



A Collaborative Vision for Alberta's Nature Strategy

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Signatories



ALBERTA
Native Plant
COUNCIL



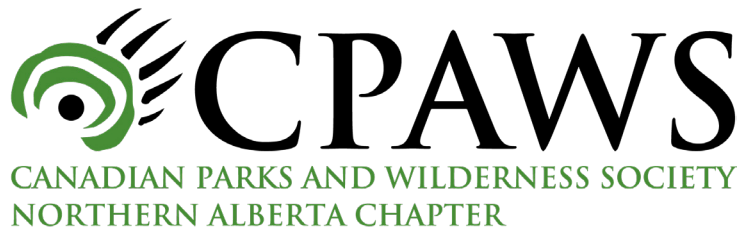
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Executive Summary

As a collective of organizations concerned about nature, we present “*A Collaborative Vision for Alberta’s Nature Strategy*,” a unified vision to address the escalating biodiversity and climate crises threatening our province. Alberta must embrace its responsibility to protect nature to create a future where both people and wildlife thrive.

Our strategy outlines a plan rooted in proven, measurable actions that can halt and reverse biodiversity loss while safeguarding the ecosystems that all Albertans rely on. We call for an Alberta-wide Nature Strategy that aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and, as countries and subnational governments have committed to around the globe, commits to protecting 30% of our land and water by 2030. This strategy is not just an environmental imperative; it is essential to the health, well-being, and resilience of our communities, economy, and cultural heritage.

Key pathways identified within this ENGO endorsed nature strategy include:

1. Comprehensive land use planning
2. Expanded network of parks and protected areas
3. Indigenous-led conservation
4. Habitat conservation and restoration
5. Sustainable economic opportunities
6. Nature-based climate solutions

We must restore ecosystems, secure habitat for species at risk, and ensure Alberta’s natural resources are managed sustainably. Specific actions include committing to expanding our parks network, including designating areas that were committed to long ago, completing and implementing range plans and recovery plans for caribou and other species at risk, banning coal mining in the eastern slopes, and ensuring that industry cleans up damage they have done to nature. The strategy and resulting actions must also include a full integration of Indigenous leadership in conservation efforts and recognize the value of nature-based climate solutions—restoring wetlands, grasslands, and forests as key carbon sinks that support Alberta’s climate resilience.

Our collective voice champions a future where biodiversity flourishes, ecosystems become more intact, and that will benefit future generations. A nature strategy can only be successful if it commits to ambitious actions to strengthen nature protection and restoration to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. Current land management actions have not been sufficient. By working together—across sectors, governments, and communities—Alberta can take its place as a leader in addressing the global biodiversity crisis.



photo: Gillian Chow-Fraser

Introduction

Now, more than ever, it is important that Albertans work collaboratively towards a shared vision for the future where nature can thrive. Alberta can play an important role in addressing the dual biodiversity-climate crises by developing a strong Nature Strategy. Such a strategy can, in turn, provide countless benefits to wildlife, habitat, and human communities – including ensuring clean air and water, drought and flood mitigation, and resilient recreation, and tourism economies.

Our province is not immune to biodiversity loss, and Albertans care.

Indeed, [polling](#) conducted in late 2022 found that 95% of Albertans are concerned about the loss of wildlife, with the vast majority (77%) supportive of increasing protected areas to safeguard wildlife habitat and prevent further decline of wildlife populations, and more land in Alberta being left as wilderness where human activities are minimal (76%). As it stands, however, over 90 Alberta species are listed under the federal Species at Risk Act and the Alberta Wildlife Act. This is largely due to habitat loss or fragmentation, and includes iconic species like woodland caribou, bison, and three species of native trout.

Moreover, as the climate changes, habitats, and the broader ecosystems – which offer important climate mitigation and refugia – continue to be severely impacted by unsustainable land-uses, which threatens the water security of downstream communities and increases the cost of the infrastructure that will become necessary to replace lost ecosystem services.

