GEORGIAN BAY VISION 2050 PROJECT

Models of Protected and Conserved Areas in the Georgian Bay Region, Canada and Beyond

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July 2025

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Executive Summary

This report presents an in-depth analysis of 16 conservation and protection models that are relevant in a Canadian and International context, focusing on their applicability to the Georgian Bay eastern and northern coasts which is centred on the Thirty Thousand Islands Archipelago. These models represent diverse legal, institutional, and community-based approaches, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), private land trusts, government-designated protected areas, and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

As part of Canada's biodiverse-rich Great Lakes Basin, the Georgian Bay region faces growing threats from habitat fragmentation, unsustainable development, and climate change. To address these challenges and support Canada's commitment to protecting 30% of its lands and waters by 2030, it is critical to understand and apply a range of complementary conservation tools that reflect ecological, cultural and governance diversity.

This report profiles each model using a consistent framework, examining governance structures, legal authority and Indigenous participation, funding sources, and conservation outcomes. The analysis reveals that successful conservation increasingly relies on incisive governance, specifically Indigenous leadership, as well as flexible legal tools and strong community and local government engagement

Key findings include:

- Models that integrate multiple approaches to protection and are connected are essential to support habitat corridors, safeguard biodiversity, and build climate resilience.
- Private conservation efforts, such as those led by land trusts, contribute to further ecological connectivity.
- OECMs and collaborative formal protection plans are defined by IUCN criteria and by Canada through the ECCC (Environment and Climate Change Canada).
- Indigenous governance models (IPCAs and co-managed parks) align strongly with conservation and reconciliation goals while embedding long-term stewardship. However, IPCA plans are particular to each First Nation and do not employ a uniform standard of protection.
- Demonstrating clear benefits to communities, economies, and ecosystems is essential to building long-term support and achieving conservation goals.

The report intends to guide Vision 2050 to look at effective long-term conservational cross Georgian Bay tools. It provides a foundation for shared understanding and strategic alignment in achieving nature and climate commitments while integrating local community values.

Introduction

The Georgian Bay region is one of Canada's most ecologically rich and culturally significant landscapes. It is home to the world's largest freshwater archipelago and to the Georgian Bay Biosphere, a designated UNESCO Biosphere Region. It hosts many species, diverse ecosystems, and longstanding Indigenous stewardship. Yet, despite its global and national importance, Georgian Bay faces pressures such as accelerating development, climate change, habitat loss, and a fragmented land-use planning and environmental protection system.

It is crucial to understand the full spectrum of land and water protection tools available to meet these challenges and support national and global commitments such as Canada's 30 by 30 conservation goal. This includes formally designated protected areas such as national and provincial parks and emerging mechanisms like Indigenous Protected Conserved Areas (IPCAs), private land conservation through land trusts, and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

This report provides a comprehensive overview of 16 conservation models currently being applied across Canada and internationally potentially relevant to the Georgian Bay region. These models span government-led, Indigenous-led, privately governed structures, legal frameworks, planning tools, Indigenous and community roles, funding mechanisms and conservation outcomes.

This report aims to inform and support regional conservation planning efforts, especially those under Vision 2050, by identifying viable, complementary approaches that can be adapted or combined to achieve long-term protection of Georgian Bay. By clearly outlining strengths, limitations, and opportunities associated with each model, this report helps build a foundation for coordinated, inclusive, and effective conservation planning that meets this extraordinary region's ecological, cultural and social needs.

Methodology

This report was developed through a structured review and analysis of 16 conservation and protection models relevant to land and water conservation in the Georgian Bay region and across Canada and the world. The methodology followed a three-phase approach: model identification, framework development, and data collection and synthesis

The models included in this report were selected to reflect the full spectrum of current and emerging conservation approaches in Canada. These include government-led protected areas, such as national and provincial parks and reserves; Indigenous-led conservation models, including IPCAs and co-managed national park reserves. Privately governed conservation tools include land trust holdings, private nature reserves, and collaborative and hybrid models, including corridors, OECMs, and shared governance frameworks. Canadian federal and provincial policy frameworks, conservation NGO strategies, academic literature, and Indigenous-led conservation networks informed this selection. The models have been categorized based on the IUCN framework, as The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides global guidance on the classification and governance of protected areas. These frameworks help standardize conservation efforts and offer criteria for assessing effectiveness and governance diversity.

Each conservation model was assessed using the same template to ensure consistent and comparable analysis. The template includes model name, jurisdiction/region, overview/background, core features and structure, implementation and governance, funding and resources, key achievements and results, and strengths and weaknesses. This structure allowed for a balanced evaluation of each model's practical operation, policy framework, strengths and weaknesses.

Information was gathered from a wide range of publicly available sources, including

- Government legislation, websites, and policy documents (Parks Canada, Ontario Parks, Environment and Climate Change Canada).
- Reports and toolkits from national and regional conservation organizations (NCC, OLTA, Indigenous Circle of Experts, Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership).
- Academic research and international guidelines (IUCN, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, UN Convention on Biological Diversity).
- Directly analyze maps and regional conservation plans, such as those from the Georgian Bay Land Trust and Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy).

Overview of Protected and Conserved Area Models

Protected and Conserved area modes are vital in protecting significant natural land and waterscapes, supporting ecosystems and biodiversity, and sustaining cultural and community values across Canada. These models represent a spectrum of legal, governance, and management approaches that range from highly regulated public parks to Indigenous-led and privately managed lands. Together, they form a complex conservation system across diverse

jurisdictions and ecosystems. The 16 models assessed in this report can be broadly grouped into four categories as per the IUCN framework

The International Union for Conservation of Nature Framework
The IUCN is an international framework applied globally and used in Canada to guide protected areas' classification and reporting. The IUCN has established four governance types of models describing authority and management responsibility. This model offers a universal framework for designating and assessing protected areas and supports global conservation. These four frameworks are governmental-led, Indigenous-led, private-led, and collaborative-led. This framework was used as it is a globally accepted structure for diverse conservation efforts and is adaptable to national legal systems and policies.

Government-Led Protected Areas
These include National and Provincial Parks, National Marine Conservation Areas, Conservation Reserves and Nature Reserves. They are typically established under legislation, managed by public authority, and focus on ecological integrity, recreation and heritage preservation. An example of this is the PSW (Provincially Significant Wetland designation). This designation is a critically important form of protection. Within the context of Georgian Bay there are 14,700 protected wetlands within Eco district 5E-7. (Parry Sound)*

Indigenous-Led Conservation Models and Co-Managed Models
Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and Co-Management regimes recognize Indigenous responsibilities and knowledge systems. These models reflect Indigenous governance and stewardship over traditional territories and play a growing role in national conservation strategies.

Private and NGO-led Conservations
Land trusts and private protected areas involve non-governmental organizations, private landowners, and conservation-focused charities. These models often rely on easements, land donations and stewardship agreements to secure long-term protection of ecologically significant lands.

