



2025 REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE ENVIRONMENT
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TO THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA
ON BEHALF OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Federal-Indigenous Management of Protected Areas



Office of the
Auditor General
of Canada

Bureau du
vérificateur général
du Canada

**INDEPENDENT
AUDITOR'S REPORT**

Performance audit reports

This report presents the results of a performance audit conducted by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) under the authority of the Auditor General Act.

A performance audit is an independent, objective, and systematic assessment of how well government is managing its activities, responsibilities, and resources. Audit topics are selected on the basis of their significance. While the OAG may comment on policy implementation in a performance audit, it does not comment on the merits of a policy.

Performance audits are planned, performed, and reported in accordance with professional auditing standards and OAG policies. They are conducted by qualified auditors who

- establish audit objectives and criteria for the assessment of performance
- gather the evidence necessary to assess performance against the criteria
- report both positive and negative findings
- conclude against the established audit objectives
- make recommendations for improvement when there are significant differences between criteria and assessed performance

Performance audits contribute to a public service that is ethical and effective and a government that is accountable to Parliament and Canadians.

This publication is available on our website at www.oag-bvg.gc.ca.

Cette publication est également offerte en français.

© His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Auditor General of Canada, 2025.

Icons for United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are used with permission.

The content of this publication has not been approved by the United Nations and does not reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.

Cat. No. FA1-26/2025-1-8E-PDF

ISBN 978-0-660-79292-7

ISSN 2561-1801

Cover photo: Martin Lipman / © Parks Canada / Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site

At a Glance



Overall message

Overall, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada have built and sustained relationships with Indigenous governments and organizations to cooperatively manage protected terrestrial areas (land and inland water) and marine and coastal areas in a manner that promotes reconciliation. Protecting ecologically significant areas helps preserve biodiversity, safeguard ecosystems, provide food security, and support cultural continuity.

The 3 federal organizations supported mutual, long-term objectives on cooperatively managed protected areas by providing annual funding and other resources such as training to Indigenous partners. They worked together in meaningful ways to weave Indigenous Knowledge, values, and priorities into the management of protected areas and supported Guardians programs, which are Indigenous-led land, ice, and water stewardship initiatives that contribute to the monitoring and protection of ecosystems.

Several risks could hinder the 3 organizations' ability to continue to strengthen relationships with Indigenous partners. There is a risk that current funding allocations will not support the longer-term needs of the programs and policies that nurture the cooperative management of protected areas. As well, existing federal legislation gives decision makers, such as the responsible minister, final decision-making authority over matters within their jurisdiction in protected areas. This can make it challenging for the 3 organizations to meet Indigenous peoples' expectations for shared decision making and advancing Indigenous self-determination in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

If the federal government is to achieve its goal of building a resilient network of protected areas that covers 30% of Canada by 2030, it will need to continue to prioritize the cooperative management of protected areas. Strengthening federal-Indigenous cooperative management increases the likelihood that Indigenous conservation methods will be sustained and flourish. The positive developments noted in this audit report will support future work in protecting the environment, increase certainty for sustainable economies, and create greater opportunities for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Key facts and findings



- This audit is part of a series of 3 reports focused on protected and conserved areas across Canada. The 2 other audits are [Establishing Terrestrial Protected Areas](#) and [Establishing Marine Protected Areas](#).
- This audit focused on 34 terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas, chosen because they had been cooperatively managed by the federal government and Indigenous partners for at least 4 years.
- The federal government has committed to increasing the percentage of all protected and conserved terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas across the country to 30% by 2030.
- The 3 organizations were generally successful in hiring and supporting candidates with cultural competencies.
- Each year between 2022–23 and 2025–26, 4 or 5 of the 7 Parks Canada field units we examined raised funding pressure concerns for their overall budgets, which included permanent and temporary funds.

See [Recommendations and Responses](#) at the end of this report.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background	1
Focus of the audit	3
Findings and Recommendations	7
Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada implemented ways to advance reconciliation through cooperative management with Indigenous partners.....	7
The organizations supported cooperative management within the limits of existing legislation.....	8
The organizations built and sustained relationships with Indigenous partners to protect terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas.....	10
Indigenous priorities were integrated into the cooperative management of protected areas.....	11
The organizations' focus on hiring and supporting people with cultural competencies was generally successful	13
The organizations provided resources to Indigenous partners to support long-term protection objectives	16
The resources provided to Indigenous governments and organizations reflected foundational agreements.....	17
Sustainable funding was at risk.....	18
Conclusion	21
About the Audit	22
Recommendations and Responses	30
Appendix—Text Description of Exhibit	33

Introduction

Background

Cooperative
management
approach to protect
terrestrial areas
and marine and
coastal areas

1. Protected areas are clearly defined geographical spaces, recognized, dedicated, and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. They preserve biodiversity, safeguard ecosystems and wildlife habitat, provide food security, and support sustainable economies and cultural continuity.
2. Currently, Canada's provinces and territories manage approximately three quarters of the country's terrestrial areas (land and inland water), while the remainder is managed by federal and Indigenous governments or private interests. Canada's marine and coastal areas are largely managed federally.
3. There are a variety of laws that enable the creation of federal protected areas. Increasingly, the federal government has partnered with Indigenous governments and organizations to determine how to identify and protect biodiversity and ecological integrity and maintain cultural continuity. The legislation used and existing relationships between the federal government and Indigenous peoples can influence the extent to which the parties work together to manage the protected area.
4. Indigenous peoples have a range of possibilities to protect their lands, including sole governance over title lands they hold. As Indigenous governments negotiate modern treaties, the parties can include provisions in the treaties for the protection of terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas. In addition, options for Indigenous peoples to work with the federal government on the protection of terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas extend along a spectrum that includes duty to consult and cooperative management.
5. The design and implementation of cooperative management depends on a distinctions-based approach to negotiations with Indigenous governments and organizations that will satisfy their

visions for involvement in the protected areas to be established. A distinctions-based approach is one that acknowledges, affirms, and respects the unique rights, histories, cultures, interests, and circumstances of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Cooperative management is an evolving approach that has, at its core, 2 or more parties that manage operations and make decisions together.

6. There are a variety of agreements that outline how protected areas are managed cooperatively with Indigenous peoples. They can include establishment agreements, Inuit impact and benefit agreements, memorandums of understanding, and other binding and non-binding agreements used to establish a mutual understanding or arrangement. Together, we refer to them as foundational agreements. A foundational agreement results from formal negotiations and lays out the core values, principles, and objectives as well as the rules governing the establishment and conduct of the cooperative management boards. They typically include information about the number of representatives from federal and Indigenous governments and organizations who will sit on the cooperative management board, and they outline how decisions will be made—for example, through quorum or consensus.

