and private land protection, and CPAWS is often asked if we purchase property. The answer is no – we do not buy private land for conservation purposes – instead, we work with government, industry, and local and Indigenous communities to protect *public* land for the benefit of everyone – for now, and forever.

### WHAT IS PUBLIC LAND?

Public lands and waters are held and managed for all Canadians by our federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments. These lands and waters are held in the public trust – meaning that they are supposed to be managed for the benefit of both current and future Canadians.

### WHY DOES CPAWS FOCUS ON PUBLIC LAND CONSERVATION?

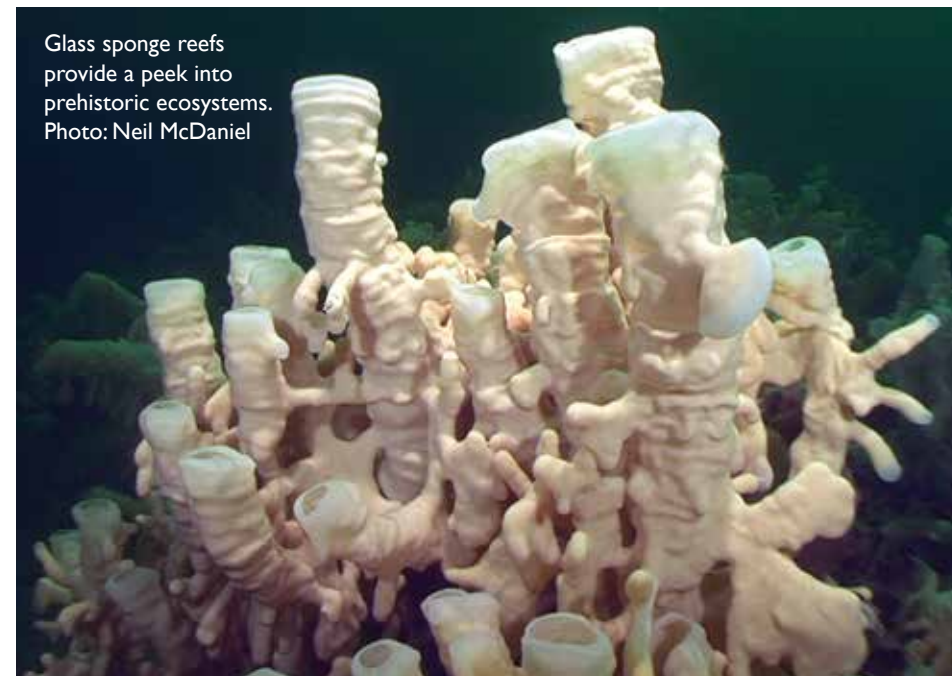
The simple answer is that 90% of Canada's land, and 100% of our oceans, are publicly held. If we don't protect public land and waters, we're missing out on the biggest opportunities for conservation.

It is also our collective duty to ensure that governments manage Canada's natural resources and wild spaces responsibly so that

future generations can benefit from their existence. Canadians are charged with safeguarding Canada's wilderness and wildlife in a way that leaves our natural heritage intact for our children and grandchildren – and which also respects the inherent right of nature and wild animals to exist.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO CANADIANS?

Public lands and waters provide so much to us – from clean air to fresh water, from opportunities for spiritual growth to illness prevention, from quiet walks in local parks to life-altering backcountry adventures. For these reasons – and many more – CPAWS takes its role as advocate for public land and water conservation very seriously. We continue to work day in and day out to fulfill our duty – for us, for you, and for future generations.



Glass sponge reefs provide a peek into prehistoric ecosystems. Photo: Neil McDaniel

# OPPORTUNITIES ALIGNING FOR POLAR BEAR PROTECTION IN MANITOBA

Two large sources of funding could be the key to protection of land and inland waters  
BY JOSHUA PEARLMAN AND RON THIESSEN

The federal budget recently allocated \$1.3 billion over 5 years “to expand protected areas and help endangered and threatened species”. Shortly after this announcement, Manitoba unveiled a lump-sum endowment of \$102 million in a ‘Conservation Trust’, promising to generate an estimated \$5 million annually in perpetuity. The money is intended for conservation initiatives throughout the province with emphasis on those that work toward protecting ecosystems and green infrastructure, including through wetland restoration and creation.

Though full details of the Trust are pending, CPAWS sees opportunities as both announcements align with government pledges to support the protection of at least 17% of lands and inland waters in Canada by 2020. Key to the conservation funding puzzle are federal funds earmarked to “build Indigenous capacity to conserve lands and species”.