Collaborative and Area-Based Tools
These include corridors, conservation networks, and other effective area-asked conservation measures (OECMs) that connect and complement core protected areas. They often rely on partnership-based governance and emphasize ecological connectivity across landscapes.

Emerging Trends

- Focus on ecological connectivity, with corridors and OECMs helping link fragmented habitats.
- Integration of community and economic values, ensuring that conservation delivers social and economic benefits.

- Recognition of Indigenous leadership and knowledge in conservation planning and land governance.
- The emergence of co-management models.
- Movement toward a national goal of protecting 30% of Canada's lands and waters by 2030, unalignment with international commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

*Eco-Districts are used as the basis of many provincial planning processes as well as for assessing biodiversity, and mapping ecosystems to identify and set natural heritage objectives. The use of Eco districts promotes a coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive approach to natural resource management across administrative boundaries. (Government of Ontario, 2018)

Government-Led Protected Areas Detailed Models

Niagara Escarpment Plan

Jurisdiction/Region: Ontario, Canada. It spans approximately 750 km from the Niagara River to the Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin Island. The NEP area encompasses parts of 7 regional and 21 local municipalities

Overview/Background:
Established in 1985 under the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act (NEPDA), the NEP is Canada's first large-scale environmental land use plan. Its primary goal is maintaining the Niagara Escarpment as a continuous natural environment, balancing conservation with compatible development. The Escarpment is recognized as a UNESCO World Biosphere Region due to its unique ecological and geological features.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - The Niagara Escarpment Commission, an agency of the Ontario government, administers it. The NEC comprises 16 members, including public representatives and municipal appointees.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Grounded in the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act, which grants the NEP precedent over municipal plains or zoning bylaws within its jurisdiction.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - The NEP delineates land-use designations, development criteria, and permitted uses. The NEC employs policy interpretations, guidelines, and technical criteria to ensure consistent application.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Covers approx. 190,000 hectares, including diverse ecosystems such as forests, wetlands, and agricultural lands. The area provides habitat for numerous species at risk and is the source of many of Southern Ontario's major river systems
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - While the NEP does not explicitly outline roles for Indigenous communities, local municipal[laities are integral to its implementation, with municipal representatives serving on the NEC.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - The NEC oversees the implementation of the NEP, ensuring that development is aligned with the plan's objectives.
- How are decisions made?
    - Through NEC through a combination of policy frameworks, technical guidelines, and permit application reviews, often involving public consultation.

- Indigenous participation?
    - The NEP does not specify Indigenous participation mechanisms; however, engagement with Indigenous communities may occur through broader provincial consultation processes.
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Development control through a permit system
    - Land- use designations to guide compatible activities
    - Monitoring and enforcement to ensure compliance
    - Public engagement and stakeholder engagement initiatives

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Primarily funded by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, with additional resources from permit fees and partnerships.
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - The NEC operates with a team of planners, ecologists and administrative staff, supported by regional offices to manage the extensive NEP area.
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Collaborates with various environmental organizations, community groups, and conservation authorities to support stewardship and education programs.

Key Achievements and Results

- Pioneered integrated land-use planning focused on environmental protection in Canada
- Contributed to the designation of the Niagara Escarpment as a UNESCO World Biosphere region.
- Established a robust framework for balancing development with conservation across a significant portion of Ontario

Strengths:

- Strong legislative backing ensures enforceability
- Comprehensive planning balances ecological integrity with human use
- Serves as a model for other conservation and land-use planning initiatives

Weaknesses:

- Complex governance can lead to administrative challenges
- The limited explicit mechanism for Indigenous engagement
- Ongoing pressures for development and resource extraction require vigilant oversight.