7. The existing state of federal legislation governing protected areas and activities within them typically means that the federal decision makers, such as the responsible minister, retain final decision-making authority over matters within their jurisdiction. Under cooperative management approaches, management boards may provide advice regarding these matters for the federal decision maker's consideration.

Roles and responsibilities

8. **Environment and Climate Change Canada.** This department is responsible for ensuring a clean, safe, and sustainable environment and is the lead federal department for a wide range of environmental issues, including the conservation of nature. Environment and Climate Change Canada's actions aim to protect and conserve Canada's wildlife and habitat, recover species at risk, and engage Indigenous peoples in these actions. The department establishes national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries, some of which are dually designated as Indigenous protected and conserved areas.

9. **Fisheries and Oceans Canada.** This department is responsible for safeguarding Canada's waters and ensuring the sustainable management of its fisheries. In terms of marine protection, the department has several key responsibilities related to the establishment and management of marine protected areas

under the Oceans Act. The department is responsible for protecting and conserving marine species, habitats, and ecosystems and for ensuring that its work remains grounded in science and local perspectives. These responsibilities are undertaken through collaboration and partnership with Indigenous peoples.

10. **Parks Canada.** This agency establishes and administers national parks, national urban parks, national historic sites, national marine conservation areas, and other heritage places and programs. It establishes new protected areas in partnership with Indigenous peoples and works collaboratively with Indigenous partners to govern and manage these areas.

Focus of the audit

11. This audit focused on whether Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada supported Indigenous governments and organizations to implement selected cooperative management models for protected terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas in a manner consistent with **reconciliation**.¹

12. This audit examined how the federal government worked with Indigenous governments and organizations using cooperative management to protect terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas in Canada. There are currently over 40 federal-Indigenous cooperatively managed protected areas across Canada. We selected the 34 protected areas that were cooperatively managed for at least 4 years to provide a sufficient basis on which to examine how federal support for the implementation of cooperative management was provided. A complete list of these cooperatively managed protected areas, such as national parks, national marine conservation areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, national wildlife areas, and marine protected areas, can be found in [About the Audit](#).

13. To further our understanding of cooperative management practices across the 3 organizations and Indigenous partners involved, we chose 6 case studies from the 34 federal protected areas ([Exhibit 1](#) and [Exhibit 2](#)). These case studies provided qualitative data to help illustrate our findings throughout the report.

¹ **Reconciliation**—The act of establishing and maintaining a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples on the basis of the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership.

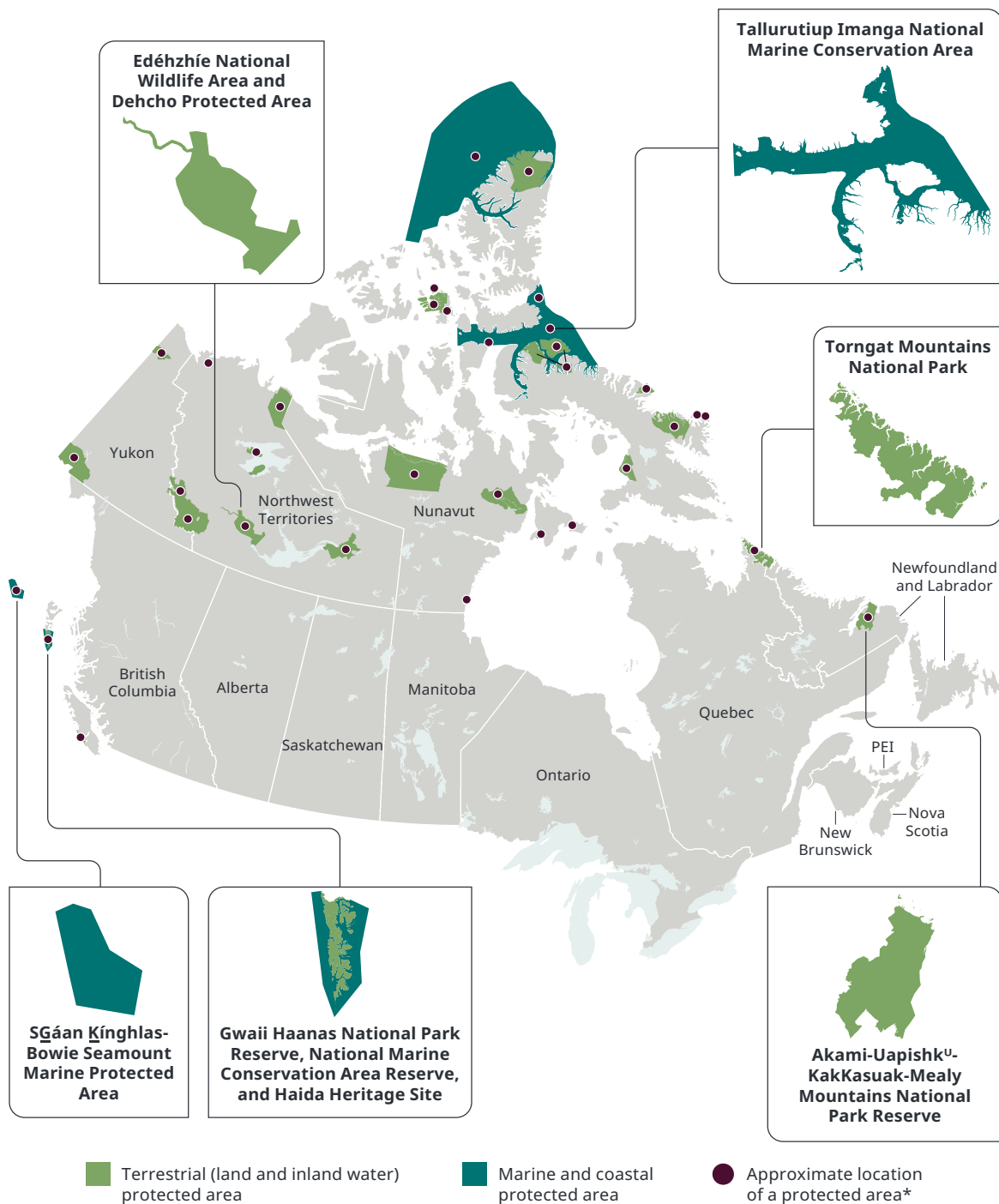
Exhibit 1—Six case studies selected for closer examination

Protected area	Designated under ¹	Federal organizations involved in cooperative management	Indigenous parties involved in cooperative management
Akami-Uapishk ^u -KakKasuak-Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Innu Nation Nunatsiavut Government
Edézhzhíe National Wildlife Area and Dehcho Protected Area	Canada Wildlife Act Dehcho Protected Area under Dehcho law	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Dehcho First Nations
Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site	Canada National Parks Act Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act Haida Heritage Site under Haida law	Parks Canada (lead) Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Council of the Haida Nation
SGáan Kínghlas-Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area	Oceans Act Xaads Siigee t'l'a damaan t'l'a k'ing giigangs (Haida Marine Protected Area under Haida law)	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Council of the Haida Nation
Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area	Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act	Parks Canada (lead) Fisheries and Oceans Canada Transport Canada	Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Tongait KakKasuangita SilakKijâpvinga-Torngat Mountains National Park	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Nunatsiavut Government Nunavik Inuit

¹ Protected areas may be designated solely under federal legislation or in combination with Indigenous law.

