

CONSERVATION LANDS PROGRAM (CLP) STRATEGIC PLAN

Final – for review

As of March 14, 2023

This CLP Strategic Plan reflects input received from the First Nations Forum, MWAC and the Conservation Lands Partner Program.

This document does not reflect direction, approval, or funding commitments from the Province of BC.

Note: Proposed text boxes are noted in italics.

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To be developed

Message from the Minister

TO BE DRAFTED: A special thanks for the guidance and wisdom of our key partners including the Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council, First Nations- BC Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum and the Conservation Land Programs Partners for helping guide the development of this initial plan. Through strong partnerships, we look forward to achieving the goals established in the Conservation Lands Strategic Plan to help steward the rich diversity and important wildlife for future generations.

References to UNDRIP, Together for Wildlife, Nature Framework, commitment to 30x30, etc. Looking forward to working with First Nations across BC to steward important fish and wildlife habitat embracing traditional knowledge and western science.

Include quotes from all chairs of the 3 advisors

Minister name/etc

Executive Summary

BC has made the call for change! Change is required to achieve the 30% protection by 2030 target to achieve Together for Wildlife Strategy goals. The Conservation Lands Program is ideally positioned to address British Columbia's commitment to advancing reconciliation while achieving provincial, national and international commitments to protect and enhance our rich biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat. Based on a 50-year legacy, the Conservation Lands Program has strong partners committed to stewardship of habitat and demonstrated ability to leverage government investments. With leadership from BC, and in partnership with First Nations, [s.13](#)

[s.13](#)

Inspired by the 2021 report from the Office of the Auditor General, the province worked in partnership with key advisors including the First Nations BC Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum, Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council and the Conservation Land Partner Program members, to develop a strategic plan for this unique and highly valuable suite of land designations, Conservation Lands. With the support of key partners, there are currently approximately 900,000 ha lands in both government administered and non-administered status that conserve fish and wildlife habitats while allowing other compatible uses. With a suite of options for designating lands under the *Land Act* and the *Wildlife Act*,

[s.13](#)

Based on input from all advisory groups, there was a unanimous call to expand and evolve the Conservation Land Program with a key focus on protecting biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat, while advancing reconciliation through new and expanded First Nations partnerships. The Strategic Plan recognizes and is based on strong regional collaboration that include First Nations as partners and engages other organizations to identify, prioritize, steward and monitor lands [s.13](#)

[s.13](#)

Growing and enhancing conservation lands directly helps achieve commitments within Together for Wildlife Strategy and BC's pledge for protecting 30% of BC by 2030.

Building on the past successes, the clear call is to grow hectares and stewardship of conservation lands to steward and restore biodiversity. A strong commitment to build partnerships with First Nations respects BC's commitment to UNDRIP. Local and regional leadership by First Nations and others is fundamental, to embrace both Indigenous knowledge with western science, on the local lands and important habitats. First Nations have a significant partnership role that ensures local knowledge and traditional stewardship practices are heard and integrated at all levels. In true partnership, the Conservation Land Program will contribute on the journey to reconciliation, while healing the land.

The Strategic Plan is based on a foundation of clear goals providing guidance to objectives, indicators and time-bound targets. These goals are intertwined and all need to move forward with increased resources, to ensure that the vision and mission for the Conservation Lands Program become reality.

- Goal 1: Expand and grow the Conservation Lands Program as a set of key tools for stewarding BC's rich biodiversity with a key focus on fish and wildlife habitats, in partnership with rights and title holders and private land interests.

- This focuses on acquisition securing, and legally designating conservation lands.
- Goal 2: Support indigenous-led conservation and increase collaboration with First Nations and others to identify, designate and steward conservation lands to conserve biodiversity including wildlife and fish habitat.
 - This focuses on ensuring partnerships at the local level to identify, prioritize and set direction
- Goal 3 – Restore and enhance biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat within current and future conservation lands
 - This focuses on increasing stewardship and monitoring of all conservation lands
- Goal 4- Increase public accountability and confidence in the role of conservation lands in contributing to collaboration, stewardship and biodiversity
 - This focuses on ensuring compliance and enforcement and tracking progress towards targets

The Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan addresses the province's commitments to the Officer of the Auditor General's recommendations and provides clear direction for the next five or more years. The Province will invest to acquire and secure new priority lands, build partnerships with First Nations, increase stewardship and ensure regular monitoring and enforcement. These investments will be leveraged by the unique existing and future partners who are integral to helping achieve the program's targets. Investing today, will achieve a legacy for BC by building new partnerships with First Nations while stewarding critical lands and habitats for future generations.

What are Conservation Lands?

Two things make the Conservation Lands Program unique in British Columbia – a priority focus on conserving critical fish and wildlife habitat above other considerations, and a 50 plus year history of formalized joint efforts with non-government organizations.

Conservation Lands are lands that are designated for the primary purpose of conserving high value fish and wildlife habitat under the Land Act and Wildlife Act. For over 50 years, Conservation lands have been an important and flexible tool within the Province's "toolbox" of land designation. Traditional indigenous rights such as hunting, fishing and harvesting medicinal plants are all recognized practices on conservation lands. Conservation land designations provide a flexible legal tool to achieve conservation benefits while potentially allowing compatible resource stewardship and use which recognize and conserve wildlife and habitat values as the priority. Legally, conservation lands include sites administered for fish and wildlife management under the Wildlife Act, some of which are designated as Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), some of which include lands owned in fee simple by the government for conservation purposes, and lands owned by other partners and leased to the province for conservation purposes. Conservation lands also include lands over which a recorded 'interest' has been secured for fish and wildlife under the Land Act, but not administration and management authority.

TEXT BOX – Types of Conservation Lands

There are two broad types of conservation lands:

Administered conservation lands

These are lands over which legal administration and management authority have been acquired by way of:

- a. Wildlife Management Area designation under section 4 of the Wildlife Act. [Learn more about Wildlife Management Areas](#)*
- b. Fee Simple acquisition through direct purchase, land exchange, or donation of private land.*
- c. Securement of privately owned land that is leased to the Province, usually for a long-term duration (99 years).*
- d. Crown Transfer of Administration under section 106 of the Land Act, or similar legal mechanism.*

Non-administered conservation lands

These are lands over which a recorded ‘interest’ has been secured for fish and wildlife, but not administration and management authority. The majority of these have been obtained through Land Act mechanisms that either preclude or constrain certain uses or tenures for a specified period of time, or require that the holder of the interest be contacted regarding proposed changes in land use. These legal mechanisms include:

- a. Land Act section 15 Order-in-Council reserve (OIC reserve).*
- b. Land Act section 17 Conditional Withdrawal (or Designated Use Area)*
- c. Land Act section 16 Temporary Withdrawal (or Map Reserve).*

Non-administered conservation land status is often used as an interim “placeholder” status while work is completed to move to formal designation such as a Wildlife Management Area under the Wildlife Act. While Administered conservation lands are generally seen as “protected” in the broadest sense, (and therefore contributory to meeting BC’s 30 by 30 Goal), non-administered lands are not.

Conservation lands are distinct from provincial parks and protected areas which also have a mandate for conservation, but also provide recreation opportunities for visitors. Parks and protected areas also include strong, legislated bans and/or restrictions on resource use activities such as range, timber harvesting, mining, hunting and fishing.

There are other conservation designations, like Wildlife Habitat Areas and Ungulate Winter Ranges that are established under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* and *Oil and Gas Activities Act*. The designations may contribute to the overall network of conservation designations, but because they are implemented to constrain specific extraction activities (e.g., forestry) rather than to define the primary values and compatible activities regardless of sector, they are distinct from the conservation lands, which are explicit in purpose to conserve critical habitats for wildlife. Therefore, while there are various other conservation designation tools, the Conservation Lands Program is specifically and solely focused on identifying, securing and stewarding sites for the priority purpose to maintain critical wildlife and fish habitat values. In a multiple-values framework, as outlined by the IPBES Nature Futures Framework, this work is founded on principles of partnership, inclusion and rights (of people and Nature) as the first priority of the designation.

A unique component of the Conservation Lands Program is its long history of working together in partnerships with non-government organizations, as well as, more recently, Indigenous and local governments to conserve important wildlife, habitat and conservation values. Indigenous partners are increasingly taking a strong leadership role in both determining and stewarding local sites. This partnership approach, inclusive of rights and title holders, is fundamental to the future direction of the

Conservation Lands Program, which can play an important role in supporting indigenous led conservation initiative going forward. These principles, along with the durable mechanisms the CLP is built upon, situate the program to play a key role in transformative change, including potential to significantly contribute to the UN's 2030 and 2050 biodiversity conservation commitments.

As of 2021 the Conservation Lands Program administers approximately 268,000 hectares, complemented by an additional 122,000 hectares of partner-owned lands. Some of the almost 300 sites are internationally recognized and are often prominently located near communities, particularly in southern BC. Partnerships with Indigenous communities in the leadership and management of conservation lands are increasing and are contributing to the stewardship of critical values and cultural practices. Even while currently making up a tiny fraction of BC's total area, these lands contribute Less than 1% to form part of the 15.4% of BC that are broadly defined as "protected" lands.

Looking forward, and in partnership with First Nations, conservation lands provide a flexible and critical tool to help move British Columbia successfully forward to the goal of protecting 30% of the lands and waters by 2030. Conservation lands are well positioned to play a key role in transformative change aimed at improving nature and rights based outcomes, as well as priority candidate areas for increased restoration and stewardship investments.

Text Box: Did you know that conservation lands?

- *Encompass some of BC's most important and biologically productive valley bottoms, estuaries, wetlands, grasslands and other vital habitats.*
- *Support almost 30% of B.C.'s species and ecosystems at risk despite their relatively small footprint in BC.*
- *Provide vital ecosystem services including carbon storage, flood control, and cooling*
- *Support a variety of uses and benefits including subsistence, recreational, cultural and spiritual.*
- *Involve more than 10 key non-government partners beyond the province along with many other volunteer partners.*

First Nation Perspective

The Conservation Land Program recognizes the cultural diversity and uniqueness of First Nations and their Territories across British Columbia. While this plan contains perspectives and content that apply to a Province-wide program, it is also grounded in the understanding that these perspectives are unique for each First Nation. Pre-contact, First Nations ensured their lands and waters were managed in a way that many would today equate with modern 'conservation' values. First Nations were, and continue to be, active participants in the ecosystem, thriving in a reciprocal relationship with their territories and relatives. For example, certain lands were regularly burned in order to maintain the ecosystem's resilience and cycle of renewal. Red stem ceanothus (*ceanothus sanguineus*), as one example, is a primary food source for Mule deer and other ungulates, as well as an important medicinal resource for First Nations, and is entirely dependent on periodic low intensity fire to thrive. By burning these areas regularly, First Nations ensured that the forest understory could provide for the ecosystem, inclusive of the people. There are many examples of the reciprocity of First Nations relationships with the lands and waters now contained in BC, many of which would fit our contemporary definitions of restoration and conservation.