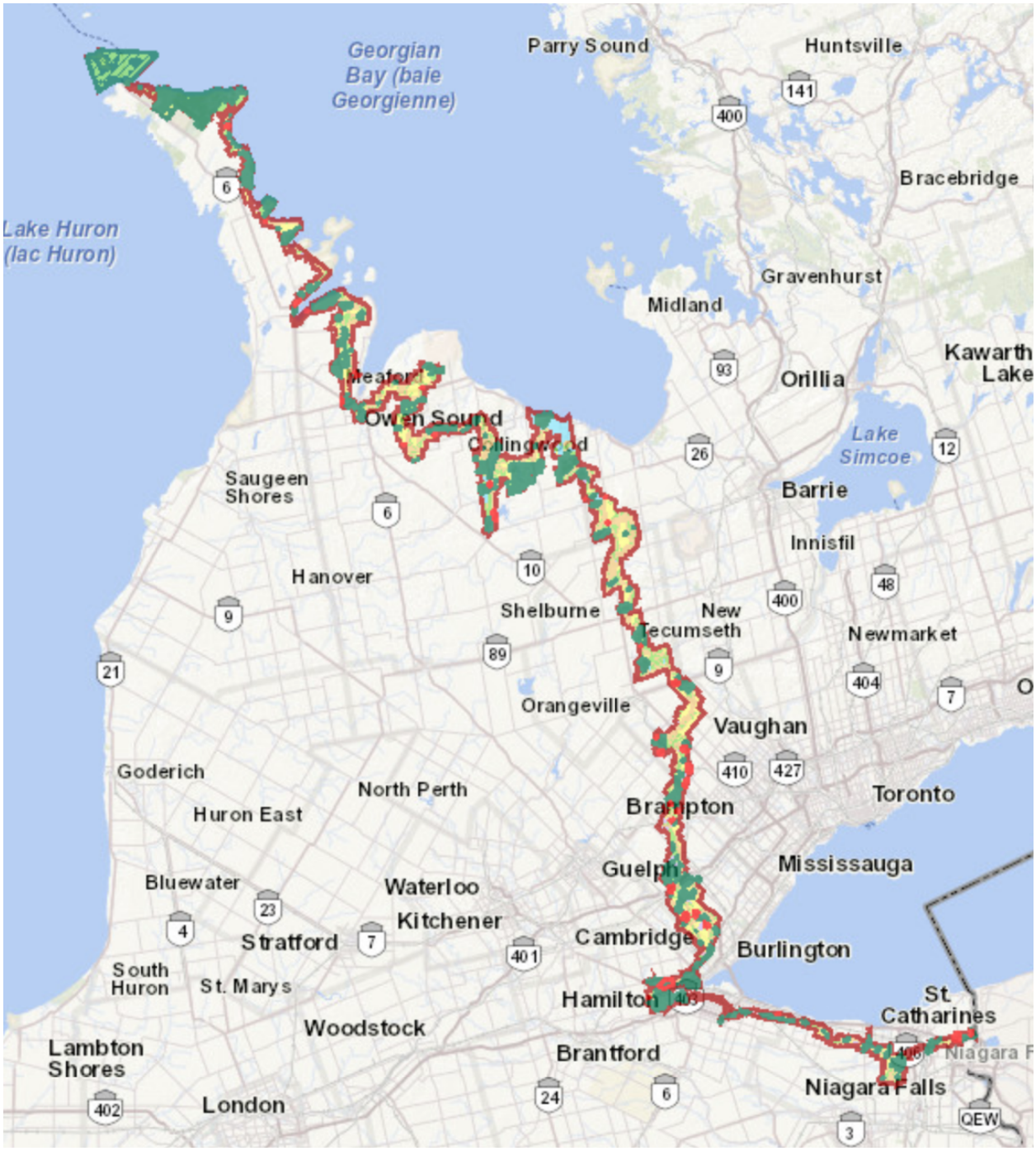


Figure 1. Niagara Escarpment Plan Map

Georgian Bay Islands National Park

Jurisdiction/Region: Ontario, Canada. Southeast shore of Georgian Bay

Overview/Background:
Georgian Bay Islands National Park, established in 1929, is part of Canada's national park system and is managed by Parks Canada. It consists of 63 small islands and parts of islands, encompassing southern boreal and deciduous forest ecosystems. The park protects a rich diversity of plant and animal life, including at-risk species, and represents the Georgian Bay landscape within the Great Lakes St. Lawrence forest region.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed by Parks Canada, a federal agency under the Minister of Environment and Climate Change
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Governed by the Canada National Parks Act, the Species at Risk Act, and relevant Parks Canada management plans.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Parks Canada develops management plans for each national park, which guide conservation priorities, infrastructure, and visitor experience.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Encompasses approx. 13.5 square km across 63 islands in Georgian Bay, which includes part of the Canadian Shield, mixed forest ecosystems and coastal wetlands
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Collaboration with Beausoleil First Nation is noted in management plans; the park operates within the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples, and engagement regarding stewardship and cultural heritage is ongoing.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Parks Canada and the Federal Government
- How are decisions made?
    - Through consultation processes and international reviews aligned with national park mandates, public and Indigenous input is sought during formal planning cycles.
- Indigenous participation?
    - Yes, with the Beausoleil First Nation, cultural site stewardship and opportunities for co-management dialogue are included.
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Ecological Integrity Monitoring Program
    - Species at Risk Management Plan
    - Fire management practices

    - Species at risk recovery strategies
    - Habitat restoration projects
    - Visitor impact management and zoning

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Primarily public funded through the Government of Canada's Parks Canada budget.
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Full-time staff includes ecologists, park wardens, interpretation staff, and operations personnel. Seasonal employees are hired during peak tourism periods.
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Community and volunteer support exists through Friends of Georgian Bay Islands National Park, local stewardship groups, and partnerships with education institutions.

Key Achievements and Results

- Ongoing species at risk protection (Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake)
- Restoration of native habitats and shorelines
- Implementation of an ecological integrity monitoring framework
- Ongoing incorporation of two-eyed seeing into their conservation measures
- Growing emphasis on sustainable tourism and education

Strengths:

- Strong legal protections and conservation mandate
- Long-term federal funding and infrastructure
- Ecological monitoring systems in place
- Partnerships with Indigenous and local stakeholders
- Accessible public education and outreach programs

Weaknesses:

- Limited in geographic scope, small and fragmented islands
- Challenges managing visitor impact on sensitive areas
- Slow progress toward formalized co-management with Indigenous communities
- Budget and staffing constraints can limit the scope of restoration work.



Figure 2. Georgian Bay Islands National Park Map

French River Provincial Park

Jurisdiction/Region: Northeastern Ontario, Canada. Between Georgian Bay and Lake Nipissing

Overview/Background:
French River Provincial Park was established in 1989 to protect one of Canada's most historic and scenic waterways. The French River, designated as a Canadian Heritage River, has significant cultural importance as a traditional travel route for Indigenous peoples, European explorers, and fur traders. Today, the park protects the river's natural beauty and cultural legacy while offering recreational activities such as canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and backcountry camping.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed by Ontario Parks, under the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP)
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Governed under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act (2006), with heritage recognition through the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) designation.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Guided by the French River Provincial Park Management Plan (originally 2005, updated as needed) and CHRS principles for river conservation and interpretation.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Protected approximately 36,000 hectares of river corridor, wetlands, forests, and rocky Canadian Shield landscape along the French River system.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Operates within the traditional Anishinabek territory; collaboration exists with Indigenous communities, stewardship, and management discussions.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Ontario Parks (MECP)
- How are decisions made?
    - Decisions follow the park's management plan, environmental assessments, public consultations, and Indigenous engagement efforts.
- Indigenous participation?
    - Recognized as a key part of the river's story, Indigenous groups have been consulted on management planning and cultural preservation, with opportunities for further stewardship collaboration.
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - River corridor zoning to protect natural and cultural features
    - Monitoring of visitor use and ecological impacts

    - Species at risk protection measures
    - Cultural heritage conservation programs

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - User fees supplement primary provincial public funding. Additional support from national programs like CHRS for heritage river projects.
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Managed by the park superintendent, ecologists, and seasonal staff, including interpreters and enforcement officers.
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Partnerships with organizations such as the French River Stewardship Council and local heritage groups to support education, conservation and visitor programming

Key Achievements and Results

- Destination as a Canadian Heritage River (1986) recognizing cultural and natural significance
- Conservation of a major historic water route and its ecosystems
- Development of a low-impact, backcountry recreation model
- Public education on Indigenous and settler history through interpretive centers
- Ongoing protection of sensitive habitats and species

Strengths:

- Strong cultural and ecological protection framework
- Effective integration of recreation and conservation
- Significant educational and heritage interpretation opportunities
- Collaboration with Indigenous groups and local communities on storytelling and stewardship

Weaknesses:

- Balancing conservation with high visitor use in peak seasons
- Continued need for deeper Indigenous co-management roles
- Ongoing threats from adjacent development and recreational pressures
- Seasonal staffing can limit year-round monitoring and enforcement.