Source: Based on information from Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada

Exhibit 2—Thirty-four federal-Indigenous cooperatively managed protected areas were selected for the audit, and 6 were examined more closely



* Some of the protected areas exist within the borders of other larger protected areas. For example, a small migratory bird sanctuary can be located within a national marine conservation area. As depicted by the colours, protected areas can also share borders that make them appear as a single area on the map. Additionally, some areas are very small and can only be depicted by a dot. This map is not drawn to scale and should not be used as an official source of protected area boundaries.

Source: Based on information contained in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database and provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada

[Read the Exhibit 2 text description](#)



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources

Source: United Nations



Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

Source: United Nations

14. This audit is important because Indigenous governments have negotiated agreements and supports to cooperatively manage protected areas as a pathway to self-determination. As well, the 3 organizations view the pursuit of cooperatively managed protected areas as a way to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action and to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan. Without sufficient and sustained human and financial resources for cooperative management in place, it will be challenging for Indigenous peoples to achieve effective and meaningful participation in decisions that affect them, their communities, and their territories.

15. This audit is also important because how the 3 organizations, as partners, provide the supports for cooperative management will affect how future areas will be established and managed. Without support for the cooperative management of protected areas, Canada is unlikely to meet its international commitments on biodiversity, such as the commitments to protect and conserve at least 30% of Canada's terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas by 2030. These commitments are in support of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

16. This audit is 1 of 3 fall 2025 Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development reports on protected and conserved areas. The other 2 reports are [Establishing Terrestrial Protected Areas](#) and [Establishing Marine Protected Areas](#).

17. More details about the audit objective, scope, approach, and criteria are in [About the Audit](#) at the end of this report.

Findings and Recommendations

Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada implemented ways to advance reconciliation through cooperative management with Indigenous partners

Why this finding matters

18. This finding matters because in keeping with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, transformative change is fundamental to improving the federal government's relationship with Indigenous peoples. How the federal government recognizes and respects Indigenous self-determination and the inherent right of self-government for Indigenous peoples will require reviewing the way Indigenous peoples are engaged in effective decision making and governance. It will also require the federal government to put in place mechanisms to support the transition away from outdated and colonial practices and systems of administration and governance.

Context

19. The 2021 mandate letters directed all ministers to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. A subsequent supporting action plan was released in 2023 that included specific actions related to environmental protection.

20. All 3 organizations work with multiple Indigenous governments and organizations that have differing capacities, priorities, and needs. The complexity of these relationships and the need for the 3 organizations to adapt their policies and tools to advance reconciliation are increased when there are multiple Indigenous partners at the table.

The organizations supported cooperative management within the limits of existing legislation

Findings

21. We found that all 3 organizations took action to better support cooperative management with Indigenous governments and organizations within the limits of existing legislation. However, they were at differing stages of implementation and had obtained different results.

22. **Environment and Climate Change Canada.** We found that although the department did not undertake a comprehensive review of its suite of policies and tools supporting cooperative management, the department had taken steps within legal frameworks to cooperatively manage protected areas. For example, it recently negotiated an innovative financial model that provides long-term funding for Indigenous governments and organizations in the Northwest Territories via an Indigenous-led trust fund. Known as NWT: Our Land for the Future, this Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiative recognizes Indigenous conservation and stewardship leadership and provides Indigenous governments and organizations with effective and meaningful opportunities for participation in decisions that affect them, their communities, and their territories.

23. In addition, we found that in 2022, the department implemented a third-party delivery model to enable a non-profit organization designed and managed by First Nations individuals to manage and administer funding for a portion of First Nations Guardians programming. Indigenous Guardians programs are Indigenous-led land and water stewardship initiatives rooted in Indigenous Knowledge, culture, and governance. The department's delivery model for First Nations Guardians initiatives supports Indigenous rights and responsibilities in protecting and conserving ecosystems and developing and maintaining sustainable economies.

24. We also found that the department revised its national guidance for individuals exercising Indigenous rights so that they do not require a permit for activities being undertaken in a national wildlife area. This removed a barrier for Indigenous people exercising their rights on their lands.

25. **Fisheries and Oceans Canada.** We found that although the department did not undertake a comprehensive review of its suite of policies and tools supporting cooperative management, it advanced initiatives at regional levels to assess what changes could be made to better support cooperative management in a manner that supported reconciliation. For example, 2 PFP initiatives were advanced, 1 in the Qikiqtani region in Nunavut and the other in the Northern Shelf Bioregion along the coast of British Columbia.

These initiatives, known as the SINAA Agreement and the Great Bear Sea PFP, are expected to support Indigenous-led conservation projects, including the pursuit of cooperative management with the federal government.

26. We also found that the Pacific region, which was responsible for 2 of the department's 4 protected areas we examined, explored different ways to improve partnerships with Indigenous governments and organizations. For example, in January 2022, the issue of co-creating and co-authoring a monitoring framework in support of the SGáan Kínghlas-Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area was raised by the marine protected area technical team members representing the Council of the Haida Nation. Though the report eventually was published cooperatively by the department and the Council of the Haida Nation, it took over a year for the department's processes to be amended to allow for a co-authored publication.

27. We found that the department continued to face challenges in balancing its marine conservation and fisheries management mandates with Indigenous visions for protection and conservation. Consistent with our [2012 report on marine protected areas](#), we found that the department operated in a context where there were different priorities, such as sustainable fisheries management, protecting species at risk, and oceans management, that involved Indigenous people and others whose interests often diverged. In addition, the department acknowledged that Indigenous partners had differing capacities and views on cooperative management, which, in conjunction with the minister's legally mandated responsibilities, meant that the department could support some, but not all, Indigenous conservation visions.

28. **Parks Canada.** We found that Parks Canada was reviewing what legislative changes may be required to reconcile the challenge of operating a national park reserve on land and foreshore for which the title will transition. Most recently, in 2024, the federal government agreed that the land and foreshore on which Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site are located will transition to Haida title lands. The decision presented the agency with a tangible example for the need to address this challenge.

29. We found that with legislative limitations and support of Indigenous self-determination in mind, Parks Canada undertook vast consultations with Indigenous partners and interested parties to examine barriers to Indigenous stewardship. In 2024, Parks Canada released the Indigenous Stewardship Policy, which is intended to support broader efforts undertaken by Parks Canada to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It aims to guide the application of the Indigenous Stewardship Framework and create conditions that

support cultural continuity, cultural safety, and healing. In recent years, the agency also adapted and implemented tools such as diagnostics, toolkits, and tip sheets designed to better support its employees and representatives working with Indigenous partners.