Worldviews, Principles, Rights and Responsibility: Informing a new approach to Conservation Lands

The lands and waters currently known as British Columbia are some of the most culturally and biologically rich on the planet. This is thanks to, in large part, the practices of Indigenous peoples, who shaped the landscape for many thousands of years. One of the many implications of colonialism and settlements over the past 150 plus years is a steep decline in the abundance and resilience of BC's ecosystems- and as a further result, impacted First Nation's abilities to steward and practice traditional practices.

Most of the province remains the unceded territory of First Nations. Reconciliation is an ongoing process based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change. There is a need to cooperatively establish and maintain a mutually respectful framework for living together, with a view to fostering strong, healthy, and sustainable Indigenous nations with a strong British Columbia.

TEXT BOX: CONSERVATIONS LANDS AND FIRST NATIONS: *Historically, the respect and substantive incorporation of First Nations rights and interest in the land and resources was largely absent and only recently has become a cornerstone for new conservation lands such as at Lhá:lt/Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area. Going forward, collaboration and partnerships with First Nations are vital from the planning through the management at the local level.*

British Columbia has committed to reconciliation with First Nations, which in an era of change, will be key to recovering and stewarding the abundance that should thrive here. Reconciliation is inextricably tied to the health and resilience of the land - we must reconcile land stewardship as a key foundation to move forward. Conservation lands offer a unique and important opportunity to meaningfully contribute and collaborate on the stewardship and healing of the lands and waters. By recognizing, upholding and facilitating the rights and responsibilities of First Nations in the protection and stewardship of their Territories, Conservation Lands are an important tool to support BC's commitment to UNDRIP and true reconciliation and partnership.

As we approach a shared understanding of stewardship, Indigenous Worldviews are now reflected more clearly in the principles of the Conservation Lands Program. For instance, the concept that all life is interconnected provides that people are an active part of the ecosystem. This is an important consideration in the context of Conservation Lands, and the role of stewards. Additionally, it is also important to embrace the view that all things have a spirit, and this spirit must be respected.

These views re-iterate the multiple-values foundation that the Conservation land Program supports, captured eloquently by the [Nature Futures Framework](#), which highlights a modern-day view of the multiplicity of relationships between nature and people. As with Indigenous Worldviews, the Nature Futures Framework highlights the relational values of nature as intrinsically valuable, as a utilitarian resource and as a source of culture and cultural diversity. The Conservation Lands Program is uniquely situated to designate and steward the multiple values of nature in a 'wildlife first' way which is central to stewardship and healing.

Ethical Space

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Principles of UNDRIP acknowledge that Truth-telling is a precondition of reconciliation. Recognition that a past and current policies impede the role of First Nation in the governance and stewardship of their lands will help advance BC's commitment to reconciliation.

Ethical Space is a process in which all knowledge systems are validated and equally valued. It is a space where the truth is often found, and a pathway to collaborative stewardship can be achieved. We envision that the Conservation Lands Program will integrate the principles of Ethical Space and ensure that new ideas, innovations and resulting policies will be co-developed.

TEXT BOX: Ethical Space**



Truth telling can be facilitated through a process called Ethical Space. In Ethical Space, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous governments collaboratively develop protocols framed by pre-existing treaties, other agreements, and inherent Indigenous Rights. Scholar Willie Ermine of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation wrote that "Ethical Space is formed when two societies, with disparate world views, are pointed to engage each other". It is a space in which all knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western) are validated and respected (also called two-eyed seeing" and where it is possible to arrive at joint decisions arising out of mutually-agreed to protocols. This is where the process of trust building begins.

*** from BC-First Nation Wildlife and Habitat Forum, [Cultivating Abundance](#)*

British Columbia's Commitment to the Principles of UNDRIP, as provided in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's Act* (2019) (DRIPA), is unwavering. However, tools and opportunities to advance these commitments remain in development. The Conservation Lands Program offers unique opportunities to contribute to these commitments. Collaboration and cooperation with and among First Nations in BC on the development of the Conservation Land Program, as well as all new projects, is one way we ensure that the role of Indigenous communities as stewards of their lands is restored.

INFO PAGE OR COLUMN: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's Act (2019) (DRIPA)

BCs Commitment to UNDRIP is formalized through DRIPA, containing all 46 articles of UNDRIP in Provincial Legislation (2019).

Of particular note are:

Article 18

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 19

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

Article 20

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
2. Indigenous peoples deprived of their means of subsistence and development are entitled to just and fair redress.

Article 24

Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

Article 25

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

Article 26

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.
3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

The Conservation Land Program

The Conservation Land Program achieves its objectives to conserve, restore and enhance critical habitats for fish and wildlife through focus on three key areas:

- **Land Securement** – to acquire, designate or, through other means, secure land or interests in land (both Crown and private) for conservation purposes. Securement often relies on collaborative arrangements to accommodate site-specific issues and circumstances. In the past, this role has included support for the acquisition of private lands by partners. Securing conservation lands, in partnership with First Nations is an important opportunity for BC to advance reconciliation which may include a role to facilitate the securement and management of lands directly by First Nations.
- **Land Stewardship** – following securement, sites move into a land management phase that is focused on maintaining/restoring/enhancing conservation values over time. As with all aspects of the Conservation Lands Program, it is important to recognize that fully integrating an Indigenous worldview with science and adaptive management in the stewardship and management of sites has profound benefits to the ecosystem. This requires working in partnership to co-develop stewardship goals and directives based on shared values while setting objectives that have tangible positive impacts for multiple generations. Partnerships with local First Nations include, but are not limited to, assessing habitats, developing specific management directives, managing public use, monitoring and enforcement to ensure conservation objectives are being met through time.
- **Planning, Policy and Administration** – provide a foundation for managing, planning and reporting on the status of conservation lands. This requires work with legal land interests, developing consistent policies and procedures, administering revenues and taxes, managing data and information, facilitating internal and external communications, developing management directives, new regulatory tools, policies, etc. Moving forward, future policy must adapt as new designations or decisions supporting First Nations reconciliation are implemented.

The *Wildlife Act* was recently amended to ensure that decision-makers are making decisions in an ethical space, where both indigenous knowledge and western science are equally valued and weighted. The stewardship of conservation lands also provides unique potential as an area to advance shared decision-making partnerships, while recognizing the historical success of Indigenous-led conservation.

TEXT BOX: WILDLIFE ACT:

Within the Together for Wildlife Strategy, the Province committed to reviewing the Wildlife Act, in Goal 5, Action 18 “to advance co-management and shared decision-making with Indigenous Governments in British Columbia”. When updating the Wildlife Act, it will be important to address and identify existing and/or new land designations that legally protect fish and wildlife habitats, reflect government’s commitment to UNDRIP, and create opportunities to collaborate with First Nations in stewarding the lands. To support this review, a Conservation Lands Intentions Paper will provide recommendations for proposed legislative amendments to enhance statutory habitat protection measures.

The Power of Partnerships

The Conservation Lands Program has a long history of bringing disparate parties together around a shared value of wildlife and habitat. With early roots in the establishment of 'game reserves' in the early 1900s as part of colonial settlement, these reserves were often identified by hunters and naturalists keen on working together to preserve the intrinsic values and opportunity to recreate.

Formal partnerships with others began in earnest in the 1960s starting with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and expanding over time to include Nature Trust of BC (NTBC), Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF), Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), and Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) of Environment and Climate Change Canada. The partnerships took various forms over the years, and included the private purchase of lands that were then leased back to the province for management.

TEXT BOX - McTaggart-Cowan/nsek'niw't Wildlife Management Area - relatively recent designation; explicitly supported by FN; relatively large in size; Interior example; relatively high profile/known (immediately outside of Penticton); includes NGO lands to support the partnership angle.

The program continues to evolve to become a stronger collaborative effort between governments including First Nations, non-government organizations (NGOs) and other community partners. Moving forward, it is vital to recognize that First Nation's worldviews of nature are cultural, relational and directly tied to land and title. Each conservation land initiative will need to work with the related First Nations, in a full partnership from conception to stewardship. The Conservation Lands Program is a tangible legal approach to using the provincial legal system to achieve legal and value pluralism in how we collectively steward and conserve these lands and waters.

Regardless of the specific form, these partnerships are characterized by many or all of the following:

- **Formal agreements** - defining roles and responsibilities and ensuring a disciplined approach to building and sustaining strong relationships.
- **Collaborative planning and delivery** - to monitor progress and achieve shared outcomes
- **Resource leveraging**- of cash and other resources. For example, a BC government investment of approximately \$64 million into the Conservation Lands Program since 1986 has leveraged an additional \$174 million from NGO and federal partners, for a total of over \$238 million in overall conservation land assets which are now worth many times that amount. NGO partners play a role that governments often cannot, such as bringing philanthropic funding to support conservation.
- **Synergies** - providing access to greater overall expertise, capacity, flexibility and responsiveness to conservation land acquisition and management opportunities.
- **Resilience** – allowing the partnership to collectively weather resource shortages or other challenges affecting any one of the partners.
- **Reconciliation** - Indigenous communities play an integral role in advancing the partnerships, leadership and guidance reflected in effective stewardship on conservation lands.

Meeting Provincial Mandates

Conservation Lands are a central part of the Province's conservation and stewardship goals. Broadly, addressing the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change requires focused efforts to increase conserved lands and restoration of degraded sites in partnership with First Nations Rights and Title holders. Together for Wildlife outlines five goals and 24 actions to improve wildlife stewardship and habitat conservation. Conservation lands are one of the critical tools to help achieve these goals.

Recently the Province of BC committed to global targets of 30% land protected or conserved by the year 2030. New conservation designations and protected areas must be done in partnership with First Nations and it is important that the quality (biodiversity and habitat values, productivity, connectivity, etc.) of areas are contributing to multiple co-benefits (carbon sequestration, recovery of species at risk, ecosystem health and resilience, flood mitigation, fire resistance).

The Conservation Lands Program is positioned to address this clear call for collaboration in securing, stewarding and administering priority lands and habitats. BC is committed to working collaboratively with First Nations to protect wildlife, ecosystems and species at risk, as a pathway to advance reconciliation. Based on DRIPA, and through the implementation of the Together for Wildlife Strategy, there is a renewed commitment to protect and restore British Columbia's biodiversity in partnership with First Nations.

TEXT BOX - Lhá:lt/Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area – relatively recent designation; explicitly supported by FN; Coastal example; relatively high profile/known (good media coverage at time of designation, with ministerial and FN Chief and council attendance); includes NGO lands.