A Nature Strategy for Alberta must address biodiversity loss, ecosystem function, and water security. It must outline measurable provincial goals and targets and be accompanied by specific actions and timelines that will be implemented over the next decade to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in the province. We must take bold steps to meaningfully protect lands, waters, and communities in our province.





photo: Martin Prentice

The Global Context

In 2022, 196 nations including Canada committed to taking action to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by adopting the Kunming-Montreal [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) under the Convention on Biological Diversity. This framework aims to: *“catalyze, enable and galvanize urgent and transformative action by Governments, subnational and local governments, and with the involvement of all of society to halt and reverse biodiversity loss...”*

As subnational governments, provinces and territories have important roles and opportunities in meeting the 23 targets outlined in the biodiversity framework, which collectively address the key threats to nature and provide unified guidance to effectively safeguard nature and reverse biodiversity loss by 2050, including the protection of 30% of land and water by 2030. Fulfilling these commitments necessitates collective governmental action. There are key issues in Alberta that align with the threats to biodiversity, and the targets to address them. Thus, there are tangible areas where the province can play a leadership role and take immediate action through the development of a homegrown nature strategy.

It can be difficult to wrap one’s head around how a global framework could be applied in our own backyards, so we’ve provided an overview of what an Alberta Nature Strategy should look like, including pathways with clearly outlined goals and objectives. Under each pathway, we’ve listed the Global Biodiversity Framework targets (in a summarized form) where they are most applicable, to highlight how this strategy effectively addresses nature conservation.

Pathways to a Collaborative Nature Strategy

Vision

Nature is healthy and sustained for, and by, Albertans, with strong government commitments and actions to maintain, restore, and increase thriving natural spaces and ecological functions that help address the dual climate and biodiversity crises.

Guiding Principles

- **Meaningful Action:** Commit to implementing clear actions that will result in tangible change for nature and are aligned with the interests of Albertans.
- **Effective Conservation:** Contribute towards reaching the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, with a commitment to measuring and meeting the indicators for the targets each pathway is associated with.
- **Reconciliation:** Respect and recognize the importance of Indigenous-led conservation, values, knowledge, and Treaty Rights.
- **Community Involvement:** Ensure accountability and transparency through meaningful engagement with communities.
- **Sustainability:** Support long-term conservation and climate action, while empowering sustainable economic opportunities.
- **Comprehensive Planning:** Conduct holistic planning and decision-making processes, accounting for all aspects of biodiversity and climate change.

Working Together

Achieving nature conservation in Alberta requires a collective effort from all sectors of society. Governments, businesses, communities, and individuals must collaborate to address the complex challenges. By working together, we can pool resources, share knowledge, and implement effective strategies that ensure the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable provision and use of ecosystem services.

Pathways

Opportunities to protect nature in Alberta will need a suite of approaches, or pathways, to address the key threats across diverse landscapes. No singular pathway will allow us to achieve conservation of the natural system and stem the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Likewise, all pathways are needed across the landscape to achieve holistic, meaningful outcomes. Key pathways needed in an Alberta nature strategy include:

Key pathways needed in an Alberta nature strategy include:

- ▶ **Comprehensive land use planning**
- ▶ **Expanded network of parks and protected areas**
- ▶ **Indigenous-led conservation**
- ▶ **Habitat conservation and restoration**
- ▶ **Sustainable economic opportunities**
- ▶ **Nature-based climate solutions**

For each pathway we have outlined the goals or broad courses of action to achieve the vision of the nature strategy over the long-term, as well as several objectives – specific and measurable actions that can be taken to advance the broader goals and overall vision. We have also listed some examples of clear and actionable opportunities that are specific to the Alberta ecological and policy context that if implemented would meaningfully protect and restore biodiversity and natural ecosystem services across the province. While there are many approaches and tools that can be used in Alberta, they must address the key threats and lead to clear positive outcomes for nature and biodiversity.

Goals: Broad courses of action to achieve the desired outcome (vision) over the long-term.