30. We also found that decisions that best reflected the goal of shared decision making were made when the superintendent—the individual responsible for the management and operations of a specific site or field unit within Parks Canada—was a member of a protected area cooperative management board. The Canada National Parks Act and regulations made under it confer certain authorities to superintendents (for example, issuance of permits and licences). This role of the superintendent helped the agency build and sustain relationships with Indigenous partners. We heard from many of the Indigenous governments and organizations that Parks Canada had a constructive approach to collaborating with Indigenous people and supporting their right to self-determination.

Recommendation

31. Fisheries and Oceans Canada should work with Indigenous governments and organizations with whom it has cooperative management agreements to co-develop solutions in the short, medium, and long terms to key barriers and challenges to balancing the department's marine conservation and fisheries management mandates with Indigenous people's goals for protection and conservation. This work should be informed and guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan, with particular attention to those action plan measures assigned to the department that pertain to protection, conservation, and cooperative management.

The department's response. Agreed.

See [Recommendations and Responses](#) at the end of this report for detailed responses.

The organizations built and sustained relationships with Indigenous partners to protect terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas

Why this finding matters

32. This finding matters because the federal government has made public commitments to increase the percentage of protected and conserved terrestrial areas (land and inland water) and marine and coastal areas to 30% by 2030. Central to these commitments,

and in line with reconciliation and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan, are the government's relationships with Indigenous peoples and its support for Indigenous stewardship of terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas. Meaningful involvement of Indigenous governments and organizations in protecting terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas is fundamental to supporting Indigenous cultural continuity, reconciliation, and healing. Without good relationships with its Indigenous partners, the federal government will not succeed in meeting these commitments.

Indigenous priorities were integrated into the cooperative management of protected areas

Findings

33. Overall, we found that Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada worked with Indigenous governments and organizations to include their priorities in the cooperative management of protected areas we audited. They did so in a variety of ways, such as the following:

- Indigenous laws and cultural practices, values, and language were fundamentally woven into management plans, which provided strategic direction to the operations of protected areas.
- Financial, human, material, and other resources were provided to Indigenous governments and organizations that supported the implementation of their projects and initiatives, which in turn supported their vision for the protected areas. In particular, where they existed, Guardians programs were delivered directly by First Nations and Inuit governments and organizations, with financial and in-kind support offered by the 3 organizations as appropriate.
- The 3 organizations took into account concerns raised by Indigenous parties and cooperative management boards, and they put forward solutions or provided explanations to address them. Where an agreement or consensus could not be met on a solution, the 3 organizations continued to work with the Indigenous parties and cooperative management boards through various channels until such time as a resolution could be reached.

An example of how these elements work in practice can be found at [Exhibit 3](#).

Exhibit 3—The Haida Nation and the federal government worked together to include Haida priorities in the cooperative management of Gwaii Haanas

The 6-member Gwaii Haanas Archipelago Management Board developed the Gwaii Haanas Gina 'Waadluxan KilGuhlGa Land-Sea-People Management Plan with members equally distributed between the Haida Nation and the Government of Canada. The management plan was based on Archipelago Management Board direction and included a vision and principles to guide the management of Gwaii Haanas. The principles were based in Haida law and include, for example, yahguudang (respect), 'laa guu ga kanhlins (responsibility), and giid tlljuus (balance). These same principles were taught to all visitors to Gwaii Haanas through mandatory orientation sessions offered by Parks Canada staff or licensed tour operators.

Gwaii Haanas signage is in 3 languages: English, French, and Haida.



An example of Gwaii Haanas signage

Photo: Office of the Auditor General of Canada

Over the audit period, approximately half of Gwaii Haanas's Parks Canada staff self-identified as Haida, and positions such as the superintendent, operations manager, and human resources manager have been occupied by Haida. The majority of all staff reside locally on Haida Gwaii.

Even prior to Gwaii Haanas's establishment, Haida were responsible for the delivery of the Haida Gwaii Watchmen Program. Within Gwaii Haanas, the Haida Gwaii Watchmen protect sensitive areas of high cultural significance and act as ambassadors between nations by educating visitors about Haida heritage. As of 2022, it was funded by a 3-year contribution agreement between Parks Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation, which allowed for greater flexibility and decision making for Haida in running the program.

Source: Based on information from Parks Canada and the Council of the Haida Nation

The organizations' focus on hiring and supporting people with cultural competencies was generally successful

Findings

34. We found that the 3 organizations implemented individualized approaches that best met the circumstances of each protected area to hire and support candidates with the cultural competencies necessary to sustain relationships with Indigenous governments and organizations. This was important because we heard from Indigenous governments and organizations that working with partners who demonstrated cultural competencies was essential to building good relationships. Some common examples from all 3 organizations included:

- emphasizing experience working with Indigenous people and building partnerships as essential merit criteria for positions where working with Indigenous governments and organizations was a primary function
- providing learning opportunities, as well as guidance documents to support employees, such as on-the-land trips, the sharing of best practices across protected areas, and cultural workshops and events

35. We also found that Environment and Climate Change Canada and Parks Canada:

- promoted Indigenous-first hiring practices (for example, providing preference to Dehcho First Nations in hiring for the Edézhíe National Wildlife Area and Dehcho Protected Area; the Haida-first approach in Gwaii Haanas; and providing preference to Inuit applicants in hiring for the Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area)
- offered Inuit mentorship initiatives designed to support increased Inuit employment and career opportunities
- had centres of expertise in Indigenous reconciliation within their organizations that supported policy teams and operational staff with their work

An example of how these elements work in practice can be found at [Exhibit 4](#).

Exhibit 4—Parks Canada built a better understanding of Inuit culture in Torngat Mountains National Park

Torngat Mountains National Park is located in northern Labrador, Newfoundland and Labrador, on traditional territory of the Inuit of Nunavik and Nunatsiavut. The park site office is located in Nain, Newfoundland and Labrador, on Labrador Inuit land, and all of its employees are Inuit beneficiaries.

Every year, Parks Canada staff travel to the park with the cooperative management board, which comprises 7 members representing the Nunatsiavut Government, the Makivvik Corporation, and Parks Canada, to learn more about the wildlife, history, culture, and Inuit connections to the land. For approximately a week, they live together in the remote base camp and visit sites of cultural importance, witness progress made on infrastructure investments, and discuss their priorities and shared vision for the park.