BC has made the call for change! Change is required to achieve the 30 by 30 targets and to achieve Together for Wildlife. This requires significant investments for the acquiring and securing new conservation lands as progress towards the 30% target. Enhancing and restoring the lands will be important for biodiversity values, including fish and wildlife habitat. This also requires resources to support local capacity, including with First Nations.^{s.13}

s.13

These renewed commitments align with BC and Canada's commitment to the Pathway to 30 by 30. Through partnerships with the federal government, industry and communities, and in collaboration with First Nations, BC is committed to leading the work to achieve the Nature Agreement's goals of 30% protection of BC's land base by 2030. This Strategic Plan is intended to achieve multiple goals – support reconciliation, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity and recovery of species at risk. The Conservation Lands Program is positioned to contribute significantly to this target, and to explore new tools and mechanisms, including links to Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, to steward BC's biodiversity.

Given international goals for biodiversity, it is important that the Conservation Lands Program be clearly linked to other planning processes such as Modernised Land Use Planning, Forest Landscape Planning, and other local land use plans as options for conservation designations are identified. Integrating with

other initiatives such as the regional Together For Wildlife planning teams can help ensure a cohesive approach is taken to stewardship of the lands and collaboration across partners and designation types.

TEXT BOX - International Recognition of biodiversity values in conservation lands - Boundary Bay, Roberts Bank, Sturgeon Bank and the South Arm Marshes Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) on the Fraser River are all designated as part of the international Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network ([WHSRN](#)), and the Columbia Wetlands WMA (one of the longest protected, contiguous wetlands in the world, stretching 180 kilometres along the Columbia River basin) is part of the globally significant ([Ramsar](#)) designation.

This Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan provides the foundation for ensuring a strong plan with clear measurable outcomes that will provide direction for the future of the program based on collaboration and partnerships with Indigenous and non-government partners. Together stewardship is achievable.

VISION: Conservation lands contribute to the resilience of BC's rich culture and biodiversity by ensuring that the lands and waters, fish and wildlife habitat, connected to them thrive now and for time immemorial.

MISSION: The Conservation Land Program includes land designation tools that contributes directly to BC's commitments to First Nations partnerships, achieving conservation of 30% of BC s.13 by 2030 and meeting the Goals of Together for Wildlife.

Principles- A special thanks to Together for Wildlife which provided the following strong and relevant principles:

- **Interconnectedness** - We recognize that all living and non-living things and communities are integrally dependent on each other.
- **Trust** - We will build public trust and confidence in land stewardship through our actions.
- **Reconciliation** - We are committed to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples to support conservation and stewardship
- **Collaboration** - We will strengthen partnerships and leadership, especially with Indigenous communities, to achieve the goals of the strategy.
- **Respect** - We recognize and respect that people hold deep and sometimes differing intrinsic, ecological, social, cultural, and economic values for stewardship of our lands.
- **Responsiveness** - We will be proactive and adaptive in responding to new information on conservation and stewardship.
- **Transparency** - We will improve accessibility to information across all aspects of stewardship, including decision-making and administration of funding.
- **Accountability** - We will define measures of success for this strategy, report our performance, and promote actions that improve implementation and success.
- **Evidence-Based Decisions** - We will use evidence gathered through research, monitoring, and experience to inform decisions that includes knowledge gained through both traditional and western based science systems. We will use evidence gathered through research, monitoring and

experience, and as provided by Indigenous knowledge holders and governments to inform decisions with both science and traditional knowledge systems.

- **Balance** - We will work together to improve balance to ensure that habitat stewardship and the economy thrive.
- **Innovation** - We will embrace new technology and approaches to collect, apply and share information, deliver services, and implement practices

Strategic Plan Framework

Stewardship of priority habitats is important to all. Working together towards common goals and objectives will help conserve priority habitats for today and future generations. Tracking our collective progress towards our targets will help inform us on progress and where and when we need to adapt to ensure that our important lands are conserved for our wildlife and other conservation values. The following framework provides a foundation that all partners can work together to achieve the desired outcomes of the Conservation Lands Program. Partnership underlies each goal and objective.

Goals and Objectives

These goals and objectives are interlinked, and together serve as a clear roadmap for the future direction for the Conservation Lands Program. This program will continue to evolve to reflect reconciliation with First Nations, new land designations and legislative changes. Strong policy leadership and vital resource investment are critical to enable the Conservation Lands Program to achieve the goals and objectives of this Strategic Plan. Resources at the regional level are needed to develop direction, support action and monitor progress and ensure that conservation lands help achieve biodiversity and reconciliation targets. This renewed focus requires a fresh commitment to ensuring that conservation lands conserve and steward biodiversity and vital fish and wildlife values for decades and generations to come!

Using specific and concise Objectives and Targets are key components of the Strategic Plan and provide a road map by which to monitor progress towards the goals. Reporting regularly against the Targets will demonstrate whether the operations and implementation are trending towards and/or achieving the ultimate desired outcomes. When targets are not achieved, it is important to review whether operations are progressing towards the desired targets and/or whether they need to be reviewed to ensure that positive traction occurs towards the desired direction.

Goal 1: Expand and grow the Conservation Lands Program as a key solution for protecting BC's rich biodiversity with a key focus on fish and wildlife habitat.

Protecting biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat, is vital to help ensure protection of 30% of BC's lands and waters and Together for Wildlife commitments are achieved. With a prime focus on protecting biodiversity, the Conservation Lands Program has the unique ability to work collaboratively and in partnership, to help achieve provincial, federal and international commitments for protection biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat.

Objective #1-1: To increase hectares of legally designated conservation lands to support BC's commitments to Together for Wildlife and protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030.

Indicator: # of hectares legally designated administered conservation lands, including Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) or other alternative designations

Indicator: # of regulatory tools available to legally designate conservation lands

Indicator: Level of funding dedicated to achieve land acquisition and/or securement targets

Indicator: Actions to strengthen *Wildlife Act* to secure, designate and steward important conservation lands for fish and wildlife habitat

Target 1-1: By 2030, increase hectares of administered conservation lands **s.13**

Target 1-2: **s.13**

Target 1-3: By March 2024, submit an intentions paper with recommendations on how the *Wildlife Act* should be amended to develop new legal tools for conservation land designation and stewardship

Target 1-4: **s.13; s.17**

*Operational Guidance: With the province's commitment to protecting biodiversity, including achieving 30x30, there is a clear need for enhanced provincial resources to increase land acquisition and securement. An Acquisition Plan, based on a regional collaborative planning in partnership with First Nations and input from others, will provide a clear plan for moving towards the 30x30 target. Building capacity at the regional level in government and First Nations is required to identify and prioritize recommended sites for future land acquisitions. In addition, commitment and clear authority at the regional and provincial levels must be in place to enable acquisition and/or securing priority lands. Trust and transparency with First Nations and other partners is vital for adding and/or removing conservation lands within each region. An intentions paper, build through collaboration, will provide recommendations on modernizing the *Wildlife Act* and identify potential new opportunities to secure Conservation Lands*

s.13

Once the Acquisition Plan is achieved, it is expected the related investments would shift from acquisition to stewardship.

Goal 2: Increase collaboration with First Nations and others to identify, protect and steward conservation lands to protect biodiversity including wildlife and fish habitat.

Identifying and stewarding conservation lands for biodiversity, including fish and wildlife, must reflect regional-level decisions that embraces First Nations as true partners. The Province and First Nations must work together collaboratively, while seeking input from key local partners, to determine where and how to enhance stewardship. This collaborative partnership, must exist at all phases from identifying

new priority lands, building management directives, stewarding to monitoring. Including and respecting First Nations knowledge and partnership, will demonstrate progress towards reconciliation while protecting and restoring high value habitat. Overtime, all conservation lands need co-developed management directives in place, while recognizing the initial stages will focus on lands deemed to be highest priority. Developing effective collaborative management directives must be in a timely and efficient manner to facilitate and enable 'on-the-ground' actions in the near future. Management directives will continue to evolve over time to reflect new knowledge and priorities but action is needed now- not after extensive planning. A standardized template for management directives would streamline planning and reporting. Fundamentally, directives are the foundation to serve as a catalyst for improved stewardship of key habitats.

Objective #2-1: Partner with First Nations to identify and determine management direction for all current and future CLP land designations

Indicator: # of collaborative initiatives that are with and/or inclusive of First Nations

Indicator: # of CLP lands that have plans and/or management directives in place

- Target 2.1: By 2030, 100% of all CLP lands include collaborative initiatives, in partnership with First Nations and inclusive of local partners, that reflect both western science and Indigenous knowledge
- Target 2.2: By 2025, a priority list of future CLP lands is in place for each region, built collaboratively with First Nations and inclusive of local partners
- Target 2.3: By 2030, all new and existing CLP lands have a management directive in place, built collaboratively with First Nations, inclusive of local partners, and jointly signed off by decision makers
- Target 2.4: s.13; s.17

Operational Guidance: With BC's commitment to UNDRIP and collaboration, Conservation lands provide an ideal opportunity for partnerships from planning to management between First Nations, the province and other partners. Together it is vital that high priority lands in each region (for existing and future CLP lands) be identified for biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat, through a partnership and inclusive process. Local initiatives such as the Regional Wildlife Advisory Committees could provide an existing platform for ensuring an inclusive planning approach.

Once the high-priority lands are identified for designation, collaborative management directives must be in place to guide stewardship and monitoring. While each Conservation Land has unique and different management needs, a standardized management directive template, will help ensure that standard indicators are addressed while enabling local adaptability. Increased resources are needed at the local level, including with First Nations, to identify, collaborate and plan for the growing amount of Conservation Lands.

This Strategic Plan provides the foundation for standard indicators across all Conservation Lands which can be augmented by additional ones based on local priorities. The ultimate goal is to get action to the ground supported by management directives, which will continue to evolve over time.

Goal #3 – Restore and enhance biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat within current and future conservation lands

Stewardship of conservation lands is important to restore and/or enhance biodiversity, including critical fish and wildlife habitat - all components of BC's commitment to a nature framework. Increased stewardship of high value habitats will contribute to the restoration economy that benefit ecosystems and the communities that thrive within them. Increased stewardship, based on a collaborative management directive, provides increased opportunities for First Nations management, supported by other partners. Progress towards restored and/or enhanced habitats, requires establishing a 2022/23 benchmark for current lands and expand, until all conservation lands are restored and/or enhanced.

Objective #3.1: That the quality of habitat in all conservation lands improves over time

Objective #3-2: Increased investment to better steward conservation lands.

