

Government of
Northwest Territories



Canada – Northwest Territories

Nature Agreement

PROGRESS REPORT FOR 2025-26



Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta
Julien Schroder 2020

Canada-Northwest Territories Nature Agreement

Supporting Conservation in the Northwest Territories

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and the Government of Canada signed the Canada-Northwest Territories Nature Agreement in February 2025, through which Canada will provide up to \$20 million to the GNWT over 10 years. In 2025-26, the GNWT received \$5.4 million under the agreement to:

- protect and conserve new areas in the NWT;
- support co-management and advance Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship in the NWT;
- improve knowledge, data collection, and data sharing to support conservation goals; and
- monitor, manage, and protect critical areas for biodiversity and species at risk.

The GNWT reports progress annually under the agreement. This report highlights conservation work from April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026, that supports Canada's commitment to conserve 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030.

While GNWT protected and conserved areas contribute to Canada's conservation targets, the GNWT makes decisions about conserving land and water in collaboration with Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, and stakeholders. The GNWT's approach to protecting biodiversity, ecosystems, and cultural integrity is guided by *Healthy Land, Healthy People*, a collaborative work plan for establishing, planning, managing, and operating the NWT conservation network.

In addition to *Healthy Land, Healthy People 2023-2028*, the Canada-NWT Nature Agreement also supports work related to the *NWT: Our Land for the Future (OLF)*, an initiative that secured \$375 million to support Indigenous-led conservation, stewardship, and economic diversification. Part of this funding was invested as an endowment to ensure long-term funding for conservation and stewardship. OLF partners include the GNWT, 21 Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, Canada, and private donors. The GNWT cannot access funding through OLF funds; funding for its OLF-related work comes through the Nature Agreement.

For more information about the *Canada-Northwest Territories Nature Agreement*, please visit <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/canada-and-northwest-territories-sign-nature-agreement-communique-de-presse-le-canada-et>.

Accord Canada–Territoires du Nord-Ouest sur la nature

Soutenir les efforts de conservation aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest

Le gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (GTNO) et le gouvernement du Canada ont signé l'Accord Canada–Territoires du Nord-Ouest sur la nature en février 2025, en vertu duquel le Canada versera jusqu'à 20 millions de dollars au GTNO sur une période de 10 ans. En 2025-2026, le GTNO a reçu 5,4 millions de dollars dans le cadre de cet accord afin :

- de protéger et de conserver de nouvelles aires aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO);
- de soutenir la cogestion et de faire progresser les activités de conservation et d'intendance dirigées par les Autochtones aux TNO;
- d'améliorer les connaissances et la collecte et le partage de données afin d'appuyer les objectifs de conservation;
- de surveiller, de gérer et de protéger des aires importantes pour la biodiversité et les espèces en péril.

Le GTNO rend compte des progrès réalisés chaque année en vertu de cet accord. Le présent rapport met en lumière les travaux de conservation réalisés entre le 1^{er} avril 2025 et le 31 mars 2026 qui soutiennent l'engagement du Canada à conserver 30 % des terres et des eaux d'ici 2030.

Bien que les aires protégées et de conservation du GTNO contribuent aux objectifs de conservation du Canada, le GTNO prend ses décisions concernant la conservation des terres et des eaux en collaboration avec les gouvernements autochtones, les organisations autochtones et les parties prenantes. L'approche du GTNO en matière de protection de la biodiversité, des écosystèmes et de l'intégrité culturelle est guidée par le plan de travail collaboratif *Territoire en santé, population en santé* visant à établir, à planifier, à gérer et à exploiter le réseau de conservation des TNO.

En plus de *Territoire en santé, population en santé 2023-2028*, l'Accord Canada–Territoires du Nord-Ouest sur la nature soutient également l'initiative *TNO : Notre territoire pour l'avenir*, qui prévoit un versement de 375 millions de dollars pour appuyer les efforts de conservation, d'intendance et de diversification économique déployés par les Autochtones. Une partie de ces fonds a été investie dans un fonds de dotation afin d'assurer le financement à long terme des activités de conservation et de gestion responsable. Les partenaires de cette initiative comprennent le GTNO, 21 gouvernements et organisations autochtones, le gouvernement du Canada et des donateurs privés. Le GTNO ne peut pas accéder à des fonds par l'entremise de l'initiative *TNO : Notre territoire pour l'avenir*; le financement de ses activités liées à cette initiative provient plutôt de l'Accord sur la nature.