Parks Canada staff and the cooperative management board gather during an excursion into Torngat Mountains National Park

Photo: Parks Canada

Source: Based on information from Parks Canada

36. In addition, we found that Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada created new regional site offices to strengthen relationships with the Indigenous partners they worked most closely with on cooperatively managed protected areas, among other activities. For example, Fisheries and Oceans Canada created the Arctic regional office in Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, to support broader goals of the organization in the Arctic region, including the establishment and implementation of the

Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area and the Tuvaijuittuq Marine Protected Area. As well, Parks Canada created the Labrador field unit in Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador, to better support the Torngat Mountains National Park and Akami-Uapishk^u-KakKasuak-Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve. Environment and Climate Change Canada already had offices in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

37. When we heard from Indigenous governments and organizations, we found that they were less satisfied with their relationships with the 3 organizations if they were not meaningfully included in the recruitment and selection of candidates for essential positions or sufficiently represented in positions within the 3 organizations in line with their respective foundational agreements.

38. We found that for a small number of areas within our audit scope, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Parks Canada did not involve their First Nations partners in recruitment and hiring decisions. In 1 instance, the Innu Nation expressed their concerns over their exclusion from the process of appointing the Superintendent for Akami-Uapishk^u-KakKasuak-Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve. This contrasted with other areas where we found involvement and higher levels of satisfaction among their First Nations partners. In our opinion, it is a good practice when partners are provided the opportunity to meaningfully collaborate on recruitment for positions they view as important to achieving their vision for the protected areas or that provide important liaison and support functions for the cooperative management board.

39. We also found that the 3 organizations reported that they did not consistently reach representative levels of Inuit employment across regional and site offices in the Nunavut Settlement Area. Article 23 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement sets out an objective to increase Inuit participation in government employment in the Nunavut Settlement Area to a representative level. We heard from Inuit organizations that recruitment of Inuit across Inuit Nunangat is a challenge for all governments and organizations. We found that efforts were made across the 3 organizations to work with Inuit partners in Nunavut to improve representative levels of Inuit employment.

Recommendation

40. Where existing practices are not already in place, the 3 organizations should provide Indigenous partners with opportunities to meaningfully collaborate on recruitment processes for positions the Indigenous partners view as important to cooperative management.

Response of each organization. Agreed.

See [Recommendations and Responses](#) at the end of this report for detailed responses.

The organizations provided resources to Indigenous partners to support long-term protection objectives

Why this finding matters

41. This finding matters because for Indigenous governments and organizations to be meaningfully involved in protecting terrestrial areas (land and inland water) and marine and coastal areas, they must have the financial means to do so. Untimely or insufficient funding puts at risk the success of long-term protection objectives, including the protection of ecological and cultural values.

42. As the intent is for the protection of terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas to be permanent, resources should align with this intention. The 3 organizations need the resources necessary to sustainably fulfill their own roles and responsibilities for cooperative management, beyond providing resources to Indigenous peoples.

Context

43. The degree to which financial and other resource commitments were made to Indigenous governments and organizations that were party to 1 or more foundational agreements varied based on many factors, such as:

- the mechanism used to establish the protected area
- the size of the protected area and the extent of stewardship activities expected to be undertaken within it
- the role of the Indigenous governments or organizations in the cooperative management of the protected area
- the existence of alternative funding mechanisms to support the role of the Indigenous government or organization, such

as a private endowment fund held in trust by an Indigenous government or organization that provides funding for its stewardship activities

44. A distinctions-based approach is used with Indigenous governments and organizations to determine what is needed and how to protect an area. The financial and resource commitments made for each protected area are expected to differ based on the needs and priorities of the Indigenous parties involved. Similarly, the internal resources required by each of the 3 organizations can vary in relation to the factors described above.

The resources provided to Indigenous governments and organizations reflected foundational agreements

Findings

45. We found that the 3 organizations provided financial and other resources, such as in-kind services like training, to Indigenous governments and organizations. The resources provided reflected commitments found in foundational agreements and covered activities such as costs associated with the operation of cooperative management boards, the development and implementation of management plans, Guardians programs, and monitoring programs.

46. We found examples in all 6 case studies where the 3 organizations made changes to how they typically funded Indigenous governments and organizations in an effort to simplify and optimize the process and better support self-determination. For example:

- Environment and Climate Change Canada established a 5-year contribution agreement with the Dehcho First Nations for funding related to the Edézhíé National Wildlife Area and Dehcho Protected Area that allowed for any unused funding at the end of a fiscal year to be carried forward annually up to the final year of the agreement. In our opinion, this was helpful, as the implementation activities of Edézhíé were delayed due to various challenges, such as COVID-19 restrictions.
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada provided funding via a single multi-year contribution agreement from 2019–20 to 2023–24 to the Council of the Haida Nation for activities related to both Gwaii Haanas and the SGáan Kínghlas-Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area, instead of a separate agreement for each of the protected areas.
- In 2021–22, Parks Canada provided a 5-year contribution agreement to the Cooperative Management Board for the Torngat Mountains National Park that allowed for a

carry-forward of unspent funds to future years. In addition, at the end of the 5-year period, the board would be able to retain any unspent funds if there had been no deviation from the terms of the agreement. This addressed a concern of the board regarding the flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances that could cause delays in completing activities, a common challenge in the North.

47. Another example was where Parks Canada supported the negotiation of the Incremental Treaty Agreement between the government and the Innu of Labrador. This agreement allowed funding related to the establishment and implementation of the Akami-Uapishk^u-KakKasuak-Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve to flow to the Innu of Labrador before the final negotiation of their modern treaty. This funding allowed them to meaningfully participate in shaping the vision for the protected area.

Sustainable funding was at risk

Findings

48. We found that the 3 organizations had annual budgeting processes in place that considered the funding requirements of the foundational agreements and the organizations' own operations in relation to protecting terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas. We found that during our audit period, cooperatively managed protected and conserved areas funding commitments were achieved.

49. However, we found challenges with sustainable funding to support the 3 organizations' ongoing cooperative management resource needs. In our opinion, relying on current models to support existing and growing funding needs of cooperatively managed protected areas is unsustainable.

50. **Environment and Climate Change Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.** We found that the 2 organizations determined that the current annual allocation of their operational base funding was insufficient to provide funding for the support of the ongoing cooperative management of protected areas. We found that the departments relied on program funding of 5 years or less for the majority of resources required for ongoing support of cooperatively managed protected areas, except for Inuit impact and benefit agreements that received funding for 7-year periods plus interim funding where necessary (see [Exhibit 5](#) for examples of significant program funding received during our audit period).