Indicator: # of hectares restored and/or enhanced

Indicator: % of area treated based on total hectares infested with high priority invasive species

Indicator: \$ invested and leveraged by the province and others

Target 3.1: By 2030, at least double the total hectares restored and/or enhanced over 2022/23

Target 3.2: Annually, treat at least 50% of all hectares identified as infested with invasive species

Target 3.3: **s.13; s.17**

Target 3.4: Annually, ensure each conservation land is monitored

Operational Guidance: Increased stewardship requires dedicated provincial resources that can be leveraged from external partners. Management directives for each conservation land provides a solid foundation to determine key restoration and enhancement activities, including identifying priority invasive species. In partnership with First Nations, increased on-the-ground actions will generate local employment, training and skill development through stewardship activities. When considering the benefits linked to the restoration economy, increased activity on the land will result in a growth in benefits for fish, wildlife, habitats, and people. With increased field activities and responsible monitoring, conservation lands will contribute directly to the national and international commitment to restore 30% of degraded habitats. Establishing benchmarks for 2022/23 will provide the foundation for reporting progress toward indicators and targets.

Goal #4- Increase public accountability and confidence in the role of conservation lands in contributing to collaboration, stewardship and biodiversity

Objective #4-1: Ensure each conservation land is monitored and reported on regularly

Objective #4-2: Reduce unauthorized uses on conservation lands

Objective #4-3: Full implementation of all 11 provincial commitments to the BC Auditor General

Indicator: CLP's lands achieving objectives and targets

Indicator: # of illegal uses resolved/unresolved

Indicator: \$ for compliance and enforcement

Indicator: # of provincial commitments to BC Auditor General report addressed

Target 4.1: Annually, 100% reporting from all CLP lands on objectives and indicators

Target 4.1: Annually, 100% of illegal uses responded to within 3 months of the report

Target 4.2: By 2030, no illegal or unauthorized use of conservation lands

Target 4.4: By 2030, 100% of # of provincial commitments to Auditor General report addressed and reported to the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Target 4.5: **s.13; s.17**

Target 4.5: At least every 2 years, report out on progress against Conservation Land Program Strategic Plan

Operational Guidance: Measuring progress within and across conservation lands is important to demonstrate enhanced biodiversity and fish and wildlife habitat. Guided by a Compliance and Enforcement Plan, increased investment is needed to reduce unauthorized uses, to protect biodiversity and conservation values. With increased lands and commitment to stop unauthorized uses, expanded approaches will be needed such as through Conservation Officers, First Nations Guardians and Natural Resource Officers.

Based on the collaborative management directives and/or other tools, reporting annually for standard indicators on all conservation lands is important to demonstrate progress towards the 'standard indicator' referenced in this Strategic Plan. The standard indicators should align, where possible, with existing reporting systems, such as with the Together for Wildlife Strategy and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation to ensure efficiency. With increased resources and investment in stewardship, each site will require regular monitoring to inform the management directives and progress towards achieving the direction of Together for Wildlife and other biodiversity commitments such as 30 x30.

All of these 4 Goals are integrated and critical to achieving progress towards the Together for Wildlife and the 30x30 commitment. Strong provincial policy, supported by significant resources, is required to achieve each of these goals.

Text Box: Restoration Project Example

Nanaimo River Estuary restoration - the largest estuary on Vancouver Island, it is utilized by all five Pacific Salmon species and various other wildlife, including Black-tailed Deer, Black Bear and over 200 species of birds. The estuary is located in the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN), who have sustainably harvested fish, shellfish, plants, and other foods and resources from the estuary for thousands of years. However, industrial and agricultural landscape modifications over the last century had seriously degraded fish and wildlife habitat on the estuary.

Elders from the SFN identified the Nanaimo River estuary as a high priority for restoration. Working with The Nature Trust of BC (TNTBC, who own a portion of the estuary) and using funding provided by Canada and BC, SFN and TNTBC jointly developed a restoration plan and then worked together to:

- remove three kilometres of agricultural berms, restoring vital tidal flow to productive mudflats;*
- remove 800 truckloads of riverbed gravel to restore a natural flow regime, improving salmon spawning success; and*

- *plant thousands of native plants to provide habitat for native fish and wildlife.*

The parties jointly monitor the restored estuary, including monthly water quality surveys, fish and wildlife surveys (i.e. bird and benthic invertebrates), and annually assessing flow through the new channel.

CONFIDENTIAL DRAFT

CONSERVATION LANDS PROGRAM (CLP) STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2030



This document is submitted to the Province of BC based on input and advise in 2022-2023 from the First Nations- BC Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum, Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council and the Conservation Lands Partner Program.

This document is undergoing internal review and does not reflect direction or approval from the Province of BC.

Acknowledgments

CLP Strategic Plan reflects input received from the First Nations Forum, Ministers Wildlife Advisory Council, the Conservation Lands Partner Program and subject matter experts. A special thanks to all the many people from these groups who provided input and time to guide and shape this Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan. The passion and commitment to protecting BC's lands and waters for future generations was clearly heard and felt across all of the meetings and interviews. [etc]

Photo credits: Karen Wipond

Opening Message

[The opening message likely to come from the ADM level due to it being an internal plan]

TO BE DRAFTED: A special thanks for the guidance and wisdom of our key partners including the Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council, First Nations- BC Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum and the Conservation Lands Partner Program members for helping guide the development of this initial plan.

Through strong partnerships, we look forward to achieving the goals established in the Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan to help steward the rich diversity and important wildlife for future generations.

References to various strategies and priorities (e.g., UNDRIP, Together for Wildlife, Ecosystem Health, commitment to 30x30, modernized land use planning etc).

Importance of partnership with First Nations rights and title holders across BC to steward important fish and wildlife habitat embracing traditional knowledge and western science.

Consider quotes (e.g., from all chairs of the 3 advisory bodies)

Table Of Contents

To be developed and included following graphic design

Note: All text boxes are noted with italics and highlighted text

Executive Summary

BC is committed to implement UNDRIP, protect or effectively conserve 30% of the lands and waters **s.13** by 2030, prioritize ecosystem health and biodiversity and implement the goals within the Together for Wildlife Strategy. Conservation Lands are specific designations made to explicitly prioritize, steward, and protect high priority biodiversity areas and fish and wildlife habitats. The Conservation Lands Program (CLP) is ideally positioned to address British Columbia's commitment to advancing reconciliation while achieving provincial, national and international targets to protect and enhance our rich biodiversity. Based on over a 50-year legacy, the Conservation Lands Program has strong partners committed to habitat stewardship and demonstrated ability to leverage government investments on public and private lands **s.13**

In 2021 the Office of the Auditor General reported several areas and opportunities of improvement for the Conservation Lands Program, including the need for a Strategic Plan. The province worked in partnership with key advisors including the First Nations- BC Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Forum, Minister's Wildlife Advisory Council, and the Conservation Land Partner Program members, to develop a strategic plan for this unique and highly valuable suite of land designations, Conservation Lands. With the support of key partners, there is currently approximately 900,000 ha of land including government-administered and non-administered status that conserve fish and wildlife habitats while allowing other compatible uses. With a suite of options for designating lands under the *Land Act* and the *Wildlife Act*,

s.13

Based on input from all advisory groups, there was a unanimous call to significantly expand and evolve the Conservation Land Program with a key focus on protecting biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat, while advancing reconciliation through new and expanded First Nations partnerships. The Strategic Plan recognizes and is based on strong regional collaboration that includes First Nations as partners and engages other organizations to identify, prioritize, steward, and monitor lands to **s.13**

s.13 Growing and enhancing conservation lands directly helps achieve commitments within the Together for Wildlife Strategy and BC's pledge for protecting 30% protection of BC's land base by 2030.

Building on past successes, the clear call is to grow hectares and stewardship of conservation lands to protect and restore biodiversity. A strong commitment to building partnerships with First Nations respects BC's commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Local and regional leadership by First Nations and others is fundamental, to embrace both Indigenous knowledge with western science, on the local lands and important habitats. First Nations have a significant partnership role that ensures local knowledge and traditional stewardship practices are heard and integrated at all levels. In a true partnership, the Conservation Land Program will contribute to the journey to reconciliation, while healing the land.

Commented [BW1]: see my email comment regarding rebranding

Commented [BW2]: math seems off. 900,000 ha. is 0.5%? or am I reading this wrong?

Commented [WCW3R2]: This is the total of Wildlife Act (admin lands) and Land Act (non-admin), the later which would is not included in the percentage calculation as Land Act does not count towards 30 by 30.

Commented [LF4]: For the majority of the province use of the Land Act to temporarily preserve Crown land for future Conservation lands status is wrong. The majority of impacts to many of these proposed areas comes from commercial forestry, mining and oil and gas activities. Limiting access to these areas using a Land Act mechanism might be useful in sprawling urban areas impacted by residential, commercial or industrial development; however, as the Skeena Region has been activity involved in this issue, most of the threat to these areas comes from forestry, mining and O&G development. You would need a Part 13, No Disposition Reserve and No Registration reserve to also be put in place to truly preserve these areas temporarily.

Commented [WCW5R4]: We are working on policy guidance to clarify the purpose of non-administered lands/Land Act (as per the OAG audit recommendation #3). I agree there is a need to clarify their limitations and applicability.

Commented [MW6R4]: noting there is potential for agriculture as an incompatible use or perhaps a compatible use with restrictions? what legislation would enable that direction?

Commented [BW7]: Through the document there is inconsistency on referencing the 30% (30% by 2030, 30 by 30, 30x30 etc.)

Commented [WCW8R7]: I'll make sure this is consistent in the next version.

Commented [BW9]: **s.13**

s.13

The Strategic Plan is based on a foundation of clear goals providing guidance to objectives, indicators, and time-bound targets. These goals are intertwined and all need to move forward with increased resources, to ensure that the vision and mission of the Conservation Lands Program becomes reality.

Goal 1: Expand and grow the Conservation Lands Program as a key solution for protecting BC's rich biodiversity with a key focus on fish and wildlife habitat.

- This focuses on acquiring/securing, and legally designating conservation lands to steward BC's rich biodiversity in partnership with Rights and Title Holders and private land interests.

Goal 2: Increase collaboration with First Nations and others to identify, protect and steward conservation lands to protect biodiversity including wildlife and fish habitat.

- This focuses on ensuring partnerships at the local level to identify, prioritize and set direction

Goal #3 – Restore and enhance biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat within current and future conservation lands

- This focuses on increasing stewardship and monitoring of all conservation lands

Goal #4- Increase public accountability and confidence in the role of conservation lands in contributing to collaboration, stewardship, and biodiversity

- This focuses on ensuring compliance and enforcement and tracking progress toward targets

The Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan addresses the province's commitments to the Officer of the Auditor General's recommendations and provides clear direction for the next five or more years. The Province will invest to acquire and secure new priority lands, build partnerships with First Nations, increase stewardship, and ensure regular monitoring and enforcement. These investments will be leveraged by the unique existing and future partners who are integral to helping achieve the program's targets. Investing today, will achieve a legacy for BC by building new partnerships with First Nations while stewarding critical lands and habitats for future generations.