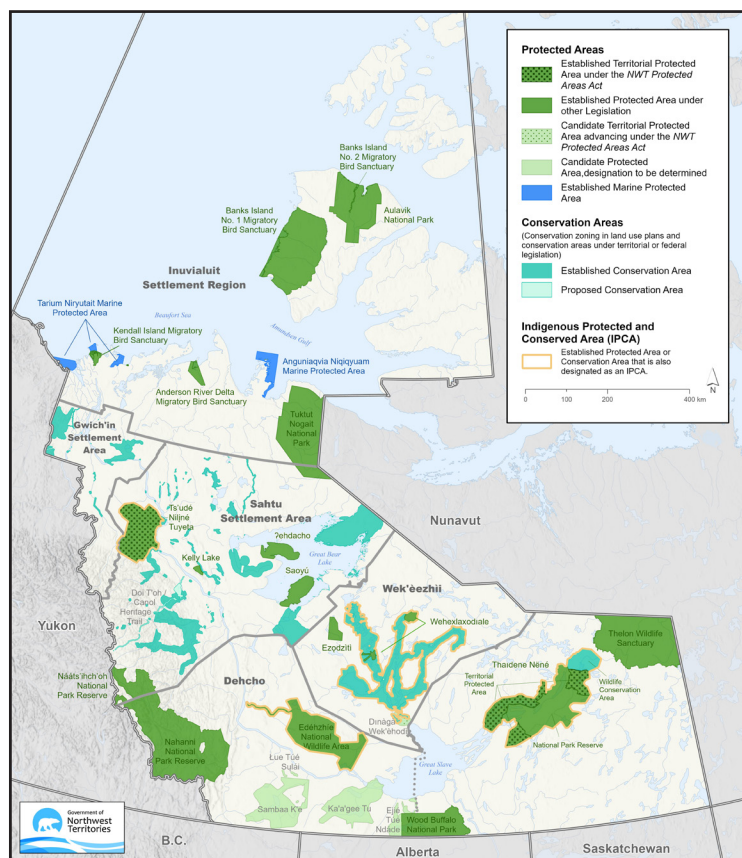
Pour en savoir plus sur l'Accord Canada–Territoires du Nord-Ouest sur la nature, veuillez consulter le www.gov.nt.ca/fr/newsroom/canada-and-northwest-territories-sign-nature-agreement-communique-de-presse-le-canada-et.

Advancing the NWT Conservation Network

The NWT conservation network is made up of protected areas and conservation areas that, together, preserve the NWT’s lands, waters, and ways of living more effectively than any single area alone.

The network currently includes 24 terrestrial protected and conserved areas and 2 *Oceans Act* marine protected areas (see Map 1), administered by territorial, federal, and Indigenous governments. Together, these areas account for 17.6 percent of the NWT’s total area, as reported to the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) in November 2025.

The GNWT is committed to a northern approach to conservation that includes strengthening existing partnerships and building relationships with Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations. The Canada-Northwest Territories Nature Agreement supports this work by helping the GNWT achieve the key priorities of *Healthy Land, Healthy People 2023-2028*, potentially protecting up to 23.3 percent of the NWT’s land and water by 2028, and an additional 3.6 percent by 2035.



Map of the NWT conservation network, including proposed, candidate, and established protected areas and conservation areas in the NWT.

Dinàgà Wek'èhodì

Dinàgà Wek'èhodì was nominated by the Tłıchq Government and is supported by Yellowknives Dene First Nation, North Slave Métis Alliance, and Northwest Territory Métis Nation. It is currently designated as a candidate protected area, and these Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations are negotiating agreements with the GNWT to establish it as a territorial protected area under the *Protected Areas Act*. Once established, it will contribute 790 km² to Canada's protected areas.

The Nature Agreement supports Indigenous-led monitoring programs in Dinàgà Wek'èhodì, including:

- Mapping the distribution and number of mammals, birds, and bats using remotely triggered cameras and autonomous recording units (ARUs);
- Sampling herring gull and black tern eggs for environmental contaminants;
- Inventorying roadside bee species; and
- Population estimates and collaring surveys for species including boreal caribou, moose, wood bison, and black bears.

Wenek'e Protection Zones

In 2025, the Tłıchq Government confirmed that three Wenek'e Protection Zones meet the criteria for reporting as Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). This increased the amount of NWT land protected and conserved and reported to CPCAD from 15.9 to 17.6 percent of the NWT.