Objectives: Measurable actions to prioritize in the short-term towards achieving the broader goals and visions.

Examples: Clear and actionable opportunities specific to Alberta that address key threats and lead to positive outcomes for nature and biodiversity.

► Comprehensive Land Use Planning

Land use planning is essential to appropriately manage increasingly busy landscapes across Alberta. Past and current levels of disturbance from energy, forestry, and other high impact activities have reduced the amount and quality of intact habitat needed for wildlife, ecosystem services and nature-based climate solutions as well as opportunities for low-impact recreation and sustainable economies.

Alberta's Land Use Framework was released in 2008 and provides the foundation for comprehensive land-use planning. However, land-use plans have not been completed for many regions of the province and detailed land use plans are lacking. Land use planning processes should be completed, with a focus on entire ecosystems and watersheds, and should include enforceable and quantitative limits on cumulative impacts of all types of land uses. The goal of land use planning should be ensuring functioning and connected terrestrial and aquatic habitats, which subsequently provide long-term opportunities for cultural, economic, social, and health benefits for Albertans.

Goals

- Restore ecosystem functions by increasing and maintaining the area of intact ecosystems.
- Improve watershed health and connectivity.
- Prioritize low-impact land uses and create opportunities for sustainable economic development.
- Increase equity in accessing and connecting with nature.

Objectives

- Use best available science and data to determine biodiversity indicators and ecological thresholds for informing land use decisions.
- Complete comprehensive land use planning to reduce the cumulative footprint of multiple land uses (e.g. forestry, coal mining, agriculture, and recreation) including minimizing linear disturbances (e.g. from seismic lines, forestry roads, and recreational trails).

Examples of Alberta Specific Opportunities

- Complete regional and sub-regional land use planning under the Land Use Framework that assesses landscape values and cumulative impacts of all land uses and prioritizes maintenance and improvement of ecosystem functions.
- Complete recreation planning as part of broader landscape planning initiatives to ensure appropriate siting, avoidance, maintenance and management of trails and trail use, to reduce ecological impacts and improve user experience.
- Align and update land and water legislation and regulatory and enforcement measures with ecosystem goals to ensure land use does not impact important water sources or sensitive ecosystems.
- Prioritize areas of high biodiversity and nature-based climate solution value in land use decisions.
- Ensure annual budgets for Environment and Protected Areas, and Parks are adequate to enhance nature conservation. This should include the assessment of equity in accessing public lands, including an analysis of user fee systems (e.g. fees for accessing recreational areas) to ensure fees do not present a financial burden and are allocated to the restoration, conservation, and management of areas, without replacing existing funding.

Addresses Global Biodiversity Targets

Target 1: Plan and manage all areas to reduce biodiversity loss

Target 21: Accessible data and information to guide decision-makers, practitioners, and the public

Target 23: Equality in conservation and access to the land

► Parks and Protected Areas

Protected areas play a key role in recovering species at risk, providing ecosystem services and recreation and tourism opportunities, supporting climate action, and maintaining local economies. Currently at only 15% of the land base, Alberta's protected area network must expand, with Indigenous leadership and collaboration, to provide equitable recreational and cultural opportunities and improve conservation of the province's diverse ecosystems and wildlife. According to a 2022 poll, approximately 85% of Albertans are in favour of the province committing to protecting 30% of its land for conservation purposes by 2030. Existing parks and protected areas must also continue to be managed with ecological integrity as the top priority, and in a way that is publicly transparent and accountable. As Alberta is currently developing its next 10-year vision for our parks through the [Plan for Parks](#) process, now is the time to commit to an expanded protected areas network.

Goals

- Increase the size, number, and connectivity of parks and protected areas
- Expand the protection of underrepresented ecoregions (e.g. native grasslands and areas within the Parkland and Foothills natural regions).
- Maintain and improve the sustainable management of existing parks and protected areas.
- Increase Indigenous leadership and public involvement in designation and management decisions.