What are Conservation Lands?

Two things make the Conservation Lands Program unique in British Columbia – a priority focus on conserving critical fish and wildlife habitat above other considerations, and a long history of formalized joint efforts with non-government organizations.

Conservation Lands are lands designated for the primary purpose of conserving high-value fish and wildlife habitat under the *Land Act* and *Wildlife Act*. For decades, Conservation lands have been an important and flexible tool within the Province's "toolbox" of land designations. Traditional Indigenous rights such as hunting, fishing and harvesting medicinal plants are all recognized practices. Conservation land designations achieve conservation benefits while allowing compatible resource stewardship and use which recognize and conserve wildlife and habitat values as the priority. Legally, conservation lands include sites administered for fish and wildlife management under the *Wildlife Act*, some of which are designated as Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), other lands are owned in fee simple by the government for conservation purposes, and lands owned by partner organizations and leased to the province for conservation purposes. Conservation lands also include lands over which a recorded

Commented [MW11]: It would be great if this document could also highlight the value of partnerships with regional districts and local governments. In more highly populated parts of the province these conservation lands are likely to be in or adjacent to major centers which then requires a partnership approach with local government and First Nations.

Commented [MW12]: Considering recent experience with the Cowichan Estuary and other lands which may be on high value ALR. This strategic plan should mention the tradeoffs that sometimes need to be made between perceptions of risk to local food security vs other higher uses of the land such as habitat conservation

'interest' has been secured for fish and wildlife under the *Land Act*, but not administration and management authority.

Text Box: Types of Conservation Lands

There are two broad types of conservation lands:

Administered conservation lands

These are lands over which legal administration and management authority have been acquired by way of:

- Wildlife Management Area (WMA) designation under section 4 of the *Wildlife Act*. [Learn more about Wildlife Management Areas](#)
- Fee Simple acquisition through direct purchase, land exchange, or donation of private land.
- Securement of privately owned land that is leased to the Province, usually for a long-term duration (99 years).
- Crown Transfer of Administration under section 106 of the *Land Act*, or similar legal mechanism.

Non-administered conservation lands

These are lands over which a recorded 'interest' has been secured for fish and wildlife, but not administration and management authority. The majority of these have been obtained through *Land Act* mechanisms that either preclude or constrain certain Crown land uses or *Land Act* tenures for a specified period of time (5- 30 years) and require that the holder of the interest be contacted regarding proposed changes in land use. These legal mechanisms include:

- Land Act* section 15 Order-in-Council reserve (OIC reserve).
- Land Act* section 17 Conditional Withdrawal (or Designated Use Area)
- Land Act* section 16 Temporary Withdrawal (or Map Reserve).

Non-administered conservation land status is often used as an interim "placeholder" status while work is completed to move to a formal designation such as a Wildlife Management Area under the *Wildlife Act*. While administered conservation lands are generally seen as "protected", (and therefore contributory to meeting BC's 30 by 30 Goal), non-administered lands are not considered protected lands.

Administered conservation lands are distinct from provincial parks, national parks and other protected areas which have a mandate for conservation, but many parks also have a mandate to provide recreational opportunities for visitors. Parks and protected areas also include strong, legislated bans and/or restrictions on resource use activities such as range, timber harvesting, mining, hunting and fishing.

There are other conservation designations, like Wildlife Habitat Areas and Ungulate Winter Ranges that are established under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* and *Oil and Gas Activities Act*. These designations contribute to the overall network of conservation designations, but they are implemented to constrain specific extraction activities (e.g., forestry) rather than to define the primary values and compatible activities regardless of sector. The Conservation Lands Program is specifically and solely focused on identifying, securing, and stewarding sites for the priority purpose to maintain wildlife and fish habitat values. Resource use activities for all sectors are assessed for compatibility with this purpose within administered Conservation Lands. In a multiple-values framework, as outlined by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Nature Futures

Commented [LF13]: Refer to my previous comment. Land Act only addresses a small portion of the threat posed to these areas. It does little to limit other activities given authority through other provincial legislation.

Commented [LF14]: It needs to be clearly indicated that the Land Act mechanisms being referred to here only restrict activities authorized under the Land Act. All tenures and permits issued under other provincial statutes for resource extraction/development can still occur. DO NOT MISLEAD THE PUBLIC WITH WHAT THESE MECHANISMS HAVE THE ABILITY TO RESTRICT!!!!

Commented [SF15]: I recall the federal gov considers non-administered lands as protected lands for the purpose of assessing critical habitat.

Commented [WCW16R15]: I will check into this as that does seem surprising to me. It may be appropriate in some contexts and not in others (depending on threats).

Commented [LF17]: There is a common misconception that these Land Act mechanism are in fact protected from any resource development. THEY ABSOLUTELY ARE NOT! Strongly suggest further clarification on this point so as not to create a false sense of security with those who believe that once these designations are in place nothing can happen in those areas.

Commented [LF18]: Be clear in your distinction between administered and non-administered CL's. As it was written someone could easily believe that any conservation lands (administered or non-administered) would have "strong, legislated bans and/or restrictions on resource use activities". The Land Act mechanisms listed above only restrict activities requiring authorization under the Land Act. Cutting Permits, issued under FRPA, could still go ahead in non-administered areas.

Commented [WCW19R18]: Yes, there needs to be a clearer distinction between the two throughout the document.

Commented [BW20]: This statement is true at a systems level, but not at a specific lands level. Many parks, ecological reserves and protected areas primary purpose is conservation with little

Framework, this work is founded on principles of partnership, inclusion, and rights (of people and Nature) as the first priority of the designation.

A unique component of the Conservation Lands Program is its long history of working together in partnerships with non-government organizations, as well as, more recently, Indigenous and local governments to conserve important wildlife, habitat, and conservation values. Indigenous partners are increasingly taking a strong leadership role in both determining and stewarding local sites. This partnership approach, inclusive of rights and title holders, is fundamental to the future direction of the CLP which can play an important role in supporting Indigenous-led conservation initiatives. These principles, along with the durable mechanisms the CLP is built upon, situate the program to play a key role in transformative change, including the ability to significantly contribute to Canada meeting its international and United Nation treaty commitments regarding biodiversity conservation.

Text Box: Together for Wildlife

Together for Wildlife is a provincial strategy to improve wildlife and habitat stewardship across British Columbia. Co-developed with First Nations, communities, and stakeholders, the Together for Wildlife strategy includes additional funding, proactive objectives, and improved data and knowledge - all supported by new policies, strong partnerships, and dedicated resources. Of the 24 Actions, Action 11 specifically supports the Conservation Land Program by committing BC to “.....make investments to manage existing Conservation Lands and acquire new priority lands for wildlife stewardship. We will use these funds to leverage additional investments, and we will strengthen ties with Indigenous governments, conservation partners, resource industries, and stakeholders to better secure and manage Conservation Lands to achieve wildlife objectives.”

The Conservation Lands Program administers approximately 268,000 hectares, complemented by an additional 122,000 hectares of partner-owned lands. Some of the almost 300 sites are internationally recognized and are often prominently located near communities, particularly in southern BC. Partnerships with Indigenous communities in the leadership and management of conservation lands are increasing and are contributing to the stewardship of critical values and cultural practices. While these lands support some of BC's most sensitive and critical wildlife habitats, they contribute less than 1% of the 15.4% of BC that are broadly currently defined as “protected” lands.

Looking forward, and in partnership with First Nations, conservation lands provide a flexible and critical tool to help move British Columbia successfully forward to the goal of protecting 30% of the lands and waters by 2030. Conservation lands are well positioned to play a key role in transformative change aimed at improving nature and rights-based outcomes, as well as priority candidate areas for increased restoration and stewardship investments.

Text Box: Did you know that conservation lands?

- Encompass some of BC's most important and biologically productive valley bottoms, estuaries, wetlands, grasslands, and other vital habitats.
- Support almost 30% of B.C.'s species and ecosystems at risk despite their relatively small footprint in BC.
- Provide vital ecosystem services including carbon storage, flood control, and cooling
- Support a variety of uses and benefits including subsistence, recreational, cultural and spiritual.

- *Involve more than 10 key non-government partners beyond the province along with many other volunteer partners.*

First Nation Perspective

The Conservation Land Program recognizes the cultural diversity and uniqueness of First Nations and their Territories across British Columbia. While this plan contains perspectives and content that apply to a Province-wide program, it is also grounded in the understanding that these perspectives are unique for each First Nation. Pre-contact, First Nations ensured their lands and waters were managed in a way that many would today equate with modern 'conservation' values. First Nations were, and continue to be, active participants in the ecosystem, thriving in a reciprocal relationship with their territories and relatives. For example, certain lands were regularly burned in order to maintain the ecosystem's resilience and cycle of renewal. Red stem ceanothus (*Ceanothus sanguineus*), as one example, is a primary food source for Mule deer and other ungulates, as well as an important medicinal resource for First Nations, and is entirely dependent on periodic low-intensity fire to thrive. By burning these areas regularly, First Nations ensured that the forest understory could provide for the ecosystem, inclusive of the people. There are many examples of the reciprocity of First Nations' relationships with the lands and waters now contained in BC, many of which would fit our contemporary definitions of restoration and conservation.

Worldviews, Principles, Rights and Responsibility: Informing a new approach to Conservation Lands

The lands and waters currently known as British Columbia are some of the most culturally and biologically rich on the planet. This is thanks to, in large part, the practices of Indigenous peoples, who shaped the landscape for many thousands of years. One of the many implications of colonialism and settlements over the past 150-plus years is a steep decline in the abundance and resilience of BC's ecosystems- and as a further result, impacted First Nation's abilities to steward and practice traditional practices.

Most of the province remains the unceded territory of the First Nations. Reconciliation is an ongoing process based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change. There is a need to cooperatively establish and maintain a mutually respectful framework for living together, with a view to fostering strong, healthy, and sustainable Indigenous nations with a strong British Columbia.

Text Box: Conservation Lands and First Nations

Historically, the respect and substantive incorporation of First Nations rights and interest in the land and resources were largely absent and only recently has become a cornerstone for new conservation lands such as Lhá:lt/Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area. Going forward, collaboration and partnerships with First Nations are vital from the planning through to management at the local level.