These zones on Tłıchq private land, and established under the updated Tłıchq Wenek'e Law, protect approximately 22,565 km² of Tłıchq land with the following goals:

- Tłıchq Nàowò K'è Dèt'àhot'ıı: To preserve Monfwi's trails by protecting the land from activities that interfere with the integrity of Monfwi's trails.
- Gowhaèhdqò Yek'e Aet'ıı K'è: To preserve the ıdaà Trail by protecting the land, waterways and watersheds for continued traditional use by Tłıchq.
- Tıts'aàdıı Nàdèe K'è Wexoedıı: To protect selected areas of permanent or seasonal wildlife and bird habitat on Tłıchq lands.

These conservation zones add to the Tłıchq Government's previously established Wehexlaxodiale Land Exclusion Zone (997.74 km²).

Co-management of Territorial Protected Areas

Thaidene Nënë and Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta Territorial Protected Areas were established in 2019, shortly after the NWT *Protected Areas Act* came into effect. Both are also designated as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas under Indigenous laws. They are in the early stages of implementation, and it will take time to clarify roles and responsibilities for effective and equitable co-management. Government-to-government relationships are strengthening, as are the foundations for shared decision-making.

Thaidene Nënë

Thaidene Nënë, or 'Land of the Ancestors' in Dene Yati, is 26,300 km² and located on the East Arm of Tu Nedhé (Great Slave Lake). It is made up of:

- A national park reserve, established using the *Canada National Parks Act*
- A territorial protected area, established using the *NWT Protected Areas Act*
- A wildlife conservation area, established using the *NWT Wildlife Act*

Operational decisions about Thaidene Nënë are the shared responsibility of Łutsël K'e Dene First Nation, Northwest Territory Métis Nation, the Government of Canada (Parks Canada), and the GNWT. These governments appoint members to Thaidene Nënë Xá Dá Yáłti, the operational management board, which is in the final stages of completing the area's first management plan, *Thaidene Nënë Badi Xá*.

The three Indigenous governments that make up Akaitcho Dene First Nation – Łutsël K'e First Nation, Dení nu Kúé First Nation, and Yellowknives Dene First Nation – will provide guidance and recommendations to Thaidene Nënë Xá Dá Yáłti and the operational parties through a regional management board yet to be formed.

The Nature Agreement contributes funding toward the management of Thaidene Nënë. The GNWT is using these funds to fulfill commitments under the establishment agreements and implement priorities identified in *Thaidene Nënë Badi Xá*, including:

- Supporting ecological monitoring, including forest health, water quality and permafrost sampling;



Hoarfrost River - Thaidene Nënë Territorial Protected Area

- Hosting community engagement meetings to provide updates to members of Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation about existing land leases and ongoing research in the territorial protected area;
- Creating a position in Łutsël K'é to support monitoring and operational work in the territorial protected area;
- Supporting “Observe, Record, Report” training for Ni Hat’ni Dene Guardians to build capacity and strengthen collaboration with enforcement agencies;
- Supporting infrastructure development for the Ni Hat’ni Dene Guardian program, and initial design and site selection for the Thaidene Nënë Visitor and Administration Centre in Łutsël K'é, which will centralize management staff and improve public engagement and community access.



GNWT research and monitoring update in Łutsël K'e.
Photo credit: Danielle Thompson GNWT.

Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta

Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta, or 'Big Tree River and Wetland' in Dene Xэдá, protects 10,100 km² in the Sahtú Settlement Area in the NWT, west of the community of Rádéyılı Kóé (Fort Good Hope).

Management of Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta is shared by the K'ahsho Got'Inę Foundation and the GNWT. These governments appoint non-representative members to the Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta Management Board to guide collaboration, resource sharing, and effective management.

The Nature Agreement contributes funding toward the management of Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta. The GNWT is helping the management board finalize the management plan and is also supporting the area by:

- Providing core support to K'ahsho Got'Inę Foundation (KGF) for infrastructure, guardian programs, and management board expenses;
- Contracting an independent facilitator (chosen in collaboration with KGF) to support management board meetings and the completion of a first draft of the management plan;



Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta.

- Supporting K'ahsho Got'Inę Guardians in traditional trail building inside Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta;
- Hiring a full-time Renewable Resource Officer in Rádéyılı Kóé for monitoring, patrols, and collaboration with the Guardians;
- Supporting "Observe, Record, Report" training for K'ahsho Got'Inę Guardians to build capacity and strengthen collaboration with enforcement agencies; and
- Supporting board development opportunities.

Protected Areas Permit System

The GNWT is developing a permit system for each protected area, as required under the Protected Area regulations and Establishment Agreements. The system will manage business, research, and visitor activities within protected area boundaries and support monitoring, compliance, and enforcement. In 2026, work began on an online application system through the GNWT website.