Exhibit 5—Environment and Climate Change Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada relied on short- to medium-term program funding to provide support for the ongoing cooperative management of protected areas

Name of the program	Enhanced Nature Legacy	2016 to 2023 Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement for National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries in the Nunavut Settlement Area	Canada's 2025 Marine Conservation Targets
Department	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Duration	5 years beginning in 2021–22	7 years beginning in 2016, plus a 2-year extension for 2023–24 and 2024–25	5 years beginning in 2021–22
Purpose	Support of cooperatively managed protected and conserved areas, including direct funding to Indigenous government and organizations to support their participation in the governance of protected areas and related stewardship activities, such as Guardians programs. This included funding related to the Edézhíé National Wildlife Area.	Funding for the implementation of the Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement for the 5 national wildlife areas and 8 migratory bird sanctuaries that are co-managed by the department and the designated Inuit organizations in the Nunavut Settlement Area.	Support for the management of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, including monitoring, enforcement, and reporting.
Allocation of existing reference levels¹ over the duration of the agreement	\$65.2 million (represents 7% of total funding)	\$12.9 million (represents 53% of total funding)	\$68.3 million (represents 42% of total funding)
New funding received over the duration of the agreement	\$823.6 million (represents 93% of total funding)	\$11.4 million (represents 47% of total funding)	\$92.9 million (represents 58% of total funding)
Total funding allocated over the duration of the agreement	\$888.8 million	\$24.3 million	\$161.2 million

¹ Existing reference levels refer to base funding received every year by the department.

Source: Based on information from Environment and Climate Change Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada

51. Should program funding not be renewed, there is a risk that programs and positions that Indigenous governments and organizations have come to expect and that have generated positive outcomes between them and the 2 organizations will be reduced or eliminated, affecting the long-term achievement of outcomes for the protected areas.

52. **Parks Canada.** We found that the organization relied on a mix of annual base (permanent) funding and temporary funding to meet its obligations. Temporary funding covered 5- to 7-year periods. We found that Parks Canada used its budgets from temporary funding as sites were established and implemented or for certain agency-wide programs, such as Guardians programs, and for Inuit impact and benefit agreements. As well, the agency used its budgets from permanent funding for those sites that were already well established and operational during our audit period, such as Gwaii Haanas and Torngat Mountains National Park. Temporary funding levels were higher than permanent funding levels to reflect the increased costs with establishing a new site, including building and acquiring new infrastructure to support operations, and because they also covered some Inuit impact and benefit agreements, which are typically funded for 7-year periods.

53. We found that in 2022, the agency undertook a resource review to assess alignment between its human and financial resources and its activities. The results illustrated the increasing trend in the level of effort attributed to the agency's relationships with Indigenous people, including effort dedicated to consultations, negotiations, and the implementation of agreements.

54. In reviewing the integrated business plans, we found that each year between 2022-23 and 2025-26, 4 or 5 of the 7 field units we examined raised funding pressure concerns for their overall budgets, which included permanent and temporary funds. Field units are business units within Parks Canada's organizational structure that are managed by a field unit superintendent and can include the responsibility for 1 site (such as the Gwaii Haanas field unit) or several. The field units that did not report concerns did not expect to have an overall budget deficit. Some of the pressures noted by field units were:

- the increasing cost of maintaining personnel in remote locations (salaries and isolated post allowances are more expensive; infrastructure, such as staff housing, was more expensive; and technology requirements, such as satellite internet, were more expensive)
- an expectation among Indigenous parties that program costs, such as those for Guardians, be permanently funded

- the funding received through Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada for the agency's own operations related to the implementation of protected areas established by modern treaty may not continue to be available; however, this funding was used to provide operations that are essential to delivering on certain foundational agreements, in particular those in the North negotiated with the Inuit

55. We also found that between 2022–23 and 2025–26, there was an increase in the planned deficits for activities associated with permanent funding from 3 of 7 field units to all 7 field units. To address this, the agency relied on various ways to cover the shortfalls, such as transferring funds from other field units or parts of the organization made available by unforeseen delays in planned spending. In addition, they relied on the following approaches:

- cutting planned program activities, such as a reduced number of in-person cooperative management board meetings or a reduced number of monitoring activities in the protected areas
- using temporary funds or funding for new parks and sites, which have limited funding horizons, to make up the shortfall in the other activities

56. These approaches resulted in some important funding priorities for both the agency and Indigenous parties being delayed to future years. While overall, Parks Canada has demonstrated good relationships with its Indigenous partners, an important reason for this has been the agency's ability to meet its funding commitments. Continued funding pressures could erode the agency's ability to meet its funding commitments and treaty obligations. This could have important negative impacts on its relationships with Indigenous partners, as well as its ability to fulfill its responsibilities under the Canada National Parks Act and the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act to conserve and manage the protected areas in a manner that meets the use of current and future generations.

Conclusion

57. We concluded that Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada supported Indigenous governments and organizations to implement selected cooperative management models for protected terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas in a manner consistent with reconciliation.

About the Audit

This independent assurance report was prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada on cooperatively managed protected terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas. Our responsibility was to provide objective information, advice, and assurance to assist Parliament in its scrutiny of the government's management of resources and programs and to conclude on whether Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada, the 3 organizations responsible for cooperative management of protected terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas, complied in all significant respects with the applicable criteria.

All work in this audit was performed to a reasonable level of assurance in accordance with the Canadian Standard on Assurance Engagements (CSAE) 3001—Direct Engagements, set out by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA Canada) in the CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance.

The Office of the Auditor General of Canada applies the Canadian Standard on Quality Management 1—Quality Management for Firms That Perform Audits or Reviews of Financial Statements, or Other Assurance or Related Services Engagements. This standard requires our office to design, implement, and operate a system of quality management, including policies or procedures regarding compliance with ethical requirements, professional standards, and applicable legal and regulatory requirements.

In conducting the audit work, we complied with the independence and other ethical requirements of the relevant rules of professional conduct applicable to the practice of public accounting in Canada, which are founded on fundamental principles of integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due care, confidentiality, and professional behaviour.

In accordance with our regular audit process, we obtained the following from entity management:

- confirmation of management's responsibility for the subject under audit
- acknowledgement of the suitability of the criteria used in the audit
- confirmation that all known information that has been requested, or that could affect the findings or audit conclusion, has been provided
- confirmation that the audit report is factually accurate

Audit objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada supported Indigenous governments and organizations to implement selected cooperative management models for protected terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas in a manner consistent with reconciliation.

Scope and approach

We examined the cooperative management of protected terrestrial areas (land and inland water) and marine and coastal areas of Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada and Indigenous governments or organizations that reflected the recognized rights and assertions of the Indigenous parties involved. Our audit population included the 34 protected areas that were established by and for which implementation began on or before April 1, 2021 (“the population”). This allowed for sufficient time during our audit period to examine how the 3 organizations built and sustained relationships with Indigenous peoples and respected Indigenous Knowledge, leadership, and priorities in decision making.

The following table is organized alphabetically, first by the federal legislation under which the areas are designated, and then by protected area.