Objectives

- Create and implement a roadmap for protecting 30% of Alberta's lands by 2030 in a way that meets international standards of protection.
- Pursue co-management and Indigenous-led conservation in park and protected area designations and management.
- Support accessibility and connection to nature through the creation of urban parks and improved educational resources.
- In suitable areas where accepted international criteria are in place and enforced, explore the use of alternative area-based conservation measures, including Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs).
 - OECMs are defined by the Government of Canada as “a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.”

Examples of Alberta Specific Opportunities

- Use the Land Use Framework, Plan for Parks, Environmentally Significant Areas mapping and other processes to designate parks and protected areas across all natural regions and subregions
- Designate areas that were identified in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and South Saskatchewan Regional Plan but have not been acted upon..
- In consultation with Albertans, finalize management plans for all parks and protected areas and produce reports on progress towards achieving management goals.
- Conduct substantial consultation in the development of new parks and public lands legislation that prioritizes conservation, including by increasing and enhancing documentation posted on publicly available platforms, communication tools for building public understanding, and opportunities for meaningful input.
- Support municipalities, First Nations, Métis, and community organizations in accessing federal funding for conservation planning (e.g. ECCC's Indigenous-Led Area-Based Conservation).
- Ensure adequate funding for parks, private land conservation, and public land management and other conservation efforts including adequate staffing, long-term infrastructure, and conservation efforts. Clearly track and publicly report on all park management and funding streams, including from user fees.

Addresses Global Biodiversity Targets

Target 3: Effectively conserved and managed systems of protected areas

Target 12: Increase access to urban nature and biodiversity



► Indigenous-Led Conservation

To achieve effective conservation, it is vital to recognize the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing and leadership in restoring and maintaining biodiversity, act in the spirit of reconciliation, and adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Supporting Indigenous leadership and empowering participation in land use, protected areas, and natural resource management must be done in a manner that is respectful of the interests and guidance of Indigenous groups, supports sustainable economic development, and recognizes the importance of decolonization, righting the wrongs of past and present parks and protected areas management, and acknowledging the interrelationship between people, land, wildlife, and water.

Goals

- Indigenous-led conservation, land management, and traditional stewardship knowledge sharing (where communities are interested) are at the forefront of conservation initiatives in Alberta.
- Indigenous consultation processes for conservation and land management decision-making are meaningful and respect treaty.

Objectives

- Empower Indigenous-led conservation and co-management of protected areas.
- Collaboratively support the development of a legislative framework, designed by Indigenous Peoples, for the designation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) or other area-based conservation initiatives.
- Engage in substantial and timely consultation with Indigenous Peoples (e.g. in the development of new parks and public lands legislation or other major land use changes or legislation), including government to government consultation and planning, and clear pathways for how consultation will be incorporated and reflected in the development of plans and legislation.

Examples of Alberta Specific Opportunities

- Support Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area proposals (e.g. Dene Tha' First Nation's proposal to protect the area around Bistcho Lake) and other Indigenous-led conservation initiatives.
 - IPCAs are a relatively new conservation tool focused on protecting nature and cultural values while elevating the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous communities. IPCAs are defined as "lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems". IPCAs can help in achieving conservation goals and elevate Indigenous communities in land use management, resource management, and conservation. Through respect for Indigenous Peoples as primary decision-makers on their lands, IPCAs can contribute towards reconciliation.
- Communicate to Indigenous leaders that Alberta is open to IPCA and other area-based conservation proposals.
- Incorporate Indigenous knowledge into land use decisions (e.g. knowledge provided by Elders about the Wabasca Wood Bison herd to inform industry activity in important habitat).

Addresses Global Biodiversity Targets

Target 22: Respect rights and culture of Indigenous Peoples and local communities

► Habitat Conservation and Restoration

Fulfilling Alberta's commitment to biodiversity, including recovering populations of federally and provincially listed Species At Risk, requires both a preventative and restorative approach. Efforts to protect and connect natural habitat at a landscape level will prevent further habitat degradation, fragmentation, and associated recovery costs. The implementation of species recovery plans, including restoration and reclamation of damaged habitat would contribute significantly towards halting and reversing biodiversity loss. Preventing and managing the influx of invasive species is also crucial but must be recognized as one piece of the larger puzzle, which requires committing to timely action in fully implementing federal and provincial species at risk recovery plans and preventing species from becoming At Risk.

