



Draft Northwest Territories Conservation Areas Action Plan 2015-2020

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the draft Northwest Territories (NWT) Conservation Areas Action Plan 2015 - 2020?

The draft Conservation Areas Action Plan (the draft Action Plan) proposes actions the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) will take during the next five years to move forward with conservation planning.

It is based on the principles of the “*Northern Lands, Northern Leadership: the GNWT Land Use and Sustainability Framework*” (LUSF). Objectives in the draft Action Plan relate to the:

- development of an NWT conservation areas network strategy;
- creation of appropriate legislation, policy and a decision-making framework to support conservation planning;
- concluding the planning and decision-making processes for existing candidate areas from the NWT Protected Areas Strategy; and,
- implementation of ecological representation network planning, a priority in the LUSF.

More information on the LUSF is available online at: www.lands.gov.nt.ca. For more information on existing candidate areas, see: www.nwtpas.ca.

2. Who is involved in conservation planning in the NWT?

The GNWT continues to work collaboratively with its conservation partners, including Aboriginal governments and organizations, environmental non-governmental organizations and industry representatives, on the development of an ecologically, socially, culturally and economically sustainable made-in-the-north conservation plan.

3. What is a conservation areas network?

A conservation areas network conserves diverse and healthy ecosystems in a network of areas that maintain the integrity of ecosystems and biological diversity and contributes to ecological, economic and social stability. It includes both core protected areas and conservation areas.

Core protected areas are the backbone of the network as they remain ecologically intact with the highest level of protection, including prohibiting industrial development. Core protected areas are permanent, resilient and are effectively managed and monitored.

Conservation areas protect various natural and cultural values and contribute to the long-term maintenance of ecosystems and biodiversity by providing complementary but less restrictive protection than core protected areas.

The draft Action Plan includes reference to a long-term target for the conservation areas network of 40 percent of the NWT, which will contribute to achieving sustainability. The 40 percent encompasses a target of 20 percent of land in core protected areas and 20 percent in conservation areas with less restrictive protection.

4. How does the draft Conservation Areas Action Plan 2015 – 2020 contribute to sustainability in the NWT?

The draft Action Plan helps create the balance necessary to achieve the sustainability envisioned in the LUSF. The LUSF details the overarching direction for the GNWT on land management. It also outlines the GNWT's commitment to balanced land management decisions, which consider ecological, cultural, social and economic values.

Consistent with the LUSF, the draft Action Plan demonstrates the GNWT's commitment to the conservation of our diverse landscape while recognizing our economic future requires land to be available for resource exploration and development activities.

5. How does the draft Conservation Areas Action Plan 2015 – 2020 contribute to the NWT economy?

The draft Action Plan recognizes that conservation and sustainable development are interrelated and interdependent.

The GNWT continues to recognize, and support, the key role of the resource exploration and development sector in contributing to the economy of the NWT. The GNWT is also exploring ways to diversify our economy by increasing tourism and considering the potential for growth in the conservation-based economy.

Conservation planning is an important component in several economic sectors in the NWT and many livelihoods depend on a healthy land. Examples include:

- Traditional economy (harvesting for local foods) contributed over \$9 million dollars in food value to the NWT in 2009.
- Conservation areas supply jobs, revenue, and business opportunities, for example purchasing goods and services from local suppliers.
- Forty percent of NWT residents over the age of 15 spend time trapping, fishing or hunting.

- Tourism brings in new revenue to the NWT, for example:
 - Recreation and outdoor tourism contributed \$42 million to the NWT economy in 2014.
 - Visitor spending during 2013/14 was valued at \$132.5 million.
 - Visitor spending at national parks in the NWT during 2009 contributed \$16.4 million directly to the NWT economy.
 - Private and public employment in NWT national parks contributed 183.7 full-time job equivalents.

The draft Action Plan is designed to complement other important GNWT initiatives, such as the NWT Mineral Development Strategy and the Economic Opportunities Strategy, to provide clarity and certainty for industry and investors. This approach is intended to result in the creation of localized, self-sufficient economies in the NWT communities. It will provide clarity and certainty to industry by defining the ultimate extent of the network of areas of special ecological or cultural significance for consideration as protected areas.

The targets in the draft Conservation Areas Action Plan ensure that nearly 800,000km² or 60 percent of land in the NWT, a geographic area larger than the entire province of Alberta, potentially remains open for resource exploration and exploitation.

Development activities may be permitted in conservation areas if they are compatible with the values being protected.

Non-renewable resource research is a component of the detailed assessment of values for all proposed areas. Decisions on boundaries will take into consideration mineral, oil and gas resource values and, where possible, avoid areas of high potential. This follows the standard practice used in the NWT Protected Areas Strategy (PAS). It will remain an objective for any new core protected areas or conservation areas identified in the future.

6. How were the targets in the draft Conservation Areas Action Plan 2015 – 2020 determined?

The conservation targets in the draft Action Plan reflect the appropriate proportion of the NWT to:

- meet GNWT interests of northern control of land decisions;
- establish an ecologically representative network of core protected areas;
- establish processes for meeting conservation objectives; and,
- ensure opportunities for resource exploration and development are maintained.

The long-term target of 40 percent for the conservation areas network includes a target of 20 percent in core protected areas. The remaining 20 percent in conservation areas will achieve a balance with other land interests.

GNWT's three main influences in setting the targets for the land area of the NWT are:

1. Direction in the LUSF to achieve a balance between conservation and opportunities for economic development.
2. GNWT commitment to the 2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada, which require Canada to have at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas and inland waters in core protected areas.
3. Scientific evidence that an average of between 30 to 50 percent of land would be required in protected areas in order to conserve 80 to 90 percent of all species.

The proposed long term target of including 40 percent of NWT land in a conservation areas network is in the middle of the range recommended by conservation science for protected areas. The target of 20 percent in core protected areas and 20 percent in conservation areas with less restrictive protection are not inconsistent with targets set for other jurisdictions.

Currently, 9.16 percent of the NWT is classified under core protected areas and 4.36 percent in conservation areas for a total of 13.52 percent of the NWT land included in a conservation areas network.

7. How do the proposed NWT targets compare to other northern Canadian jurisdictions?

Quebec and Ontario have also established targets for land dedicated to conservation for the northern portions of their provinces.

Plan Nord in Quebec proposes 20 percent in protected areas by 2020 and a broader encompassing target of 50 percent dedicated to environmental protection to safeguard biodiversity and strengthen natural heritage and non-industrial development by 2035.

The Far North Act in Northern Ontario proposes at least 50 percent of the area will be included in an interconnected network of protected areas.

8. Why do we need to protect conservation areas in the NWT?

The GNWT is being proactive in its use of best practices to ensure long-term sustainability for the NWT. It is much more efficient and cost effective to responsibly conserve land now than it is to restore land in the future.

The draft Action Plan outlines a science-based approach to ensure important ecological and cultural resources are protected and biodiversity is not lost due to human activities.

The GNWT recognizes conservation of biodiversity is essential for the long-term maintenance of healthy ecosystems, resources and human well-being. The relatively intact biodiversity of the NWT provides an opportunity, unavailable in most other regions of Canada, to proactively plan for a healthy future for the land, water, wildlife and people.

Species that live in intact landscapes are healthy and better able to adapt to change including the impacts of climate change. Industrial activities can fragment the land. The more fragmented the land, the harder it is for species to thrive. As more activities are being considered, it is vital to use sound proven approaches for conservation planning.

A conservation network which includes protected areas is considered the most effective, efficient and proactive way to protect and maintain ecosystem diversity and health and to ensure development in the NWT is truly sustainable, which is a priority for the GNWT.