British Columbia has committed to reconciliation with First Nations, which in an era of change, will be key to recovering and stewarding the abundance that should thrive here. Reconciliation is inextricably tied to the health and resilience of the land - we must reconcile land stewardship as a key foundation to move

forward. Conservation lands offer a unique and important opportunity to meaningfully contribute and collaborate on the stewardship and healing of the lands and waters. By recognizing, upholding, and facilitating the rights and responsibilities of First Nations in the protection and stewardship of their Territories, Conservation Lands is an important tool to support BC's commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and true reconciliation and partnership.

As we approach a shared understanding of stewardship, Indigenous Worldviews are now reflected more clearly in the principles of the Conservation Lands Program. For instance, the concept that all life is interconnected provides that people are an active part of the ecosystem. This is an important consideration in the context of Conservation Lands, and the role of stewards. Additionally, it is also important to embrace the view that all things have a spirit, and this spirit must be respected.

These views re-iterate the multiple-values foundation that the Conservation Land Program supports, captured eloquently by the [Nature Futures Framework](#), which highlights a modern-day view of the multiplicity of relationships between nature and people. As with Indigenous Worldviews, the Nature Futures Framework highlights the relational values of nature as intrinsically valuable, as a utilitarian resource and as a source of culture and cultural diversity. The Conservation Lands Program could be utilized to designate and steward the multiple values of nature in a 'wildlife first' way which is central to stewardship and healing.

Ethical Space

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the Principles of UNDRIP acknowledge that Truth-telling is a precondition of reconciliation. Recognition that a past and current policies impede the role of First Nation in the governance and stewardship of their lands will help advance BC's commitment to reconciliation.

Ethical Space is a process in which all knowledge systems are validated and equally valued. It is a space where the truth is often found, and a pathway to collaborative stewardship can be achieved. We envision that the Conservation Lands Program will integrate the principles of Ethical Space and ensure that new ideas, innovations and resulting policies will be co-developed.

Text Box: Ethical Space**

Commented [BW25]: If by referencing this site do we implicitly say that BC endorses this program and approach?

Commented [WF26R25]: Agreed - should only reference secondary document sources if it reflects BC approved approach.

Commented [WCW27R25]: I will give more thought to this, but yes, we should be careful we are not seen as endorsing.

Commented [BW28]: I disagree with this statement. We have other systems (Indigenous conserved lands, protected areas etc.) that also do this.

Commented [WCW29R28]: Reworded to remove the implication that there are not other options.

Commented [MW30]: I am not familiar enough with the Nature Futures Framework literature to comment too much, but I would exercise caution in equating it with Indigenous worldviews. Also would suggest removing the term "modern-day" as that may be misinterpreted as diminishing pre-existing, contemporary and evolving Indigenous perspectives on nature. I am also wondering if a 'wildlife first' approach is necessarily equivalent to an Indigenous perspective. This sentence somewhat contradicts language in the preceding paragraph if we understand what it means for objects, places and spaces having spirit; and that people are part of the ecosystem.

You may want to explore other work by IPBES on the Multiple Evidence Based approach. MEB has a strong connection to the concept of ethical space.

Commented [MW31]: should clarify if this is a policy statement that working within Ethical Space will be the basis of this work going forward

Commented [MW32]: I appreciate that this table is from another document and that this draft was informed by various advisory groups but I want to ensure that we are framing ethical space appropriately.

Ethical space is not a process. Rather it is a conceptual framework for how people who understand Indigenous oral systems and those who understand western written systems can create a new space to engage with each other as equals, fostering Cultural Safety.

The three bubbles are what Dr. Crowshoe shared



Truth telling can be facilitated through a process called *Ethical Space*. In *Ethical Space*, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous governments collaboratively develop protocols framed by pre-existing treaties, other agreements, and inherent Indigenous Rights. Scholar Willie Ermine of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation wrote that “*Ethical Space* is formed when two societies, with disparate world views, are pointed to engage each other”. It is a space in which all knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western) are validated and respected (also called *two-eyed seeing*) and where it is possible to arrive at joint decisions arising out of mutually agreed protocols. This is where the process of trust-building begins.

**** from BC-First Nation Wildlife and Habitat Forum, [Cultivating Abundance](#)**

British Columbia's Commitment to the Principles of UNDRIP, as provided in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's Act* (2019) (DRIPA), is unwavering. However, tools and opportunities to advance these commitments remain in development. The Conservation Lands Program offers unique opportunities to contribute to these commitments. Collaboration and cooperation with and among First Nations in BC on the development of the Conservation Land Program, as well as all new projects, is one way we ensure that the role of Indigenous communities as stewards of their lands is restored.

INFO PAGE OR COLUMN: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's Act (2019) (DRIPA)

BC's Commitment to UNDRIP is formalized through DRIPA, containing all 46 articles of UNDRIP in Provincial Legislation (2019) and of particular note are:

Article 18

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions.

Article 19

States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

Article 20

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.
2. Indigenous peoples deprived of their means of subsistence and development are entitled to just and fair redress.

Article 24

Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

Article 25

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

Article 26

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired.
3. States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

The Conservation Land Program

The Conservation Land Program achieves its objectives to conserve, restore and enhance critical habitats for fish and wildlife through focus on three key areas:

- **Land Securement** – to acquire, designate or, through other means, secure land or interests in land (both Crown and private) for conservation purposes. Securement often relies on collaborative arrangements to accommodate site-specific issues and circumstances. In the past, this role has included support for the acquisition of private lands by partners. Securing conservation lands, in partnership with First Nations is an important opportunity for BC to advance reconciliation which may include a role to facilitate the securement and management of lands directly by First Nations.
- **Land Stewardship** – following securement, sites move into a land management phase that is focused on maintaining/restoring/enhancing conservation values over time. As with all aspects of the Conservation Lands Program, it is important to recognize that fully integrating an Indigenous worldview with science and adaptive management in the stewardship and management of sites has profound benefits to the ecosystem. This requires working in partnership to co-develop stewardship goals and directives based on shared values while setting objectives that have tangible positive impacts for multiple generations. Partnerships with local First Nations include, but are not limited to, assessing habitats,

developing specific management directives, managing public use, monitoring and enforcement to ensure conservation objectives are being met through time.

- **Planning, Policy, and Administration** – provide a foundation for managing, planning and reporting on the status of conservation lands. This requires work with legal land interests, developing consistent policies and procedures, administering revenues and taxes, managing data and information, facilitating internal and external communications, developing management directives, new regulatory tools, policies, etc. Moving forward, the future policy must adapt as new designations or decisions supporting First Nations reconciliation are implemented.

The *Wildlife Act* was recently amended to clarify that Provincial decision-makers must consider relevant Indigenous Knowledge in making decisions. The stewardship of conservation lands also provides unique potential as an area to advance shared decision-making partnerships, while recognizing the historical success of Indigenous-led conservation.

Text box: Wildlife Act

Within the Together for Wildlife Strategy (Actions 12 and 18), the Province committed to reviewing the Wildlife Act, to “address priority issues, such as reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, determination of objectives, improved wildlife stewardship, effective and accessible service delivery, and dedicated funding” and to “advance co-management and shared decision-making with Indigenous Governments in British Columbia.” When updating the Wildlife Act, it will be important to address and identify existing and/or new land designations that legally protect fish and wildlife habitats, reflect the government’s commitment to UNDRIP, and create opportunities to collaborate with First Nations in stewarding the lands. Consistent with this review, a Conservation Lands Intentions Paper will be developed to provide recommendations for proposed legislative amendments to enhance statutory habitat protection measures.

The Power of Partnerships

The Conservation Lands Program has a long history of bringing disparate parties together around a shared value of wildlife and habitat. With early roots in the establishment of ‘game reserves’ in the early 1900s as part of colonial settlement, these reserves were often identified by hunters and naturalists keen on working together to preserve the intrinsic values and opportunity to recreate.

Formal partnerships with others began in earnest in the 1960s starting with Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and expanding over time to include Nature Trust of BC (NTBC), Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation (HCTF), Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), and Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) of Environment and Climate Change Canada. The partnerships took various forms over the years and included the private purchase of lands that were then leased back to the province for management.

Text Box – Leveraging Funds through Partnership

Today’s Conservation Lands programs have relied on partnerships and leveraging- so that together there can be a bigger positive impact in BC. Key contributors have included the Federal Government who invested over \$53 million with non-government partners contributing \$124 million since 1986 for and management of acquisition of conservation lands.

Commented [WF33]: The outward facing document to inform changes to the WLA will be an Intentions Paper on the WLA, not a separate intentions paper on Conservation Lands, correct? - is this a reference to a different outward facing document? If so, I would suggest that instead those findings from CLP be incorporated into the bigger Intentions Paper so there is a single point of reference as we advance external engagement. If this is intended to be an internally facing document, that would be different.

Please work with Pam Doerksen here to reflect messaging on the WLA review.

Commented [WCW34R33]: To be clarified.

The program continues to evolve to become a stronger collaborative effort between governments including First Nations, non-government organizations (NGOs) and other community partners. Moving forward, it is vital to recognize that First Nation's worldviews of nature are cultural, relational and directly tied to land and title. Each conservation land initiative will need to work with the related First Nations, in a full partnership from conception to stewardship. The Conservation Lands Program is a tangible legal approach to using the provincial legal system to achieve legal and value pluralism in how we collectively steward and conserve these lands and waters.

Commented [WF35]: Is there a word missing here? Sentence doesn't read right.

Regardless of the specific form, these partnerships are characterized by many or all of the following:

- **Formal agreements** - defining roles and responsibilities and ensuring a disciplined approach to building and sustaining strong relationships.
- **Collaborative planning and delivery** - to monitor progress and achieve shared outcomes
- **Resource leveraging**- of cash and other resources. For example, a BC government investment of approximately \$64 million into the Conservation Lands Program since 1986 has leveraged an additional \$174 million from NGO and federal partners, for a total of over \$238 million in overall conservation land assets which are now worth many times that amount. NGO partners play a role that governments often cannot, such as bringing philanthropic funding to support conservation.
- **Synergies** - providing access to greater overall expertise, capacity, flexibility and responsiveness to conservation land acquisition and management opportunities.
- **Resilience** – allowing the partnership to collectively weather resource shortages or other challenges affecting any one of the partners.
- **Reconciliation** - Indigenous communities play an integral role in advancing the partnerships, leadership and guidance reflected in effective stewardship on conservation lands.

Text Box: Office of the Auditor General Audit on the Management of the Conservation Lands Program

In 2021 BC's Auditor General reviewed the Conservation Land Program and subsequently made 11 recommendations for improvement focused on:

- *providing strategic direction*
- *increasing direction to staff to collaborate with Indigenous peoples*
- *revising outdated management plans for wildlife management areas (WMAs)*
- *resolving threats to the most at-risk conservation lands*
- *improving tracking of inventory, and*
- *monitoring and reporting publicly on the effectiveness of the program.*

The Province accepted all 11 recommendations, and this Strategic Plan directly addresses two specific recommendations while supporting the implementation of other recommendations.