Goals

- Species at Risk populations stabilize and increase, leading to species recovery.
- No new Alberta species are classified as Species at Risk, because populations become stable or increasing.
- Maintain and restore habitat for plant and wildlife species, particularly Species at Risk.
- Prevent additional habitat loss in key biodiversity areas or habitat for Species at Risk.
- Improve habitat connectivity.

Objectives

- Prioritize biodiversity conservation in provincial budgets, land use planning, and regulating industry.
- Fulfill recovery requirements for listed Species at Risk including aligning provincial legislation, regulations and industry standards with Critical Habitat protection for Species at Risk.
- Protect habitat for listed Species at Risk and other areas of high biodiversity through new and expanded protected areas.
- Build engagement with stakeholders, including industry stakeholders, to understand and support the needs of Species at Risk.
- Continue efforts to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- Identify and protect areas important for ecological connectivity.
- Restore key watersheds, areas of high biodiversity value, and habitats for Species at Risk.
- Dedicate resources to understanding population trends for species that are currently considered data-deficient.

Examples of Alberta Specific Opportunities

- Complete and implement recovery plans for species listed as threatened or endangered under the Wildlife Act and Species At Risk Act (e.g. implementation of the westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, Athabasca rainbow trout, wood bison, and grizzly bear recovery plans, and completion of caribou sub-regional plans).
- Conduct recovery efforts towards wood bison populations, particularly the Ronald Lake and Wabasca herds on provincial lands.
- Support municipalities, First Nations, and community organizations in accessing federal funding to support ecological connectivity (e.g. Parks Canada's National Program on Ecological Corridors).
- Complete [Alberta's Biodiversity Policy](#) and develop and implement Biodiversity Management Frameworks for all Land Use Plans

Addresses Global Biodiversity Targets

Target 4: Halt and reduce species extinction rates

Target 5: Ensure sustainable use, harvest, and trade of wild species to prevent ecological impacts

Target 6: Manage invasive alien species

Target 9: Sustainable management of wildlife species

Target 14: Integrate biodiversity and its multiple values into policies, regulations, planning, and development processes

Target 19: Increase financial resources to implement biodiversity strategies and action plans

► Sustainable Economic Opportunities

When managed well, Alberta's natural ecosystems support endless economic opportunities, including vital ecosystem services, sustainable natural resource extraction, sustainable agriculture, ranching, recreation and tourism. Unfortunately, current management of public lands has not been sufficient to maintain wildlife populations and ecosystem services. With increased concerns over Species at Risk, water quality and quantity, air quality, and flood and drought risk, it is time for us to plan long-term and ensure the economic opportunities we pursue are sustainable. This must be done by developing and enforcing strong, up to date, cross-jurisdictionally collaborative, and comprehensive regulatory and non-regulatory efforts to avoid irreversible damage from industrial activities, such as oil and gas, forestry, and coal mining. If done correctly, these efforts can support economic benefits for Albertans, with long-term mutually positive outcomes for wildlife and future generations.

Goals

- Alberta's economy is diversified and prioritizes sustainable activities and land uses that maintain and enhance ecosystem function and support the long-term health of communities.

Objectives

- Develop and implement an updated economic framework prioritizing ecosystem integrity in managing and regulating industrial activities (e.g. nature positive economics).
- Prevent future cumulative ecological impacts from natural resource exploration and extraction in key watersheds, areas of high biodiversity, key connectivity areas, and habitats for Species at Risk.
- Reduce the ongoing harm of previous industrial activities by investing in a restoration economy and allocating adequate resources to habitat restoration.
- Reduce and reform coal, forestry, oil and gas subsidies and redirect funds to nature-positive economic development.

