



News Release – Délıne Got'ıne Government, Government of the Northwest Territories and Canada Advance the Sahtú K'aowe (Great Bear Lake watershed) Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area

MONTREAL, QC (DECEMBER 17, 2022) – At the 15th United Nations Council of Parties to the UN Convention on Biodiversity (COP15), the Délıne Got'ıne Government, Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Canada took another step forward in advancing Indigenous-led conservation by signing a Letter of Intent to advance the Sahtú K'aowe Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) and enhance the conservation and stewardship of the Great Bear Lake watershed.

At over 31,000 km² Great Bear Lake is the world's eighth largest freshwater lake and represents 0.31% of Canada's landmass (including freshwater). It is one of the most ecologically intact ecosystems on the planet. Sahtú K'aowe is the homeland of the Sahtúgot'ıne, the 'Bear Lake People'. The region straddles the Arctic Circle, and the lake is surrounded by intact boreal forest and taiga, and is a habitat for muskox, moose and caribou. The only community in the watershed is the Dene community of Délıne, 'where the water flows'.

IPCA establishment is the latest development in the Sahtúgot'ıne people's long-term objective to protect Great Bear Lake. Délıne's elders and spiritual leaders have emphasized for generations the importance of this lake, which is seen as a living being by the Sahtúgot'ıne. The establishment of the IPCA builds on international recognition of the region as a [UNESCO Biosphere Reserve](#), promoting sustainable development and formally recognizing the stewardship role the Sahtúgot'ıne have played for millenia.

This work will help protect and conserve species, including an environment central to the social and cultural fabric of the Northwest Territories (NWT). This initiative is part of a larger discussion among the Parties, other Indigenous governments and private donors to collaboratively develop a long term NWT [Project Finance for Permanence](#) agreement that centers on Indigenous-led stewardship, supports conservation, community and economic development, and makes a large contribution to meeting Canada's commitments to protect and conserve more lands and waters.

Next steps

The Sahtú K'aowe IPCA will be designated by the Délıne Got'ıne Government with the support of the GNWT based on the recent feasibility study.

Under the Letter of Intent, the Délıne Got'ıne Government, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada will work together to achieve two goals:



- Establish the proposed Sahtú K'aowe Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) – which would enhance the conservation and stewardship of the Great Bear Lake watershed within the Délıne district .
- Explore options to support long-term funding for conservation and management of Tsá Tué (Great Bear Lake) and how the area could be recognized as a conserved area by 2025.

Upon finalization of an agreement for long-term funding for conservation of Tsá Tué (Great Bear Lake) and other established, candidate and proposed conservation initiatives in the NWT, the parties have agreed to include Tsá Tué (~0.31% of Canada's landmass) in Canada's Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD), contributing to Canada's national and global targets to protect 25% of Canada's terrestrial and freshwater by 2025.

Quote(s)

“The health of Tsá Tué (Great Bear Lake) is directly connected to the health of my people's minds, bodies and souls. Water unites and connects all things. The establishment of Sahtú K'aowe IPCA allows the people of Délıne to reclaim our role as stewards of the Lake. The recognition and support of our partners the Government of the Northwest Territories and Canada is a crucial step towards recognition of the expertise of Indigenous peoples to preserve Canadian biodiversity.”

- **Danny Gaudet**, *ʔek'wahtı́dá (Chief), Délıne Got'ıne Government*

“Indigenous-led conservation is positive for people, biodiversity and the environment. Our government is pleased to support the Délıne Got'ıne Government as they continue to steward and conserve Tsá Tué which is critical to the social, cultural, and economic well-being of their people.”

- **The Honourable Shane Thompson**, *Minister of Environment and Natural Resource, Government of the Northwest Territories*

“Tsá Tué, or Great Bear Lake, is culturally important to the Dene peoples and ecologically significant to Canada and the rest of the world. Supporting Indigenous-led conservation initiatives through a strong partnership like this makes meaningful contributions to targets in Canada. By continuing to work together, we all benefit, and it's the only way we can achieve our collective conservation goals.”

- **The Honourable Steven Guilbeault**, *Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Government of Canada*

Quick facts

- The Sahtú K'aowe IPCA will support active stewardship of the Great Bear Lake Watershed within the Délıne district, led by Indigenous values.
- Tsá Tué (Great Bear Lake) is the eighth largest lake in the world.
- Sahtú K'aowe is a Sahtúgot'ıne term meaning “The Lake is the Boss”.
- In 2016, Great Bear Lake and its watershed was designed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an International

The logo for Canada, featuring the word "Canada" in a serif font with a small Canadian flag to the right.

Biosphere Reserve in recognition as an area with unique ecological and sociocultural characteristics in a context of sustainable use.

Related links

- [Information about Délıne Got'ıne self-government area \(including map\)](#)
- [Information about Project Finance for Permanence](#)
- [Information about the Tsá Tué UNESCO Biosphere Reserve](#)

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