Meeting Provincial Mandates

Conservation Lands are a central part of the Province's conservation and stewardship goals. Broadly, addressing the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change requires focused efforts to increase conserved lands and restoration of degraded sites in partnership with First Nations Rights and

Titleholders. Together for Wildlife outlines five goals and 24 actions to improve wildlife stewardship and habitat conservation. Conservation lands are one of the critical tools to help achieve these goals.

Recently, the Province of BC committed to global targets of 30% land protected or conserved by the year 2030. To meet this new “30 by 30” commitment, BC must establish new conservation designations and protected areas in partnership with First Nations, NGO partners, and others. **s.13**

s.13

The Conservation Lands Program is positioned to address this clear call for collaboration in securing, stewarding, and administering priority lands and habitats. BC is committed to working collaboratively with First Nations to protect wildlife, ecosystems, and species at risk, as a pathway to advance reconciliation. Based on DRIPA, and through the implementation of the Together for Wildlife Strategy, there is a renewed commitment to protect and restore British Columbia’s biodiversity in partnership with First Nations.

Test Box - Developing a Framework for Co-management in the Lhá:It/Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area

The one thousand-hectare Lhá:It/Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area, located near the city of Chilliwack along the Harrison River in BC’s South Coast region, was designated in 2016 after years of stakeholder and public consultations. The area hosts internationally significant, critical wintering, migration, and breeding habitat for five species of salmon, trout, raptors, aquatic birds, amphibians, mammals, and other at-risk or endangered wildlife including Bald Eagles, Trumpeter Swans, and White Sturgeon.

The WMA also lies within the traditional homelands of several First Nations communities that have long relied on and culturally valued the area’s natural resources, biological productivity, and special environmental features. The Sts’ailes First Nation supported establishment of the WMA and is especially engaged with the Conservation Land Program partners in developing the land management strategy, as the WMA is situated directly adjacent to Sts’ailes reserve lands. The Nature Trust of BC also owns some of the land within the WMA and leases it to the Province.

“Currently, the partners are focusing on relationship building,” says Natasha Wilbrink, Coordinator of the South Coast Conservation Land Management Program. “What does co-management mean to each of us, and what does that look like in the context of this particular WMA? We’re spending a lot of time discussing what formal consultations versus WMA decision-making will actually look like, and how to implement it.”

The Conservation Land Program and First Nation partners are considering, for example, how they can optimally operate as equal collaborators in managing daily activities in the WMA, and when making long-term decisions on tenure applications. “The ultimate goal for Lhá:It/Harrison-Chehalis WMA is to have a co-management agreement in place, articulated through the management plan and derived through true collaboration” says Wilbrink. “We are working to create a framework for how this will look going forward, and how to build-in feedback mechanisms, because this is a novel and will likely require adjustments in the future.”

s.13

Conservation Land are an important contribution towards the 30% target. Biodiversity values and ecosystem functions on private lands often require significant investment for acquisition and encumbrance. Enhancing and restoring the lands is also important for biodiversity values, including fish and wildlife habitat. This also requires resources to support local capacity, including partnerships with First Nations. Identifying a long-term acquisition plan supported by critical resources requires new financing mechanisms to achieve the goals for the expanded Conservation Lands Program.

These renewed commitments align with BC and Canada's commitment to 30 by 30. This Strategic Plan is intended to achieve multiple goals – support reconciliation, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity and recovery of species at risk. The Conservation Lands Program is positioned to contribute significantly to this target, and to explore new tools and mechanisms, including links to Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, to steward BC's biodiversity.

Given international goals for biodiversity, it is important that the Conservation Lands Program be clearly linked to other planning processes such as modernized Land Use Planning, Forest Landscape Planning, and other local land use plans as options for conservation designations are identified. Integrating with other initiatives such as the regional Together for Wildlife planning teams can help ensure a cohesive approach is taken to stewardship of the lands and collaboration across partners and designation types.

Text Box – Vancouver's High-profile and High-value Wildlife Management Areas

Some CLP sites are very high-profile and internationally recognized. These include Boundary Bay, Roberts Bank, Sturgeon Bank, and South Arm Marshes wildlife management areas situated near the mouth of the Fraser River and adjacent to metropolitan Greater Vancouver. Though many people passing through in ferries, cargo ships, cars, and floatplanes may not realize it, these interconnected estuaries, mudflats, and coastal marshes are recognized as critical components of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and Pacific Flyway.

During low tide, over 1,000 invertebrates have been tallied in a 10-centimeter-diameter core of the vast mud flats—these, along with tiny diatoms and bacteria across the surface and visiting herring, eulachon, and flounders, provide vital food sources for diving and wading birds. Also migrating through each year are more than 800 million salmon from five Pacific species, comprising one of the largest salmon runs in the world, using the tidal marshes of the WMAs for food, shelter, and acclimatization to salt water. Annually, this wide delta and rich ecosystem attract millions of migrating waterfowl—at least 47 species from three continents and dozens of countries on a route stretching from the Arctic Ocean to South America. The area hosts, at times, up to eight percent of the entire North American population of Dunlins, four percent of its Trumpeter Swans, and three percent of its Black Bellied Plovers. Over 500,000 Western Sandpipers have been estimated to use the Roberts Bank mudflat alone on a single day during spring migration. The last Canadian nesting population of Barn Owl forages in the Boundary Bay WMA.

Text Box: Federal commitments to biodiversity, conservation and species at risk

Conservation lands designated under BC's Land Act and Wildlife Act are an important part of meeting Canada's conservation goals. Not only do the number of hectares matter, but the location and habitat quality of Conservation Lands is crucial. They are often located in estuary and valley bottoms, where habitat protection can be complex and expensive to accomplish, but play a key role in the conservation of migratory birds and Species at Risk. One example, the Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management

Area, forms the core of a network of conservation areas that includes a federal Columbia National Wildlife Area, and areas of private land supported by non-government organization (NGO) acquisitions and funding, including Government of Canada. Conserving these complex networks of important habitat helps support national and international conservation goals, including the protection of internationally important wetlands identified under the Ramsar convention.

The Government of Canada, a key partner in supporting the Conservation Land Program, sets national goals for the conservation of nature, and recently committed to conserving a quarter of Canada's lands and a quarter of its oceans by 2025, and working toward conserving 30% by 2030¹. Canada has contributed significant funding to conservation lands in BC for several years and, in 2021, committed a further \$2.3 billion over five years to protect Canada's lands, waters and wildlife.

[Canada's Nature Legacy: protecting our nature - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/nature/conservation/conservation-land-program.html)

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

This Conservation Lands Program Strategic Plan provides the foundation for ensuring a strong plan with clear measurable outcomes that will provide direction for the future of the program based on collaboration and partnerships with Indigenous and non-government partners. Together stewardship is achievable.

VISION: Conservation lands contribute to the resilience of BC's rich culture and biodiversity by ensuring that the lands and waters, fish and wildlife habitat, connected to them thrive now and for time immemorial.

MISSION: The Conservation Land Program includes land designation tools that contribute directly to BC's commitments to First Nations partnerships and reconciliation, help achieve the conservation of 30% of BC by 2030 and meet the Goals of Together for Wildlife.

PRINCIPLES: The Conservation Lands Program is guided by the important principles that provide the foundation for the Together for Wildlife including:

- **Interconnectedness** - We recognize that all living and non-living things and communities are integrally dependent on each other.
- **Trust** - We will build public trust and confidence in land stewardship through our actions.
- **Reconciliation** - We are committed to advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples to support conservation and stewardship
- **Collaboration** - We will strengthen partnerships and leadership, especially with Indigenous communities, to achieve the goals of the strategy.
- **Respect** - We recognize and respect that people hold deep and sometimes differing intrinsic, ecological, social, cultural, and economic values for stewardship of our lands.
- **Responsiveness** - We will be proactive and adaptive in responding to new information on conservation and stewardship.

- **Transparency** - We will improve accessibility to information across all aspects of stewardship, including decision-making and administration of funding.
- **Accountability** - We will define measures of success for this strategy, report our performance, and promote actions that improve implementation and success.
- **Evidence-Based Decisions** - We will use evidence gathered through research, monitoring, and experience to inform decisions that includes knowledge gained through both traditional and western based science systems. We will use evidence gathered through research, monitoring and experience, and as provided by Indigenous knowledge holders and governments to inform decisions with both science and traditional knowledge systems.
- **Balance** - We will work together to improve balance to ensure that habitat stewardship and the economy thrive.
- **Innovation** - We will embrace new technology and approaches to collect, apply and share information, deliver services, and implement practices

Strategic Plan Framework

Stewardship of priority habitats is important to all. Working together towards common goals and objectives will help conserve priority habitats for today and future generations. Tracking our collective progress towards our targets will help inform us on progress and where and when we need to adapt to ensure that our important lands are conserved for our wildlife and other conservation values. The following framework provides a foundation that all partners can work together to achieve the desired outcomes of the Conservation Lands Program. Partnership underlies each goal and objective.

Commented [BW38]: Hence my comment via email on potential rebranding from a "lands" program to a "F&W Partnership Program".

Goals and Objectives

These goals and objectives are interlinked, and together serve as a clear roadmap for the future direction for the Conservation Lands Program. This program will continue to evolve to reflect reconciliation with First Nations, new land designations and legislative changes. Strong policy leadership and vital resource investment are critical to enable the Conservation Lands Program to achieve the goals and objectives of this Strategic Plan. Resources at the regional level are needed to develop direction, support action and monitor progress and ensure that conservation lands help achieve biodiversity and reconciliation targets. This renewed focus requires a fresh commitment to ensuring that conservation lands to conserve and steward biodiversity and vital fish and wildlife values for decades and generations to come!

Using specific and concise Objectives and Targets are key components of the Strategic Plan and provide a road map by which to monitor progress toward the goals. Reporting regularly against the Targets will demonstrate whether the operations and implementation are trending towards and/or achieving the ultimate desired outcomes. When targets are not achieved, it is important to review whether operations are progressing in line with the desired targets and/or whether they need to be reviewed to ensure that positive traction occurs towards the desired direction.

Goal 1: Expand and grow the Conservation Lands Program as a key solution for protecting BC's rich biodiversity with a key focus on fish and wildlife habitat.

Protecting biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat, is vital to help ensure protection of 30% of BC's lands and waters and Together for Wildlife commitments are achieved. With a prime focus on protecting biodiversity, the Conservation Lands Program has the unique ability to work collaboratively and in partnership, to help achieve provincial, federal and international commitments for protection biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat.

Objective #1-1: To increase hectares of legally designated conservation lands to support BC's commitments to Together for Wildlife and protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030.