Examples of Alberta Specific Opportunities

- Dedicate resources to understanding population trends for species that are currently considered data-deficient.
- Conduct an open and transparent analysis of oil and gas and legacy coal mine liabilities, followed by adequate funding mechanisms dedicated towards the cleanup of closed and abandoned sites.
- Develop a policy that prioritizes the cleanup of orphan wells (and potentially other industry impacts) in areas of high biodiversity value.
- Update forest legislation to conserve and maintain healthy forest ecosystems.
- Develop a new legally enforceable coal policy or legislation, banning exploration and extraction in the Eastern Slopes.
- Develop an integrated plan for terrestrial and aquatic conservation, and protection against pollution, regarding future extraction of critical minerals.
- Allocate funding for resource dependent communities to ensure a fair transition to more sustainable economic opportunities for workers and families.
- Improve restoration processes and standards to mandate timely and effective remediation of sites damaged by industry, including creating opportunities for Indigenous leadership in restoration.
- Participate in cross jurisdictional collaboration to develop comprehensive effluent management plans that prioritize environmental concerns and reduce or eliminate impacts to downstream communities.
- Reassess buffer areas where renewable energy development is prohibited to include ecological considerations and apply these to all industrial development.
- Collaborate with the federal government to collectively plan and manage resource development to avoid Critical Habitat and to improve permitting and enforcement processes for projects that may incidentally impact critical habitat for Species at Risk.

Addresses Global Biodiversity Targets

Target 2: Restoration of degraded ecosystems

Target 7: Reduce the negative impact of pollution on biodiversity

Target 10: Agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and forests are sustainably managed

Target 15: Take legal, administrative, and policy measures to encourage and enable transparent and accountable business

Target 18: Identify, reform, and phase out incentives harmful to biodiversity

► Nature-Based Climate Solutions

Alberta's natural spaces provide clean drinking water, carbon storage, flood and drought mitigation, and food and habitat for wildlife. Investing in solutions to enhance the protection of nature and combat climate change enhances these benefits and actions to support Albertans. Nature-based solutions to climate change seek to prevent further release of atmospheric carbon or protect or enhance a natural ecosystem's ability to absorb carbon. These actions can also increase the resiliency of the natural ecosystems and the natural services we rely on such as flood and drought mitigation. Often, this is achieved through landscape conservation and restoration. Nature-based solutions are often more cost-effective in the long-term than other approaches to climate change mitigation and can produce important socio-economic benefits for the environment, communities, and local economies.

Goals

- Reduce emissions through nature-based solutions such as climate-smart agriculture, restoring natural ecosystems, and preventing disturbance of areas with high concentration of soil carbon.
- Focus on conserving and restoring ecosystems that store large amounts of carbon or are crucial for carbon sequestration and biodiversity such as grasslands, forests, and wetlands.
- Improve land management practices to increase carbon sequestration and enhance ecosystem resilience.
- Use natural infrastructure and emulate natural processes, such as reintroduction of beavers and restoring natural water flows in wetlands.

Objectives

- Implement large-scale restoration projects on public lands and support landowners with incentives for conservation practices.
- Expand protected areas to include areas of high carbon storage and/or importance for climate resilience or adaptation.
- Develop and enforce guidelines for sustainable logging, reforestation, and fire management that focus on climate resiliency.

Examples of Alberta Specific Opportunities

- Halt peat mining activities and minimize other industrial activities that damage high-soil carbon areas.
- Finalize and implement subregional plans for caribou, a species that overlaps with wetland areas.
- Develop comprehensive headwaters management plan and water conservation objectives for all watersheds.
- Conduct an analysis of carbon sink capacity and use this in identification of protected areas and land use management decisions.

Addresses Global Biodiversity Targets

Target 8: Minimize the impacts of climate change

Target 11: Restore, maintain, and enhance ecosystem functions and services

Target 16: Encourage and enable sustainable consumption

Target 20: Strengthen capacity building, development, and technical and scientific cooperation