Protected area	Designated under ¹	Federal organizations involved in cooperative management	Indigenous parties involved in cooperative management ²
Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site ³	Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act Haida Heritage Site under Haida law	Parks Canada (lead) Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Council of the Haida Nation
Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area	Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act	Parks Canada (lead) Fisheries and Oceans Canada Transport Canada	Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Akami-Uapishk ^U -KakKasuak-Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Innu Nation Nunatsiavut Government
Auyuittuq National Park Quttinirpaaq National Park Sirmilik National Park	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site ³	Canada National Parks Act Haida Heritage Site under Haida law	Parks Canada (lead) Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Council of the Haida Nation

Protected area	Designated under ¹	Federal organizations involved in cooperative management	Indigenous parties involved in cooperative management ²
Kluane National Park and Reserve	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Kluane First Nation Champagne and Aishihik First Nations
Nááts'j'hch'oh National Park Reserve	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Sahtu Dene and Metis
Nahanni National Park Reserve (Nah?à Dehé)	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Dehcho First Nations
Pacific Rim National Park Reserve	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Maa-nulth First Nations Huu-ay-aht First Nations Ucluelet First Nation
Pingo Canadian Landmark	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Committee for Original Peoples' Entitlement, representing the Inuvialuit of the Inuvialuit Settlement Region
Qausuittuq National Park	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Saoyú-?ehdacho National Historic Site	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Déłıne Land Corporation Déłıne Renewable Resources Council
Thaidene Nënë National Park Reserve	Canada National Parks Act Indigenous Protected Area under Dene law	Parks Canada	Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation Northwest Territory Métis Nation
Tongait KakKasuangita SilakKijâpvinga–Torngat Mountains National Park	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Nunatsiavut Government Makivvik Corporation

Protected area	Designated under ¹	Federal organizations involved in cooperative management	Indigenous parties involved in cooperative management ²
Tuktut Nogait National Park	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Inuvialuit Game Council Inuvialuit Regional Corporation Paulatuk Community Corporation Paulatuk Hunters & Trappers Committee
Ukkusiksalik National Park	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Kivalliq Inuit Association
Vuntut National Park	Canada National Parks Act	Parks Canada	Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
Akpait National Wildlife Area Ninginganiq National Wildlife Area Nirjutiqarvik National Wildlife Area Polar Bear Pass (Nanuit Itillinga) National Wildlife Area Qaqulluit National Wildlife Area	Canada Wildlife Act	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated Kitikmeot Inuit Association Kivalliq Inuit Association Qikiqtani Inuit Association
Edézhzié National Wildlife Area and Dehcho Protected Area	Canada Wildlife Act Dehcho Protected Area under Dehcho law	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Dehcho First Nations

Protected area	Designated under ¹	Federal organizations involved in cooperative management	Indigenous parties involved in cooperative management ²
Ahiak (Queen Maud Gulf) Migratory Bird Sanctuary Akpaqarvik (Prince Leopold Island) Migratory Bird Sanctuary Bylot Island Migratory Bird Sanctuary Ikkattuaq (Harry Gibbons) Migratory Bird Sanctuary Isulijarniq (Dewey-Soper) Migratory Bird Sanctuary Kuugaarjuk (McConnell River) Migratory Bird Sanctuary Naujavaat (Seymour Island) Migratory Bird Sanctuary Qaqsauqtuuq (East Bay) Migratory Bird Sanctuary	Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994	Environment and Climate Change Canada	Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated Kitikmeot Inuit Association Kivalliq Inuit Association Qikiqtani Inuit Association
SḠáan Kínghlas-Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area	Oceans Act Xaads Siigee t'l'a damaan t'l'a k'ing giigangs Haida Marine Protected Area	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Council of the Haida Nation
Tuvaijuittuq Marine Protected Area	Oceans Act	Fisheries and Oceans Canada	Qikiqtani Inuit Association

¹ Protected areas may be designated solely under federal legislation or in combination with Indigenous law.

² Cooperatively managed sites can involve several Indigenous partners. The following list is limited to Indigenous partners who are signatories to the foundational agreements that met the Office of the Auditor General of Canada's scoping criteria. As a result, not all Indigenous governments or organizations may have met the criteria and been included in our scope.

³ Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site were counted as 1 of our 34 areas, since it is managed by a single cooperative management board.

We also examined the extent to which the 3 organizations provided human and financial resources to support the management of terrestrial area and marine and coastal area protection that used a cooperative management approach with Indigenous governments or organizations. We looked at systems and practices in place to fulfill funding and staffing requirements and how they contributed to the management of the protected areas, considering their cooperative management models as well as the long-term conservation objectives and outcomes for each protected area.

Additionally, we examined work undertaken by the 3 organizations to implement or modernize policies or tools related to the protection of terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas in a manner consistent with Canada's commitment to advancing reconciliation, including its efforts to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

To conduct this work, we held interviews, analyzed data, and reviewed documentation of relevant systems and processes designed and implemented by each of the 3 organizations to support the population. This work focused on the implementation of legislation, policies, directives, and other tools to support terrestrial area and marine and coastal area protection. We also conducted meetings in person (on traditional territory, when possible) and virtually with the Indigenous parties involved in our audit population of protected areas to gain a better understanding of their perspectives on cooperative management.

In addition, we examined the implementation and management of agreements using a sample of 6 protected areas from the population of protected areas ("case studies"). These case studies included site visits and interviews with field unit employees of the 3 organizations—and, where possible, with cooperative management board members—and a review of the systems and practices of the 3 organizations' support for cooperative management.

Our work was supplemented by evidence from Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations that are party to 1 or more protected areas within the population. We approached 23 contacts representing Indigenous governments and organizations by email, by phone, and through an online survey. The survey comprised a rating scale and open-ended questions to allow for quantitative and qualitative analysis. We received responses to the survey from 15 out of 23 contacts to whom it was sent for a 65% response rate. We also conducted an in-depth analysis of survey responses, which allowed the audit team to provide further support for the findings that emerged from the examination work.

We appreciate the willingness and generosity with which the Indigenous parties and cooperative management board members responded to our questions and requests for information.