Increasing Knowledge to Support Conservation

The NWT is vast and rich in biodiversity – its plants, animals, birds, and insects. The conservation network helps safeguard this biodiversity, which provides the fuel, medicines, raw materials, air, water, wildlife, and forests Northerners depend on for social, economic, cultural, and spiritual well-being.

The Nature Agreement supports the GNWT in building knowledge about species and their habitats to strengthen resilience in NWT landscapes, where climate change is occurring more rapidly and with greater ecological impacts than in southern Canada.

Mapping Climate Change Refugia

The GNWT has been working with Natural Resources Canada to map climate-change refugia, which are areas relatively buffered from impacts like drought and wildfire. These include broad regions of projected climatic suitability for key indicator species and landscape features like wetlands and north-facing slopes that can serve as biodiversity safe havens. Once completed, these maps will help prioritize areas for the long-term protection of species and their habitats in a changing climate.

Monitoring Climate Change Impacts in Northern Landscapes

The GNWT is purchasing permafrost monitoring equipment to establish long-term stations with Guardian programs. The equipment will record air, ground, and below-ground temperatures.

To complement this research, the GNWT is purchasing Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data between the communities of Tulita and Délı̄nę to create highly accurate 3D models of the landscape, including vegetation, terrain, and built features. LiDAR data can help monitor environmental changes, map wildlife habitat, and

predict climate refugia. This data will be publicly available by request.

The GNWT operates an Air Quality Monitoring Network consisting of five National Air Pollution Surveillance (NAPS) stations across the territory. These stations collect data for the Air Quality Health Index, which helps the public understand health risks from air pollution. The GNWT is working to improve and modernize public access to air quality data.

Supporting Indigenous Leadership in Conservation and Stewardship

The Canada-Northwest Territories Nature Agreement supports the development and growth of community-based monitoring and Guardian programs in the NWT. Through partnerships with Indigenous governments, community monitors, and scientific partners, the GNWT aims to build monitoring networks that reflect excellence in scientific, Indigenous, and local knowledge.

Water Monitoring

In 2025-26, the GNWT and the Water Survey of Canada operated 24 hydrometric stations that record water level and flow in NWT lakes and rivers. To monitor water quality, including oxygen levels, pH, and temperature, the GNWT purchased a water quality sonde and continued collecting and analyzing grab water samples for contaminants.



Photo credit: GNWT Waters Division

NWT Biodiversity Monitoring Program

The NWT Biodiversity Monitoring Program tracks environmental conditions and biodiversity across the conservation network. The GNWT continues to grow this program to increase territory-wide knowledge and data sharing on biodiversity.

The NWT Biodiversity Monitoring Program is a collaboration between the GNWT, Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and academia. It began as a way to combine data collection efforts across projects using remote sensor equipment, and currently uses autonomous recording units (sound recorders), wildlife cameras, and temperature loggers to record wildlife and climate data at the same location (a “station”). Over 1,300 stations have been active in the NWT since the program began.

In 2025-26, the GNWT purchased additional remote sensor equipment for future station deployments. This equipment is an important part of identifying and monitoring critical areas for biodiversity and species at risk.



Wildlife camera photos of a female muskox with two calves (left) and a wolverine (right) along the Mackenzie Valley Winter Road.

Guardians Training

The GNWT is working with partners to support the continued development of Guardian programs through training, funding, and knowledge sharing.

The GNWT is collaborating with Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) Canada to develop a Remote Environmental Sensors course and certification as part of the Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources (BEAHR) program. A Train the Trainer session is anticipated for spring 2026, with pilot course delivery to follow.

The Remote Environmental Sensors course aims to:

- Train Indigenous Guardians, governments, and organizations in deploying and retrieving remote sensor stations for biodiversity monitoring;
- Develop consistency and collaboration in data collection on standardized biodiversity metrics; and
- Provide skills and certification for using wildlife cameras, bat and bird recording units, air temperature loggers, to map species distributions and observe trends.

Monitoring Wildlife and Species at Risk

Monitoring Wildlife

Caribou, bison, and moose are central to the way of life of Indigenous northerners and have sustained people in the NWT for millennia. The GNWT conducts regular wildlife surveys for these species in collaboration with Indigenous governments and communities. All caribou in the NWT are managed with co-management partners, including Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, renewable resource boards, and communities.

Surveys help determine sex ratios, age structures, and long-term population trends. In 2025-26, the GNWT completed caribou composition surveys by helicopter for three barren-ground caribou herds: the Beverly, Bathurst, and Bluenose-East, with a Northern Mountain caribou survey planned for

early 2026. Other aerial surveys were conducted for moose and wolves in the Dehcho, Sahtu, and Beaufort Delta regions and north of Great Slave Lake, and for anthrax surveillance in wood bison in and around the Edézhíe Protected Area.