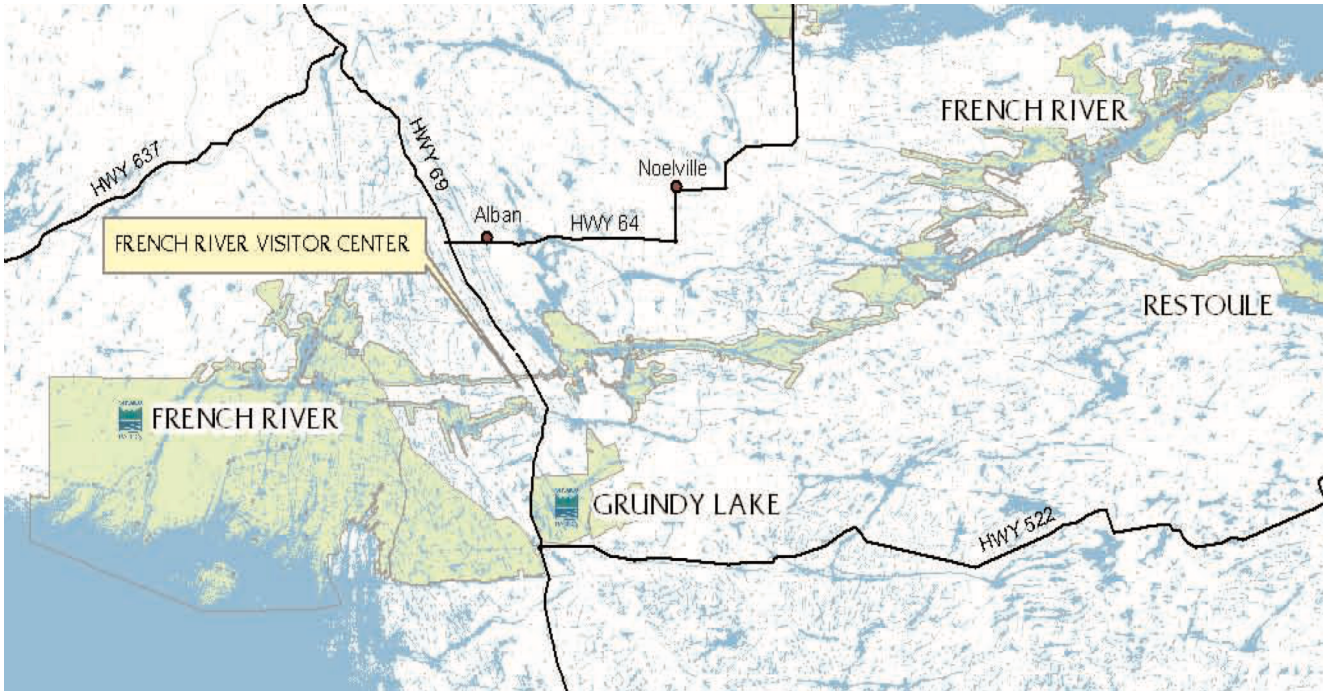


Figure 3. French River Map

Massasauga Provincial Park

Jurisdiction/Region: Parry Sound District, Ontario. Eastern Georgian Bay and inland lakes.

Overview/Background:
The Massasauga Provincial Park was officially designated in 1999 and is named after the threatened Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake, a key species in the region. The park protects over 13,000 hectares of rugged Canadian Shield landscape, including coastal islands, wetlands, and forested areas. It is a backcountry park with no roads, offering wilderness camping, canoeing and hiking. The park plays a critical role in safeguarding sensitive habitats and species.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed by Ontario Parks, a Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) branch.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Governed under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act (2006) and subject to regulations from MECP and related species-at-risk legislation.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Guided by a Park Management Plan (approved in 2009), which outlines permitted activities, zoning, ecological integrity measures and Indigenous engagement.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Covers approx. 13,000 hectares, including inland lakes, wetlands, granite outcrops, and shoreline forests within the eastern Georgian Bay coastal zone.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Acknowledges that the park lies within both Anishinabek Nation and Huron-Wendat territory. Ontario Parks collaborates with Indigenous groups in park planning and cultural heritage protection.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Ontario Parks (MECP)
- How are decisions made?
    - Based on the approved Park Management Plan, with input from scientific studies, Indigenous consultation and public engagement.
- Indigenous participation?
    - Recognized in planning documents; engagement efforts are ongoing. There is an opportunity for deeper co-management or stewardship partnerships, though not fully yet formalized
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Species-at-risk protection
    - Visitor impact management via zoning and permits
    - Habitat restoration and fire management strategies

    - Monitoring of water quality and ecological indicators

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Primarily publicly funded through provincial government budgets, supplemented by park user fees
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Year-round staff includes park managers, ecologists, and seasonal rangers/educators
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Support from local stewardship councils and NGOs and outreach through schools or conservation education programs are needed.

Key Achievements and Results

- Protection of vital wetland and shoreline ecosystems
- Continued conservation of the Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake and other at-risk species
- Development of low-impact recreational infrastructure that balances access with preservation
- Engagement with local communities on sustainability education

Strengths:

- Strong ecological focus with minimal infrastructure footprint
- Effective zoning and permit systems to manage backcountry use
- Emphasis on wilderness experience supports conservation goals
- Ongoing monitoring and habitat protection efforts
- Access to nature and lack of road access

Weaknesses:

- Indigenous partnerships are still developing and not yet formalized
- Reliance on seasonal staffing can affect continuity
- Park faces ongoing pressure from nearby development and recreational use outside its boundaries