Indicator: # of hectares legally designated administered conservation lands, including Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) or other alternative designations

Indicator: # of regulatory tools available to legally designate conservation lands

Indicator: Level of funding dedicated to achieving land acquisition and/or securement targets

Indicator: Actions to strengthen *Wildlife Act* to secure, designate and steward important conservation lands for fish and wildlife habitat

Target 1-1: By 2030, increase hectares of administered conservation lands **s.13**

Target 1-2: **s.13**

Target 1-3: By March 2024, submit an intentions paper with recommendations on how the *Wildlife Act* should be amended to develop new legal tools for conservation land designation and stewardship.

[The *Wildlife Act* Review is underway and changes to the *Wildlife Act* to support Conservation Lands are undergoing policy review; however, new tools for the program could also be considered under other regulatory mechanisms.]

Target 1-4: **s.13; s.17**

*Operational Guidance: With the province's commitment to protecting biodiversity, including achieving the 30x30 commitment, there is a clear need for enhanced provincial resources to increase land acquisition and securement. An Acquisition Plan, based on regional collaborative planning in partnership with First Nations and input from others, will provide a clear plan for moving towards the 30x30 commitment. Building capacity at the regional level in government, First Nations, and NGO partners is required to identify and prioritize recommended sites for future land acquisitions. In addition, commitment and clear authority at the regional and provincial levels must be in place to enable the acquisition and/or securing of priority lands. Trust and transparency with First Nations and other partners is vital for adding conservation lands within each region. An intentions paper, build through collaboration, will provide recommendations on modernizing the *Wildlife Act* and identify potential new opportunities to secure Conservation Lands **s.13***

Commented [SF39]: It would be good to append a sample plan to give people a better idea of the expectations for securing parcels. Lands has a policy on designations but staff and partners would benefit from seeing the consultative/engagement process requirements.

Commented [SF40R39]: I worry about accumulating more designated lands without a clear path to WMA status.

Commented [WCW41R39]: Agreed. This would have to a plan to achieve administered status/WMA's, not securing more Land Act designations. It should also include assessment of existing Land Act, and set priorities for seeking WMA or alternative designations.

Once the Acquisition Plan is achieved, it is expected the related investments would shift from acquisition to stewardship.

Goal 2: Increase collaboration with First Nations and others to identify, protect and steward conservation lands to protect biodiversity including wildlife and fish habitat.

Identifying and stewarding conservation lands for biodiversity, including fish and wildlife, must reflect regional-level decisions that embrace First Nations as true partners. The Province and First Nations must work together collaboratively, while seeking input from key local partners, to determine where and how to enhance stewardship. This collaborative partnership must exist at all phases from identifying new priority lands, building management directives, and stewarding to monitoring. Including and respecting First Nations knowledge and partnership, will demonstrate progress toward reconciliation while protecting and restoring high-value habitat. Over time, all conservation lands need co-developed management directives in place, while recognizing the initial stages will focus on lands deemed to be the highest priority. Developing effective collaborative management directives must be done in a timely and efficient manner to facilitate and enable 'on-the-ground' actions in the near future. Management directives will continue to evolve over time to reflect new knowledge and priorities but action is needed now- not after extensive planning. A standardized template for management directives would streamline planning and reporting. Fundamentally, directives are the foundation to serve as a catalyst for improved stewardship of key habitats.

Objective #2-1: Partner with First Nations to identify and determine management direction for all current and future CLP land designations

Indicator: # of collaborative initiatives that are with and/or inclusive of First Nations

Indicator: # of CLP lands that have plans and/or management directives in place

- Target 2.1: By 2030, 100% of all CLP lands include collaborative initiatives, in partnership with First Nations and inclusive of local partners, that reflect both western science and Indigenous knowledge
- Target 2.2: By 2025, a priority list of future CLP lands is in place for each region, built collaboratively with First Nations and inclusive of local partners
- Target 2.3: By 2030, all new and existing CLP lands have a management directive in place, built collaboratively with First Nations, inclusive of local partners, and jointly signed off by decision makers
- Target 2.4: **s.13; s.17**

Operational Guidance: With BC's commitment to UNDRIP and collaboration, Conservation lands provide an ideal opportunity for partnerships from planning to management between First Nations, the province and other partners. Together it is vital that high priority lands in each region (for existing and future CLP lands) be identified for biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat, through a partnership and inclusive process. Local initiatives such as the Regional Wildlife Advisory Committees could provide an existing platform for ensuring an inclusive planning approach.

Once the high-priority lands are identified for designation, collaborative management directives must be in place to guide stewardship and monitoring. While each Conservation Land has unique and different management needs, a standardized management directive template, will help ensure that standard indicators are addressed while enabling local adaptability. Increased resources are needed at the local level, including with First Nations, to identify, collaborate and plan for the growing amount of Conservation Lands.

This Strategic Plan provides the foundation for standard indicators across all Conservation Lands which can be augmented by additional ones based on local priorities. The ultimate goal is to get action to the ground supported by management directives, which will continue to evolve over time.

Goal #3 – Restore and enhance biodiversity, including fish and wildlife habitat within current and future conservation lands

Stewardship of conservation lands is important to restore and/or enhance biodiversity, including critical fish and wildlife habitat - all components of BC's commitment to a nature framework. Increased stewardship of high-value habitats will contribute to the restoration economy that benefit ecosystems and the communities that thrive within them. Increased stewardship, based on a collaborative management directive, provides increased opportunities for First Nations management, supported by other partners. Progress towards restored and/or enhanced habitats requires establishing a 2022/23 benchmark for current lands and expand until all conservation lands are restored and/or enhanced.

Objective #3.1: The quality of habitat in all conservation lands improves over time

Objective #3-2: Increased investment to better steward conservation lands.

Indicator: # of hectares restored and/or enhanced

Indicator: % of the area treated based on total hectares infested with high-priority invasive species

Indicator: \$ invested and leveraged by the province and others

Target 3.1: By 2030, at least double the total hectares restored and/or enhanced over 2022/23

Target 3.2: Annually, treat at least 50% of all hectares identified as infested with invasive species

Target 3.3: **s.13; s.17**

Target 3.4: Annually, ensure each conservation land is monitored

Operational Guidance: Increased stewardship requires dedicated provincial resources which can then be used to attract leveraged funds from external partners. Management directives for each conservation land provide a solid foundation to determine key restoration and enhancement activities, including identifying priority invasive species. In partnership with First Nations, increased on-the-ground actions will generate local employment, training, and skill development through stewardship activities. When

considering the benefits linked to the restoration economy, increased activity on the land will result in a growth in benefits for fish, wildlife, habitats, and people. With increased field activities and responsible monitoring, conservation lands will contribute directly to the national and international commitment to restore 30% of degraded habitats. Establishing benchmarks for 2022/23 will provide the foundation for reporting progress toward indicators and targets.

Goal #4- Increase public accountability and confidence in the role of conservation lands in contributing to collaboration, stewardship and biodiversity

Objective #4-1: Ensure each conservation land is monitored and reported on regularly

Objective #4-2: Reduce unauthorized uses on conservation lands

Objective #4-3: Full implementation of all 11 provincial commitments to the BC Auditor General

Indicator: CLP's lands achieving objectives and targets

Indicator: net increase in # hectares, by region and by habitat type

Indicator: # of illegal uses resolved/unresolved

Indicator: \$ for compliance and enforcement

Indicator: # of provincial commitments to BC Auditor General report addressed

Target 4.1: Annually, 100% reporting from all CLP lands on objectives and indicators

Target 4.1: Annually, 100% of illegal uses responded to within 3 months of the report

Target 4.2: By 2030, no illegal or unauthorized use of conservation lands

Target 4.4: By 2030, 100% of the recommendations from the Auditor General report addressed and reported to the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Target 4.5: **s.13; s.17**

Target 4.6: Annually, report on # increased hectares, by region and habitat type that demonstrate progress towards achieving Target 1.1

Target 4.7: At least every 2 years, report out on progress against Conservation Land Program Strategic Plan

Operational Guidance: Measuring progress within and across conservation lands is important to demonstrate enhanced biodiversity and fish and wildlife habitat. Operations must include annual reporting by region, regarding the state of habitat across all habitat types, and amount of hectares restored for each reporting year. Guided by a Compliance and Enforcement Plan, increased investment is needed to reduce unauthorized uses, to protect biodiversity and conservation values. With increased lands and commitment to stop unauthorized uses, expanded approaches will be needed such as through Conservation Officers, First Nations Guardians and Natural Resource Officers.

Based on the collaborative management directives and/or other tools, reporting annually for standard indicators on all conservation lands is important to demonstrate progress towards the 'standard indicator' referenced in this Strategic Plan. The standard indicators should align, where possible, with existing reporting systems, such as with the Together for Wildlife Strategy and Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation to ensure efficiency. With increased resources and investment in stewardship, each site will require regular monitoring to inform the management directives and progress towards achieving the direction of Together for Wildlife and other biodiversity commitments such as 30 x30.

All of these 4 Goals are integrated and critical to achieving progress towards the Together for Wildlife and the 30x30 commitment. Strong provincial policy, supported by significant resources, is required to achieve each of these goals.

Text Box: Partners in Rewilding the Nanaimo River Estuary

Draining more than 84,000 hectares, the Nanaimo River estuary is the largest estuary on Vancouver Island. The interconnected conservation lands and surrounding areas situated in the lower reaches of the river host a mix of riparian, marsh, and intertidal floral communities, including extensive eelgrass beds. These provide critical habitat for thousands of over-wintering birds and comprise a key part of a larger complex of feeding, resting, and marshing areas along the internationally significant Pacific Flyway. More than 200 bird species have been observed in the estuary, including many at-risk and endangered species, alongside five species of Pacific salmon and two species of migratory trout. Previously a rich area for First Nations harvesting, during the twentieth century the estuarine ecosystem was heavily degraded by human agricultural and industrial activities. Over time, the Province, non-governmental organizations, and other partners collaborated to set aside large parts of the Nanaimo River estuary for habitat protection.

In recent years, The Nature Trust of BC, Snuneymuxw First Nation, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Province of BC have collaborated to begin restoring the natural landscape. The partners have removed three kilometres of agricultural berms, reconnected tidal channels, and planted thousands of native species to improve fish and wildlife habitat. More than 8,000 cubic metres (hundreds of truckloads) of industrial waste gravel have also been removed --- the gravel had created a massive bar disrupting the flow of freshwater along the main stem of the Nanaimo River. A new channel has improved flow, re-opened salmon migration routes, and increased juvenile salmon rearing grounds. The partners continue to do more restoration work, while also conducting regular water quality and fish and wildlife surveys in the estuary.