The GNWT has also partnered with Université Laval to investigate food web dynamics between caribou, moose, bison, bears, and wolves using wildlife cameras and GPS collars. Other wildlife research supported by the GNWT includes American White Pelicans (NWT Species of Special Concern), garter snake populations, mosquito collection and pathogen testing (West Nile Virus, *Setaria* parasite), and production of the NWT Small Mammal Guide detailing all known small mammals in the NWT.

Kátł'odeeche Wildlife Health Surveillance Program

In 2025, Kátł'odeeche First Nation and the GNWT continued working together to update and implement the local harvester-based wildlife health surveillance program. The update focuses on community-driven health concerns and vital health determinants for moose and boreal caribou. Kátł'odeeche First Nation harvesters and Lands Guardians co-developed specific monitoring objectives based on Indigenous Knowledge and local context.

Plants

The NWT is home to many unique plant species, some of which are extremely rare, at risk, or found nowhere else in the world (endemic). To better understand the variety and distribution of plant species found here, the GNWT is producing “Endemism in the Northwest Territories: a Review of Rare and Endemic NWT Plants”. This work involves examining plant samples collected in the NWT and interviewing holders of historical and current plant collections.

Bats

White-nose syndrome (WNS), a deadly fungal disease affecting bats, was recently detected near the NWT border. To track the risk of WNS spreading to NWT bats, the GNWT is collecting and testing bat guano samples for the fungus. Samples from live bats (little brown myotis) will also be tested for WNS and for beneficial bacteria that slow the growth of the fungus.

The GNWT is also examining bat call recordings collected across the NWT from 2021 to 2024 as part of the North American Bat Monitoring Program and other projects led by Indigenous partners in the Sahtu, Gwich'in, and Wek'eezhii regions and in Dinàgà Wek'èhodì. These recordings will help identify which bat species are present in different areas, improve range maps, and inform management recommendations.



Little brown myotis in an NWT hibernaculum.
Credit: Joanna Wilson

Strengthening Collaboration in Conservation

The Nature Agreement supports the GNWT in building and strengthening partnerships for continued collaboration on conservation.

NWT Guardians Gathering

The GNWT is co-hosting an NWT Guardians Gathering with the Northern Indigenous Stewardship Circle. The objectives of the Gathering are to:

- Support the growth of Indigenous-led stewardship and Guardian programs;
- Strengthen relations between Guardians, Crown governments, and stewardship partners;
- Foster connections and support learning, innovation, and collaboration; and
- Share lessons learned for developing and implementing new Guardian programs.

The Gathering will feature panels, highlight innovative projects, and showcase community initiatives.

Community Engagement

In winter 2026, the GNWT hosted regional community engagement workshops for Inuvialuit and Gwich'in communities in the Beaufort Delta region. These workshops provided a forum for communities and the GNWT to discuss wildlife research and monitoring projects (including the NWT Biodiversity Monitoring Program), share feedback, and plan next steps.

The GNWT also supported wildlife workshops in the Dehcho Region to determine research priorities for the next two years in collaboration with Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, Parks Canada, and Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Knowledge Sharing

The GNWT is committed to knowledge sharing in the NWT and beyond. In 2025-26, the GNWT:

- Attended the Canadian Heritage Rivers System annual meeting and the NWT Water Stewardship Annual Gathering;
- Sponsored Indigenous government partners in protected areas to send representatives to the ArcticNet Annual Scientific Meeting and the Indigenous Centre for Cumulative Effects Conference;
- Supported the planning and facilitation of the 2026 North American Caribou Workshop in Yellowknife; and
- Supported a Respected Harvesters Gathering workshop.

Sahtu K'aowe Partnership Agreement

The Déljine Got'ine Government is working to create the Sahtu K'aowe IPCA in the Déljine District and to protect Tsá Tué (Great Bear Lake in Dene Kádá). In June and October 2025, the GNWT and Déljine Got'ine Government met to discuss developing a formal Partnership Agreement to define the government-to-government relationship for the creation of the Sahtu Kaowe IPCA and other shared conservation and stewardship priorities.



Déljine Got'ine Government and GNWT meeting to discuss Sahtu K'aowe Partnership Agreement.

Next Steps

In 2026-27, the GNWT will continue working toward the goals of *Healthy Land, Healthy People 2023-2028* and the Canada-NWT Nature Agreement while supporting Indigenous-led conservation, stewardship, and economic diversification initiatives advancing under Our Land for the Future (OLF).



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