Together, these two large sources of funding for conservation can work together to move the needle on protected areas in this province, while supporting Indigenous-led conservation initiatives and affirming the rights of Indigenous people. The opportunities in Manitoba are hard to miss.



Standing out as a prime candidate is the proposed protected area adjacent to the Hudson Bay coast and existing Wapusk National Park, habitat of the western Hudson Bay polar bear population.

Unlike most populations, pregnant polar bears in western Hudson Bay use earthen dens on land rather than dens on the sea ice. This region of interest hosts a great concentration of these dens and thus is critical to this population. It doubles as important habitat for a cacophony of other northern resident and migratory species, and forms the western extent of the Hudson Bay lowlands, one of the most carbon-dense terrestrial landscapes on earth. The region also holds potential for growth in locally led, sustainable, low-impact ecological and cultural tourism industries.

When proposed by the former provincial government, the polar bear protected area proposition came as a surprise, not least of all to the Indigenous communities whose traditional territories, and resource management areas stood to be impacted.

The Minister of Sustainable Development in Manitoba has made clear the province’s interest in continuing the effort to see protections in this region and in ensuring it is advanced not by surprise announcements, but through rights-affirming partnerships with the Indigenous communities on that landscape.

To date, Manitoba has protected approximately 11% of its wild lands and freshwaters. With federal conservation funds flowing to Manitoba and Indigenous nations, the government would be remiss to not use this great moment to accelerate its historically slow-paced track record on landscape conservation while strengthening their relationships with Indigenous governments.

Left: Minister of Sustainable Development, Rochelle Squires (pictured with CPAWS Manitoba Executive Director, Ron Thiessen) speaks to CPAWS Manitoba supporters at the chapter’s 25th anniversary celebration. Photo: Josh Pearlman. Facing page, top: The Hudson Bay lowlands are a peatland complex with some of the highest carbon densities on the planet. Photo: Jim Fowler. Facing page, bottom: Polar bear denning sites are a major focus of proposed lands conservation near the Hudson Bay coast. Mother polar bears fast up to 8 months of the year over which they birth and nurse their cubs in earthen dens. Photo: Debra Garside



# VICTORY DANCE

Celebrating a historic victory for the Peel  
BY NADINE SANDER-GREEN

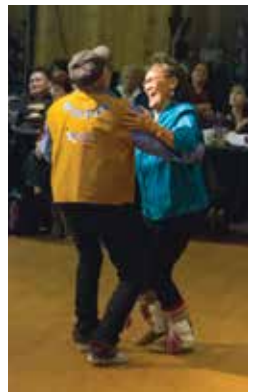
**O**n December 1st, 2017, three Yukon First Nations and two conservation groups won a landmark Supreme Court of Canada victory that ensures protection for the majority of the Yukon's Peel Watershed. The ruling ends a three-year legal battle between the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, the First Nation of Na Cho Nyäk Dän, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, CPAWS Yukon, and the Yukon Conservation Society, who took the Yukon government to court over its breach of the First Nations Final Agreements.

It is a massive win for Yukon First Nations, democracy, the environment and everyone who has been working for decades to protect this incredible tract of wilderness.

In early February, northerners gathered in Whitehorse to mark this historic victory.

Seen here are photos of the celebration, which included a story-sharing circle, dinner, speeches, live music and a lot of jigging.

This page, from top: The crowd gathers around the fire for the water ceremony, led by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Elders Clara Van Bibber and Angie Joseph-Rear; Whitehorse's Kwanlin Dun Cultural Centre was packed all evening for the celebration. Photos: Matt Jacques. Left: CPAWS Yukon's Executive Director, Chris Rider, speaks to the crowd about the Supreme Court victory. Below: The evening's speakers take a bow to a rousing applause from the audience. Photos: Dan Bader



Clockwise from above: Na Cho Nyäk Dän Elder Walter Peters leads the fire-lighting ceremony. Photo: Matt Jacques; Jody Overduin and Jimmy Johnny, Na Cho Nyäk Dän Elder and long-time Peel supporter, jig while Ben Chuck and Vuntut Gwitchin Chief, Bruce Charlie entertain on the fiddle; Lorraine Netro and her partner light up the dance floor; One of the Peel Watershed case's lead lawyers, Margaret Rosling, with long-time CPAWS Yukon staff, Jody Overduin and her son, Ekam. Photos: Dan Bader



This stunning landscape gets the protection it deserves.  
Photo: Peter Mather





Banff National Park (Lake Louise) is the flagship of the nation's park system. Photo: Harvey Locke

