

# Protected Areas

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## Introduction



Canada is one of the few countries in the world to hold vast expanses of intact natural areas, and is well known for its magnificent natural scenery and wealth of wildlife. The government of Canada plays a central role in the conservation of this natural wealth and its biodiversity by protecting habitat of national ecological importance.

Environment Canada is one of [three federal departments](#) mandated to protect habitat, fulfilling its mandate by conserving and protecting migratory birds, species at risk such as [Woodland Caribou](#), and other species of national interest. [Environment Canada's approach](#) to achieve this goal is through the development of its [network of protected areas](#) consisting of [National Wildlife Areas](#) and [Migratory Bird Sanctuaries](#) whose establishment and management are supported by [legislation](#).

Environment Canada's [network of protected areas](#) totals over 12.4 million hectares, with more than 85% of the network classified as wilderness areas under the [IUCN protected areas management system](#). By conserving these habitats, Environment Canada's protected areas help ensure that wildlife species do not become at risk, thereby preserving biodiversity at regional, national and even international scales.

### **IUCN Protected Areas Categories System**

<b>Management Category</b>	<b>Title</b>
Ia	Strict Nature Reserve
Ib	Wilderness Area
II	National Park
III	Natural Monument or Feature
IV	Habitat / Species Management Area
V	Protected Landscape / Seascape
VI	Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources

### **What is a Protected Area?**

Canada recognizes the [International Union for Conservation of Nature's \(IUCN's\)](#) definition of protected areas as: "a clearly defined geographical space, 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." (IUCN, 2008)



## Why Create Protected Areas?

Forests, wetlands, grasslands, mountains, and coastal and marine areas are all integral parts of Canada's natural capital, which provides health, socio-cultural and economic benefits to Canadians. Protected areas have long been recognized as one of the most effective tools for the conservation of natural capital, its biodiversity and the complex interactions among the elements of the biosphere.

Wildlife and wildlife habitat are vital to the ecological and biological processes that are essential to the preservation of life. Sufficient high-quality habitat is of utmost importance for the survival of wildlife populations, and essential for the maintenance of ecosystems on which all beings depend for their survival. The conservation of these ecological processes is essential for fresh water and clean air, the protection of soil resources, climate regulation, the capture and storage of carbon, and pest and disease control, among other valuable functions.



Canadians have a profound attachment to wilderness, which is rooted in our collective history and heritage. This aspect has been an important driving force behind wildlife habitat conservation in Canada, being one of the few pioneer countries that established modern<sup>1</sup> protected areas (some of the world's first), in the late 1800s. These areas have now expanded into a large network protecting approximately 100 million hectares of terrestrial habitats, and 4 million hectares of Canada's oceans.

## Federal Protected Areas

The federal government maintains many tools and programs for nature conservation. These range from ownership and management of various types of formal protected areas to the negotiation of voluntary agreements with private landowners. The federal approach to conservation and protection is to combine this range of mechanisms and partners, using each tool when and where appropriate.

Within the federal government, Environment Canada, the Parks Canada Agency and Fisheries and Oceans Canada have the mandate to protect significant nature areas and habitats by managing complementary parks and protected area programs:

- [Environment Canada](#), directly and/or through partnership arrangements, establishes and manages [National Wildlife Areas](#), and [Migratory Bird Sanctuaries](#) for the conservation of habitat

to protect migratory birds, species at risk and other species of national interest. National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries can be established in either the terrestrial or marine environment.

- [Fisheries and Oceans Canada](#) establishes [Marine Protected Areas](#) for a variety of purposes, including the conservation and protection of habitats for aquatic species at risk, and the conservation and protection of unique aquatic habitats as well as marine areas of high biodiversity or high biological productivity.
- [Parks Canada](#) establishes and manages [National Parks](#) and [National Marine Conservation Areas](#), which are intended to protect a representative sample of Canada's 39 terrestrial natural regions and 29 marine regions and to provide opportunities for public education and enjoyment.

The federal government also plays a lead role in managing the implementation of [international protected areas programs in Canada](#), including [UNESCO World Heritage Sites](#), [biosphere reserves](#), and [Ramsar wetlands sites](#), among others.

In addition, Environment Canada is responsible for the national and international reporting on Canada's protected areas, specifically to the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), the IUCN's [World Commission on Protected Areas](#), and the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) by contributing to the sustainability reports of OECD member states. This role is fulfilled through the [Canadian Council on Ecological Areas](#), of which Environment Canada is a member and to which the Department is responsible for the standardized data compilation through the [Conservation Areas Reporting and Tracking System](#).

## Protected Areas in Canada

Canada's protected areas represent a significant contribution to the protection of global biodiversity. There are over 4000 publicly and privately managed protected areas in Canada. Although "parks" are the most common type, protected areas are divided among more than 100 different types, ranging from ecological reserves and wilderness areas to community parks and conservation zones ([Canadian Council on Ecological Areas, Occasional Paper No. 18, 2008](#)).

### Did you know?

1885 1<sup>st</sup> federal park: Banff National Park, Alberta

1887 1<sup>st</sup> federal wildlife protected area: Last Mountain Lake Waterfowl Refuge, Saskatchewan

1893 1<sup>st</sup> provincial park: Algonquin Provincial Park, Ontario

1919 1<sup>st</sup> federal marine protected area: Bird Rocks Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Quebec

### Did you know?

1947 Creation of the Dominion Wildlife Service (became the Canadian Wildlife Service in 1950)

1961 Creation of largest federal protected area: Queen Maud Gulf Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Nunavut (6,292,818 ha)

Consult the Environment Canada web section on [Nature Indicators](#) to track Canada's performance related to protected areas and wildlife conservation.

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1 The creation of the first modern protected areas in Canada began with the designation of Banff National Park (1885) and Last Mountain Lake Waterfowl Refuge (1887). The designation of Yosemite (1864) and Yellowstone (1872) as national parks in the United States is often referred to as the beginning of modern protected areas, i.e., formally designated pristine and wilderness areas that were set aside for protection and for the enjoyment of the public and future generations.