The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) is developing a Protected Areas Act to be used for the establishment of permanent protected areas in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The new Act, which was created in collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations, regulatory boards, stakeholders and the public, will provide the legislative framework for protecting, conserving and maintaining biodiversity, ecological integrity and cultural continuity of the NWT through the creation of a network of permanent protected areas that are representative of the ecosystems and cultural landscapes found in the territory.

**What is the purpose of the Protected Areas Act?**

Conservation of biodiversity is essential for long-term maintenance of healthy ecosystems, natural and cultural resources, and human well-being, including food security. In the NWT, the land and water are lifelines for Indigenous cultures and the well-being of all people.

Often, the most biologically diverse areas are also the most culturally rich; they provide long-term opportunities for the development of a diversified economy through tourism, important cultural, recreational and educational activities, and other land-based activities. A conservation network, including protected areas, is an effective and equitable way to ensure the protection of land and culture for future generations.

**Why do we need protected areas legislation?**

The Protected Areas Act will allow us to work collaboratively with Indigenous governments and organizations to establish and manage protected areas in a way that protects biodiversity, ecological integrity and cultural continuity. The proposed legislation will be used to meet the conservation network planning requirements identified in Healthy Land, Healthy People: GNWT Priorities for Advancement of Conservation Network Planning 2016-2021.

Specifically, the GNWT is working in partnership with Indigenous governments and organizations to use the proposed legislation for the establishment of the Dinàgà Wek’èhodì and Ts’ude niiline Tu’eyeta candidate areas, and parts of Thaidene Nëné.

For more information on the Protected Areas Act, contact:

Environment and Natural Resources Conservation Network Planning conservationplanning@gov.nt.ca
The proposed legislation is designed to be flexible in order to ensure the unique needs and features of each individual protected area can be addressed through the establishment and management processes.

Activities that are compatible with protection of biodiversity, ecological integrity and cultural continuity – such as sustainable tourism, traditional economies and conservation economy opportunities – may be allowed. Activities that are incompatible will be prohibited, and any future changes to the boundary of protected areas on public land. The Protection Act was developed through a partnership approach with a Technical Working Group (TWG) for the Protected Areas Act.

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Who was invited to participate in the Technical Working Group (TWG) for the Protected Areas Act?
- K’at’iodeeche First Nation
- Tłı̨chǫ Government
- Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
- Gwich’in Tribal Council
- Sahtu Secretariat Inc.
- Délı̨nę Government
- Salt River First Nation
- Acho Dene Koe First Nation
- Deninu Kue First Nation
- Northwest Territory Métis Nation
- Dehcho First Nations
- Akaitcho Territory Government
- North Slave Métis Alliance
- Ka’a’gee Tu First Nation
- Lutsel K’e Dene First Nation
- Yamoga Land Corporation
- Environment and Climate Change Canada/Canadian Wildlife Service
- Renewable Resources Boards

The Protected Areas Act explicitly recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and treaty rights, including the commitments of land, resources and self-government agreements, and recognizes the role of co-management bodies. Proposed language for the affirmation of these rights was based on the Wildlife Act, with modernizations as proposed by Indigenous governments through the Technical Working Group and consultation.

The Proposed Areas Act will allow for?
- Permanent protection of biodiversity ecological integrity and cultural continuity, and activities that are compatible with those protections.
- Collaborative and cooperative establishment, management and governance arrangements with Indigenous governments and organizations that respect Aboriginal and treaty rights, land claim and self-government agreements.
- Ability to manage allowable activities through permits, zoning or conditions in Regulations or the Management Plan.
- Recognition of the intersection between cultural landscapes and biodiversity protection.
- Opportunities and requirements for engagement of the public in the establishment, management and any future changes to the boundary of protected areas on public land.
- Public protected areas registry that will include relevant information on candidate and established protected areas.
- Requirement for interim protection of candidate areas while they are being evaluated to determine if they should be designated as protected areas.
- Requirement for a management plan for established protected areas.
- Requirement to report at least every five years to the Legislative Assembly on the status of candidate protected areas and on the state of established protected areas and the NWT conservation network as a whole.
- Criteria for making changes to a protected area, if needed.

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A framework for the drafting of the Protected Areas Act was developed through this partnership approach over two years of engagement that included eight TWG meetings and three meetings with the SAG.

The partnership approach was developed to ensure coordination across resource management legislation to reduce the potential for conflict or duplication, and was based on the process used for the development of the Wildlife Act.

Through the partnership process, the TWG and SAG assisted ENR in developing a framework for the drafting of the Protected Areas Act.

There was also an external public review period, in which the general public was invited to provide feedback on summary documents through an online engagement process.

Once the bill was drafted, the GNWT carried out additional formal consultation with Indigenous governments and organizations to determine and address potential impacts the bill could have on Aboriginal or treaty rights.