# BACK IN THE GAME

Federal budget will help Canada in the global fight for nature  
BY ALISON WOODLEY

In February, the federal government invested an unprecedented \$1.3 billion over five years in Budget 2018 to protect Canada's land, freshwater and ocean, and recover species at risk. This was a huge success for CPAWS, having led a year-long effort to secure this funding as part of the Green Budget Coalition – a coalition of 19 of Canada's leading environmental organizations. It is also a key next step in the ongoing campaign to ensure Canada delivers on its promise to protect at least 17% of our landscape and 10% of our ocean by 2020. As we highlighted in our 2017 Parks Report, Canada currently lags the world in the proportion of land protected. With only 10.6% protected on land, we rank last among G7 countries, and fourth last among OECD member states.

This is a big problem. While we still have vast expanses of wild land and seascapes, Canada is far from immune from the global biodiversity crisis. A report released last year by our colleagues at WWF Canada showed that half of Canada's monitored wildlife species are in decline, and these populations have plummeted by a shocking 83% on average since 1970. More than 700 species are at risk of extinction in Canada and this list continues to grow each year. Like elsewhere in the world, habitat loss is the primary problem, with industrial and other development pressures continuing to chip away relentlessly at our wilderness landscapes year after year. Climate change is making this crisis much worse. As stewards of a fifth of the planet's wild forests, a quarter of its wetlands and a third of its coastline, we have the opportunity and the responsibility to do better.

Large, connected networks of protected wilderness offer the best hope for vanishing wildlife because they allow wild animals and plants to move unimpeded through the landscape, and to seek refuge from changing climatic conditions.

That's why this big new influx of funding is so important. In Canada, 90 percent of land is public, with most of this area managed by provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments. While details are few, the 2018 budget plan recognizes for the first time the importance of supporting action by all government and non-government partners who can help deliver on Canada's conservation commitments. Making sure enough money flows to Indigenous, provincial, and territorial

governments to support effective new protection on the ground is key to success, and CPAWS will be working to make sure this happens.

Recognizing the leadership of Indigenous peoples is also integral for success. Across Canada, Indigenous governments are identifying significant areas of their traditional territories for protection to safeguard cultural practices that depend on the health of the land. From the rugged wilds of the Yukon's Peel River watershed, to the boreal woodlands of northern Ontario's French River, and beyond, Indigenous peoples are leading efforts to establish and co-manage large protected areas as part of landscape-scale planning initiatives. Support for this work needs to be a core part of the spending plan.

Time is tight to meet the targets—just under three years—but Canada's investment provides new hope. From a recent conservation laggard, our country has the potential to be a global leader again—by meeting the 2020 promise and looking beyond to plan for the much larger-scale protection needed to safeguard our country's wild spaces and wildlife in the decades to come.



The barn owl is one of Canada's species at risk. Photo: Adobe Stock

# OLYMPIC BID 2026

Are we doomed to repeat history?  
BY IAN HARKER

The Olympics have a long history in southern Alberta, back beyond the oft-told tales of 1988. As early as the 1960s, an Olympic bid was proposed using Lake Louise as a ski venue. Canadians rallied against this bid with a clear message that the Olympic games, which lead to unsustainable development pressures, were not in the best interest of our national parks.

When the opportunity came to bid on the 1988 Olympic games, CPAWS and other conservation groups made it clear they would not support a bid that included our national parks. The 1988 bid was successful in large part because none of the ski venues were within parks or protected areas.

The recent buzz of a 2026 Calgary Olympic bid has once again raised the issue of using Lake Louise as a ski venue. Canadians have repeatedly rejected this misguided idea in the past – why is now any different? In the face of declining wildlife

populations, declining ecosystem health, and the impacts of climate change, why would we impose more pressure on our most iconic national park?

Canadians expect that national parks, such as Banff, are protected from the scale of development the Olympic games would bring. Thirty years on, the size and impact of the Olympics have increased significantly. Both PyeongChang and Sochi built venues in protected areas, to the detriment of their environment. This is not the kind of legacy we want in Canada's parks – supposedly, our most protected places.

We must remember and learn from the past, ensuring that an Olympic bid is consistent with the principle of "nature first" in our parks and protected areas. The last two winter Olympics have fallen short of honoring this principle. Let's hope for a better future.

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## 2018 AGM NOTICE

The CPAWS Annual General Meeting will be held via conference call at 8:00 PM (ET) on September 24, 2018. For more information, please contact us at [info@cpaws.org](mailto:info@cpaws.org) or 1-800-333-9453



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