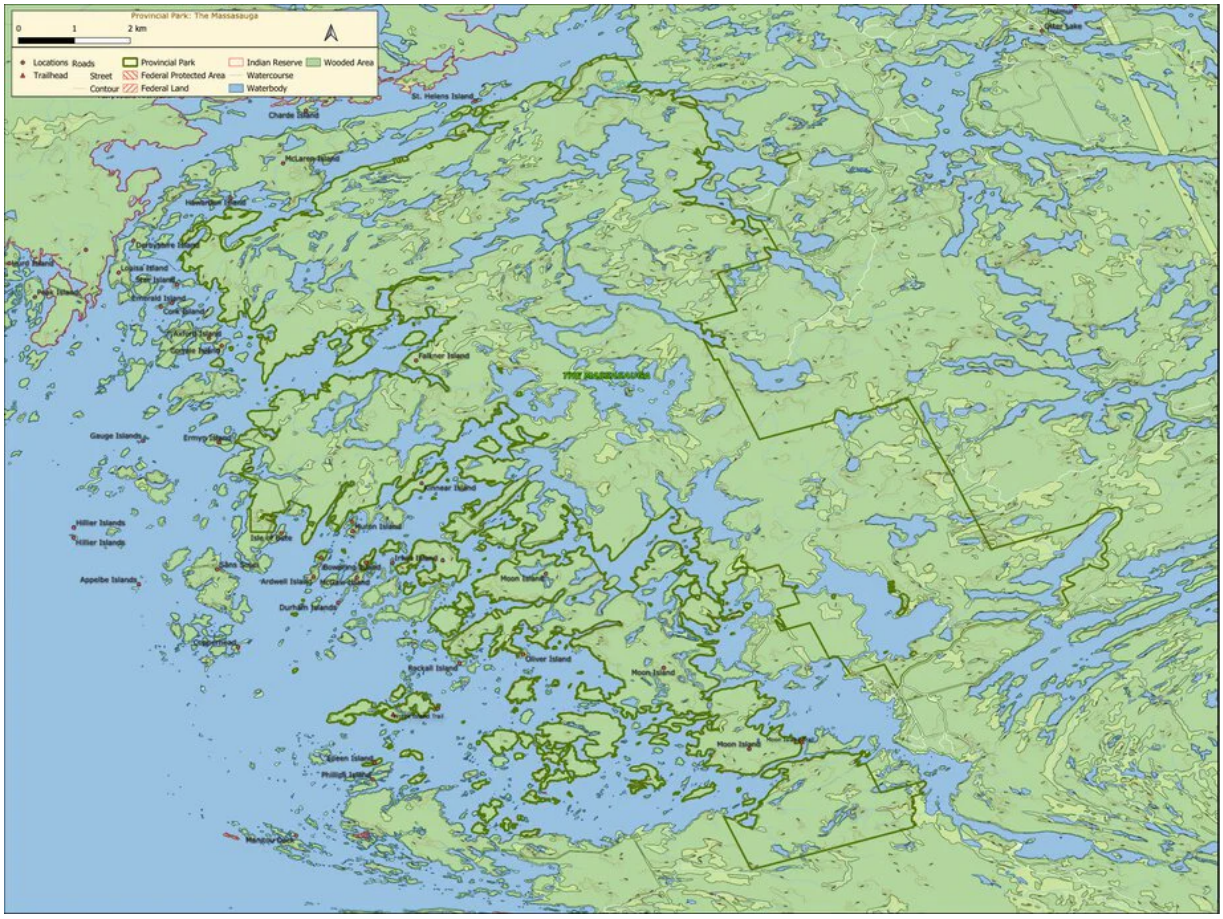


Figure 4. Massasauga Provincial Park Map

Ontario Provincial Conservation Reserves

Jurisdiction/Region: Province of Ontario, Canada. Over 295 designated conservation reserves across various ecological regions of the province.

Overview/Background:
Ontario's Provincial Conservation Reserves are protected areas established to safeguard significant natural landscapes and representative ecosystems while permitting compatible traditional activities such as hiking, hunting, fishing and canoeing. Conservation reserves differ from provincial parks in that they focus on protecting biodiversity and natural heritage without the same infrastructure or recreational development level. They serve important roles in landscape connectivity and long-term ecological integrity.

There are numerous CR's already designated within the Georgian Bay region. In addition, many areas of the region have been ecologically assessed and geophraphically mapped as a potential conservation reserve such as CR 117 (Naiscoot Iver to Byng Inlet). Potential Conservation Reserves are a major conservation opportunity yet to be realized -- ready to be brought under regulation.

Examples of Provincial Conservation Reserves in the Georgian Bay Region:

- CR 27 Crane Lake Forest
- CR 32 Moreau's Bay
- CR 33 Gibson River
- CR 35 Cognashene Lake
- CR 36 Mccrae Lake
- CR 40 Cognashene Point
- CR 90 Lower Moon River
- CR 94 Moon River

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed by Ontario Parks, under the authority of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP)
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Governed under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006, which outlines objectives for protection, permitted uses and public engagement.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Site-specific statements of conservation interests (SCIs) or Resource Management Plans
    - Landscape-level ecological plans
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered

    - Over 295 conservation reserves cover over 1.8 million hectares, ranging from boreal forests and wetlands to alvars and rocky uplands.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Indigenous communities are engaged through consultation protocols, especially where reserves overlap with traditional territories or treaty lands. Many reserves accommodate traditional land uses.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Ontario Parks (MECP)
- How are decisions made?
    - Through SCI or management plan processes involving scientific assessment, stakeholder input, and Indigenous consultation. Activities must align with ecological protection goals and allow uses under the Act.
- Indigenous participation?
    - Indigenous peoples are respected, and traditional land uses are maintained. The level of involvement in governance varies by reserve and community.
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Legal zoning to restrict development
    - Monitoring of ecological values
    - Prohibition of industrial uses (mining and commercial forestry)
    - Permitted low-impact recreational use, guided by SCI

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Core funding through the provincial government, with occasional federal grants or support from conservation partners
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Generally low on-site staffing: reserves are often monitored remotely or as part of broader Ontario Parks operations
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Local stewardship groups, land trusts, and NGOS may assist with monitoring, education and advocacy

Key Achievements and Results

- Protection of significant ecosystems and natural features across Ontario
- Creation of a complementary system to provincial parks, expanding the ecological representation of protected areas
- Support for ecological corridors and climate adaptation strategies
- Legal framework that balances protection with traditional and recreational uses

Strengths:

- Strong legal protection and ecological integrity focus
- Allows for traditional Indigenous uses and low-impact recreation

- Cost-effective model for conservation compared to developed parks
- Supports large-scale landscape connectivity

Weaknesses:

- Limited staffing and infrastructure
- Public awareness is lower than for provincial parks
- Limited Indigenous co-management or leadership roles, though engagement is increasing
- Many conservation reserves only have a management statement, not a full management plan.
- Some conservation reserves' management plans fail to protect the ecological systems that have been identified through field work.
- Many potential conservation reserves have been identified but have yet to be established by the government.

Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area

Jurisdiction/Region: Northwestern Ontario, Canada, the northern portion of Lake Superior, between Thunder Bay and Terrace Bay

Overview/Background:
Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) is the largest freshwater protected area in the world, established to conserve the ecological integrity of a vast section of Lake Superior's aquatic and coastal ecosystems. It spans over 10,000 square km and includes lake beds, islands, and shorelines. It was formally designated in 2015 and is managed by Parks Canada in collaboration with Indigenous communities. The area balances biodiversity protection with sustainable use, including tourism, recreation, and traditional harvesting.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed by Parks Canada, with input from an Advisory Committee and Indigenous partners
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Governed under the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act (2002)
    - Incorporates Indigenous peoples and partnerships
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Interim Management Plan (2020), with a final management plan under development
    - Conservation zoning to prohibit activities
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Over 10,000 square km, including lakebed, islands, and shoreline areas
    - Contains rare coastal wetlands, spawning grounds and deep freshwater habitats
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - The governance model includes formal partnerships with Indigenous communities, such as the Red Sky Metis Independent Nation and other First Nations
    - Co-development of plans, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) integration, and support for Indigenous stewardship roles

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Parks Canada with a dedicated superintendent and planning team
    - Supported by the NMCA Advisory Committee
- How are decisions made?
    - Through Parks Canada planning cycles and collaborative engagement with Indigenous and local stakeholders
- Indigenous participation?
    - Significant and formalized, including Indigenous Guardians, TEK, and leadership in research and cultural programming.

- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Zoning for ecological protection and sustainable use
    - Bans on undersea mining, oil/gas extraction, and commercial bottom trawling
    - Scientific monitoring of fish stocks, invasive species, and water quality

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Primarily federal funding through Parks Canada
    - Grants and research partnerships for universities and conservation NGOs
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Parks Canada field office and marine conservation staff
    - Seasonal rangers, research and Indigenous Guardians
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Local stewardship councils, volunteer scientists, and educational partners
    - NGOS (CPAWS) promote public awareness and policy support

Key Achievements and Results

- Official designation of the world's largest freshwater protected area
- Formalized Indigenous stewardship partnerships
- Preservation of important spawning and migratory fish habitats
- Successful integration of TEK and community-based conservation
- Strengthened environmental education and ecotourism in the Lake Superior region

Strengths:

- World-class freshwater ecosystem protection
- Model of Indigenous Federal Cooperative Conservation
- Zoning approaches balance use with protection
- Promotes sustainable tourism and cultural learning opportunities

Weaknesses:

- Enforcement and ecological monitoring are challenged due to the vast size
- Limited public awareness outside the region
- Climate change impacts remain a growing concern.

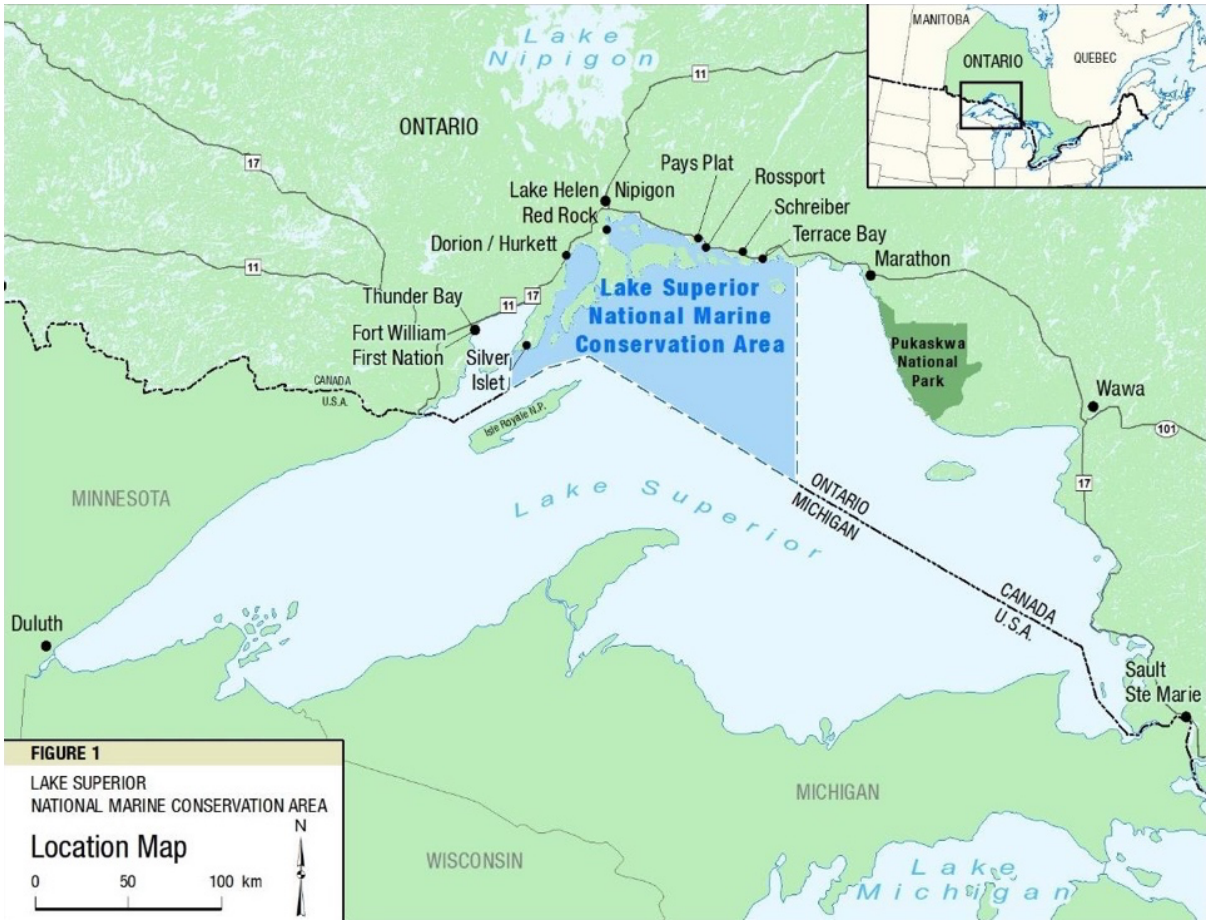


Figure 5. Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area Map

Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs)

Jurisdiction/Region: Province of Ontario with designated sites across southern and northern Ontario, including Crown and privately owned lands

Overview/Background:
Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs) are lands in Ontario identified by the provincial government as having significant geological, ecological or natural heritage value. ANSIs are classified as either earth science (unique rock formations, fossils) or life science (rare ecosystems and species habitats). While they do not carry statutory protection independently, they are recognized in land-use planning and policy decisions as valuable natural heritage features.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Identified and managed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) with input from conservation authorities and scientists.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - ANSIs are recognized under the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) of the Planning Act
    - Not a legislated protection mechanism themselves but must be considered in municipal and provincial planning
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Included in official plans and land use planning reviews
    - Integrated through scientific evaluation reports
    - Land use restrictions may be applied through zoning or development applications
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Over 400 Life Science ANSIs and 300 Earth Science ANSIs
    - Cover diverse features: old-growth forests, wetlands, glacial formations, rare species habitats
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Municipalities must consider ANSIs in their planning process
    - Indigenous roles are not formally integrated into designation or management, though many ANSIs are within traditional territories

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - The MNRF maintains the ANSI registry and scientific evaluations; implementation occurs through municipal planning authorities
- How are decisions made?
    - Designation is based on scientific studies and criteria (i.e. rarity, ecological integrity, representation). Municipalities are expected to protect or avoid impact through planning decisions

- Indigenous participation?
    - Not a formalized component of the ANSI system, though this is an emerging area of interest for reconciliation and collaborative stewardship
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Environmental assessments
    - Site-specific land-use policies
    - Limited development rights depending on significance and planning authority discretion

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Funded and maintained through provincial resources (MNRF), often limited
    - Occasionally supported by research institutions or NGOs for site studies
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - ANSI evaluations and updates are handled by provincial ecologists and geoscientists, with no dedicated site staff or enforcement personnel
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - NGOs and conservation groups help advocate for ANSI consideration in development applications
    - Some groups monitor or help protect ANSI features (i.e. through land acquisitions or stewardship)

Key Achievements and Results

- Recognition and documentation of hundreds of ecologically and geologically important sites across Ontario
- Inclusion in planning policies has prevented development impacts in some sensitive areas
- Used as the scientific baseline for land use and environmental assessment

Strengths:

- Science-based identification of important natural features
- Integrates with land-use planning frameworks (i.e. PPS, Official plans)
- Allows flexible protection approaches tailored to the local context
- Helps guide land acquisition and stewardship by land trusts and NGOs

Weaknesses:

- No legal protection on its own; relies on municipal discretion
- Inconsistent application across municipalities
- Limited public awareness and transparency
- Not formally integrated with Indigenous knowledge or governance
- Many ANSIs are on private land with no mechanism for formal protection

ANSIs within Georgian Bay

- Big Chute Rocklands

- Lost Channel Gneiss Rocklands Forest
- Bearshead-Buckshoof Lakes Costal Gneiss Rocklands
- Sand Islands
- Penetanguishene Harbour
- Alexander Islands Reserve
- Umbrella Islands
- West Lookout Island Reserve

Provincially Significant Wetland Designation

Jurisdiction/Region: Province of Ontario, Canada

Overview/Background: The Provincially Significant Wetland (PSW) designation is a classification systems used by the Ontario government to identify wetlands that are of high ecological value based on a standardized evaluation system. The designation is intended to protect Ontario's most vulnerable wetlands from development and degradation, as they play critical roles in biodiversity conservation, water purification, flood mitigation, and carbon storage. The PSW program has been in place since the 1980s and its foundational to Ontario's broader natural heritage planning framework.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Administered by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) in collaboration with conservation authorities and municipalities.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Designated under the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020, issued under the Planning Act. PSWs are protected from site alteration and development unless no negative impacts can be demonstrated.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Ontario Wetland Evaluation System (OWES)
    - Official Plans and Zoning By-laws incorporating PSW mapping
    - Site plan control and environmental impact assessments (EIA)
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Includes wetlands evaluated and scored as "provincially significant" based on biological, social, hydrological, and special features criteria.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Municipalities integrate PSW protections into their local planning instruments; Indigenous engagement has not historically been required but is increasingly recognized as important in current policy discussions.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), with municipalities responsible for implementing protections through local planning.
- How are decisions made?
    - Wetlands are evaluated using the OWES manual by certified evaluators. Designations are confirmed by MNRF and enforced through municipal planning processes.
- Indigenous participation?
    - Recent advocacy has highlighted the need for Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in wetland evaluations and conservation.

- Important conservation tools/measures
    - OWES for evaluation
    - Mapping and designation in Official Plans
    - PPS policies prohibiting development in PSWs
    - Buffer zones and EIAs

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Publicly funded through provincial ministries and sometimes supported by conservation authorities
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - MNRF staff, municipal planners, certified wetland evaluators, and conservation authority ecologists.
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Environmental NGOs may support mapping, restoration and advocacy. Local groups often mobilize to protect PSWs during development proposals.

Key Achievements and Results

- Thousands of hectares of wetlands identified and protected from development across Ontario.
- Integrated into municipal and regional planning systems
- Supports provincial biodiversity and water quality goals.

Strengths:

- Strong protection under the Planning Act through the PPS
- Science-based, standardized evaluation system
- Recognized in all levels of local planning documents
- Contributes to climate resilience, biodiversity and flood mitigation.

Weaknesses:

- Time-intensive evaluation and approval process
- Recent changes to planning legislation have weakened protective frameworks in some areas.
- Lack of enforcement or monitoring in some jurisdictions.

Ontario Greenbelt

Jurisdiction/Region: Southern Ontario, Canada. Over 2 million acres surround the Greater Golden Horseshoe, including the Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges Moraine, and urban river valleys.

Overview/Background:

Established in 2005, the Ontario Greenbelt is the largest permanently protected Greenbelt in the world, created to prevent urban sprawl, protect natural heritage and farmland, and promote sustainable growth. The Greenbelt safeguards significant ecological systems while supporting agriculture, water protection, and climate resilience in one of Canada's fastest-growing regions.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Overseen by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, in coordination with other provincial ministers and municipalities governments
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Greenbelt Act (2005)
    - Greenbelt Plan (latest update 2017)
    - Linked with the Places to Grow Act (2005) and Provincial Policy Statement
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Land use designations
    - Integration with municipal official plans
    - Urban growth boundaries
    - Ecological and agricultural system mapping
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Over 2 million acres
    - Includes forests, wetlands, river systems, agricultural land, and key headwaters
    - It encompasses parts of the Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges Moraine, and urban river valleys
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Municipalities must conform to the Greenbelt Plan in their official plans
    - Indigenous communities are not formally included in governance but may engage through consultation processes.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - The provincial government has appointed a Greenbelt Council primarily through the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- How are decisions made?
    - Through provincial legislation and regulations, municipalities implement and enforce policies through land use planning processes

- Indigenous participation?
    - No formal role. Participation only occurs through the duty to consult processes during policy or boundary changes.
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Permanent protection from development
    - Agricultural system designation
    - Ecological corridor protection
    - Groundwater and surface water resource management

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Primarily funded by the Government of Ontario
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Managed by provincial staff and some municipal oversight, supported by planning, enforcement and mapping teams
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Strong support and advocacy from NGOs such as Environmental Defence, Ontario Nature, and the Greenbelt Foundation
    - Community groups monitor enforcement and push back against policy rollbacks

Key Achievements and Results

- Protected over 2 million acres from urban development
- Maintain permanent farmland, forests and watersheds near major urban centers
- Enhanced public awareness of urban sprawl and ecological planning
- Contributed to climate mitigation through carbon storage, water regulation, and ecosystem services

Strengths:

- Provides long-term protection for key ecosystems and agricultural lands
- Integrates with broader land use planning frameworks
- Limits sprawl and supports smart growth
- Offers a proven, scalable model for green infrastructure
- Strong public and NGO support has kept in the spotlight

Weaknesses:

- Fragmented governance across municipalities can create inconsistencies
- Limited Indigenous leadership or inclusion in design or management
- Vulnerable to political changes and boundary manipulation, as seen in recent removal and restoration debates
- Some ecologically important lands remain outside the Greenbelt boundary.