We did not examine:

- the establishment of new protected and conserved terrestrial areas and marine and coastal areas
- agreements signed after April 1, 2021
- protected and conserved areas that are not cooperatively managed
- the design of specific funding programs or tools or a review of the efficiency or effectiveness of funding programs or tools

Criteria

We used the following criteria to conclude against our audit objective:

Criteria	Sources
Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada build and sustain relationships with Indigenous peoples and respect Indigenous Knowledge, leadership, and priorities in decision making. Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada provide financial and human resources to implement the joint or cooperative management or shared governance models of the protected and conserved areas to achieve the long-term conservation objectives with Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations. Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada implement their policies and tools in a manner consistent with Canada's commitment to advancing reconciliation, including its efforts to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.	• United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act • United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples • United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan 2023–2028, Department of Justice Canada • Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, United Nations • Technical Note: Equity in Conservation—What, Why and How?, International Union for Conservation of Nature and World Commission on Protected Areas • Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act • Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 • Canada Wildlife Act • Wildlife Area Regulations • Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994 • Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations • Canada National Parks Act • Parks Canada Agency Act • Oceans Act • Fisheries Act • Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action • Ministerial mandate letters • Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ People, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada • Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples, Department of Justice Canada • We Rise Together: Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 Through the Creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the Spirit and Practice of Reconciliation: The Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018

Criteria	Sources
	• Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy: Halting and Reversing Biodiversity Loss in Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2024 • Inuit Nunangat Policy, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada • Policy on the Establishment and Management of National Marine Conservation Areas, Parks Canada • Indigenous Stewardship Policy, Parks Canada • Shared Governance Primer, Parks Canada • Protection Standard for Canada's Marine Protected Areas, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2019 and 2023 • Agreements related to the establishment of protected and conserved areas (such as establishment agreements, Inuit impact benefit agreements, and memorandums of understanding) • Management plans from a sample of individual establishment agreements

Period covered by the audit

The audit covered the period from November 1, 2019, to June 30, 2025. This is the period to which the audit conclusion applies. However, to gain a more complete understanding of the subject matter of the audit, we also examined certain matters that preceded the start date of this period.

Date of the report

We obtained sufficient and appropriate audit evidence on which to base our conclusion on September 29, 2025, in Ottawa, Canada.

Audit team

This audit was completed by a multidisciplinary team from across the Office of the Auditor General of Canada led by Carey Agnew, Principal. The principal has overall responsibility for audit quality, including conducting the audit in accordance with professional standards, applicable legal and regulatory requirements, and the office's policies and system of quality management.

Recommendations and Responses

Responses appear as they were received by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

In the following table, the paragraph number preceding the recommendation indicates the location of the recommendation in the report.

Recommendation	Response
31. Fisheries and Oceans Canada should work with Indigenous governments and organizations with whom it has cooperative management agreements to co-develop solutions in the short, medium, and long terms to key barriers and challenges to balancing the department’s marine conservation and fisheries management mandates with Indigenous people’s goals for protection and conservation. This work should be informed and guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan, with particular attention to those action plan measures assigned to the department that pertain to protection, conservation, and cooperative management.	Fisheries and Oceans Canada’s response. Agreed. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) will work with Indigenous governments and organizations, with whom the department has cooperative management agreements, to leverage best practices to strengthen cooperative management boards’ governance, consensus, and issue-resolution through improved review processes. This work will support the co-development of solutions, both immediate and longer term, that reflect Indigenous partners’ visions for marine protected areas. It will build on recent advances, such as the Great Bear Sea and SINAA Project Finance for Permanence Agreements signed in 2024 and 2025 and will support commitments under United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA) Action Plan Measure 42.

Recommendation	Response
40. Where existing practices are not already in place, the 3 organizations should provide Indigenous partners with opportunities to meaningfully collaborate on recruitment processes for positions the Indigenous partners view as important to cooperative management.	Environment and Climate Change Canada's response. Agreed. Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) will identify any gaps that exist with current practices that are already in place for collaborating with Indigenous partners on the recruitment processes for positions that are important to the co-management of protected areas. If any gaps are identified, ECCC will work collaboratively with Indigenous partners to address them. Expected completion date: March 2027. Fisheries and Oceans Canada's response. Agreed. DFO will build on current practices to increase opportunities to collaborate with Indigenous Peoples, on its recruitment and retention strategy, which includes goals to increase the hiring and retention for Indigenous people and ensuring employees working with Indigenous Peoples on cooperative management of protected areas receive appropriate cultural humility training. For example, DFO Pacific Region has supported the Indigenous internship program facilitating greater connections to Indigenous communities and will build on successes to improve how we recruit, onboard, and retain Indigenous staff where possible. DFO is committed to the objective of realizing a fully representative workforce in the Nunavut Settlement Area as set out in Article 23 of the Nunavut Agreement. The Inuit Employment Plan (IEP) outlines how DFO will attain its short and medium-term targets, and work towards long-term goals over the period spanning 2023-2033. Through the implementation of the IEP DFO aims to improve how we adapt Nunavut staffing, diversify recruitment, improve onboarding practices, retain staff, expand education as well as Inuit traditional knowledge and training, and mainstream cultural recognition.

Recommendation	Response
	Parks Canada's response. Agreed. Parks Canada is advancing collaborative, place-based hiring practices in partnership with Indigenous communities, guided by respect, transparency, and shared decision-making. To ensure consistency and promote increased application of collaborative place-based hiring practices, the Human Resources and Employee Wellness Directorate (HREW) is developing guidance to support implementation of best practices regarding Indigenous partners' involvement in hiring. The guidance will be accompanied by a framework for tracking implementation of these practices. The work will be completed by July 2026 and will be guided by Indigenous partners.

Appendix—Text Description of Exhibit

Here is the text description of the exhibit.

Exhibit 2—Thirty-four federal-Indigenous cooperatively managed protected areas were selected for the audit, and 6 were examined more closely

This map shows the 34 federal-Indigenous cooperatively managed protected areas that were selected for the audit. Six of the 34 areas are highlighted, as they were examined more closely. In alphabetical order, the 6 areas are as follows:

- Akami-Uapishk^U-KakKasuak-Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve, which is a terrestrial (land and inland water) protected area in northeastern Labrador, Newfoundland and Labrador
- Edézhíe National Wildlife Area and Dehcho Protected Area, which is a terrestrial (land and inland water) protected area in the southern central area of the Northwest Territories
- Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve, National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, and Haida Heritage Site, which are part terrestrial (land and inland water) protected area and part marine and coastal protected area on islands off the coast of British Columbia
- SGáan Kínglas-Bowie Seamount Marine Protected Area, which is a marine and coastal protected area on islands off the coast of British Columbia
- Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area, which is a marine and coastal protected area in the northeastern region of Nunavut
- Torngat Mountains National Park, which is a terrestrial (land and inland water) protected area in northwestern Labrador, Newfoundland and Labrador

The remaining federal-Indigenous cooperatively managed protected areas are located as follows: 1 more in British Columbia, 2 in the Yukon, 5 more in the Northwest Territories, and the rest sprinkled throughout Nunavut. Many are large enough on the map to be identified as terrestrial (land and inland water) protected areas. A large area at the northern tip of Nunavut is identified as a marine and coastal protected area.

Some of the protected areas exist within the borders of other larger protected areas. For example, a small migratory bird sanctuary can be located within a national marine conservation area. As depicted by the colours, protected areas can also share borders that make them appear as a single area on the map. Additionally, some areas are very small and can only be depicted by a dot. This map is not drawn to scale and should not be used as an official source of protected area boundaries.

Source: Based on information contained in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database and provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and Parks Canada

[**Back to Exhibit 2**](#)



Office of the
Auditor General
of Canada

Bureau du
vérificateur général
du Canada