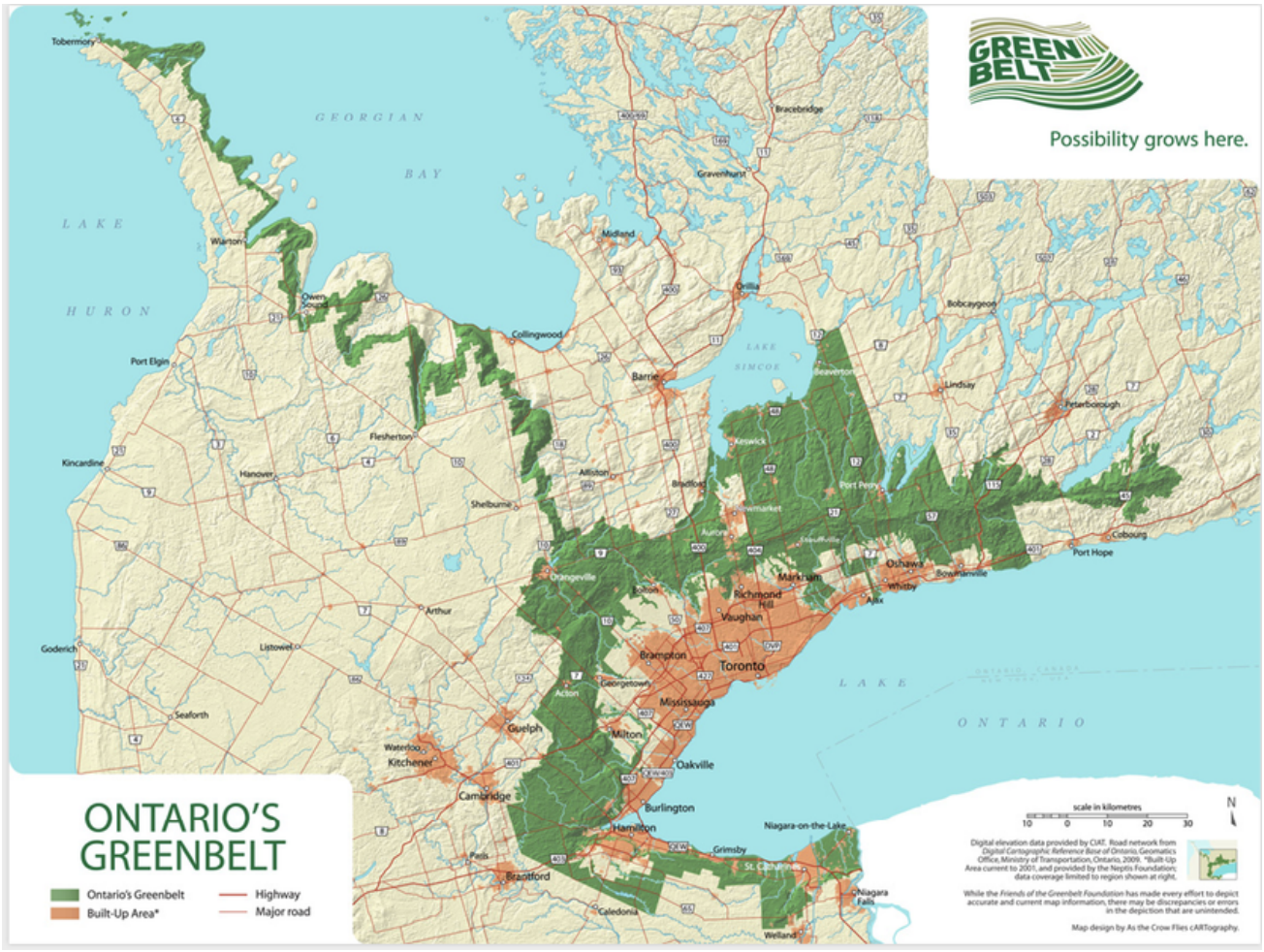


Figure 5. Ontario Greenbelt Map

Indigenous-Led Conservation Models and Co-Managed Models Detailed Models

Indigenous Co-Management Model for National Protected Areas

Jurisdiction/Region: Canada-wide. It is applied within National Park Reserves, National Marine Conservation Areas, and other federally managed protected areas on Indigenous territories.

Overview/Background: This model acknowledges Indigenous Peoples as stakeholders in the governance of lands and waters across Canada. It responds to the need for shared governance, reconciliation, and recognition of Indigenous laws, knowledge systems, and sovereignty. These models typically emerge in areas with unresolved land claims or modern treaties and aim to co-develop conservation plans and decisions between Parks Canada and Indigenous governments.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Co-management boards or advisory bodies with representation from Indigenous governments and Parks Canada
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Guided by modern treaties, interim measures agreements, and Parks Canada policy frameworks, often grounded in Section 35 of the Constitution Act
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Shared decision-making tables, joining park management plans, Indigenous Guardian programs, and adaptive management principles
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Varies by site; typically large, culturally, and ecologically significant areas like national park reserves (i.e.. Gwaii Haanas, Thaidene Nene, Sable Island, NMCA)
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Central to governance and stewardship, often contributing traditional ecological knowledge and community engagement

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Jointly overseen by Parks Canada and Indigenous governments or co-management boards
- How are decisions made?
    - Through consensus or shared authority under agreements or governance protocols
- Indigenous participation?
    - Direct participation in governance, monitoring, planning, and employment, including Indigenous Guardians programs and traditional knowledge integration
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Indigenous knowledge-based planning
    - Cultural and ecological monitoring

    - Stewardship programs
    - Legally binding co-management agreements

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Primarily federal funding via Parks Canada, sometimes supported by philanthropic sources or Indigenous organizations
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Co-management secretariats, Guardians staff, joining planning teams
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - NGOs provide support through training, funding, and research partnerships, but Indigenous leadership is prioritized.

Key Achievements and Results

- Successful long-term co-management of areas like Gwaii Haanas (Haida Nation) and Thaidene Nene (Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation)
- Strengthened relationships and trust-building between federal agencies and Indigenous nations
- Protection of cultural landscapes and biodiversity under joint protection of large and significant natural areas.
- Creation of employment and youth engagement opportunities in conservation.

Strengths:

- Advances reconciliation and Indigenous sovereignty
- Grounded in place-based knowledge and relationships
- This model leads to more holistic and culturally respectful conservation
- Encourages shared responsibility and capacity building

Weaknesses:

- Time-consuming negotiations and planning process
- Legal and bureaucratic complexities can delay implementation
- Risk of power imbalance if not truly equitable
- It varies greatly by region, with inconsistent federal approaches.

Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs)

Jurisdiction/Region: Across Canada. Led by Indigenous Nations and governments; relevant to PaBIA and the broader Georgian Bay regions

Overview/Background:
IPCAs are lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance, and knowledge systems. These areas are deeply connected to Indigenous cultural values and are central to reconciliation, decolonization, and climate resilience. They differ from government conservation models by prioritizing Indigenous authority and their relationship to land.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Led and governed by Indigenous Nations, with possible collaboration from federal, provincial or municipal governments as supporting partners.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Rooted in Indigenous legal traditions may or may not be recognized by Canadian federal or provincial legislation.
    - Supported by Canada's Pathways to Target 1 and the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE).
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Community-based land use planning, Indigenous Guardian programs, nation-specific protocols and laws.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Varies widely include traditional territories, sacred lands, biodiversity hotspots and culturally important watersheds.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Indigenous communities are the central authority. Planning, implementing and monitoring conservation activities.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Indigenous Nations, with varying levels of recognition or partnership from Crown governments
- How are decisions made?
    - Based Indigenous governance structures, laws, and decision-making processes may include collaborative frameworks
- Indigenous participation?
    - Full leadership and stewardship from concept design to implementation and enforcement Indigenous Guardians play a key role in monitoring and managing IPCAs
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Indigenous law-based conservation policies

    - Indigenous guardians and monitoring teams
    - Custom planning frameworks rooted in traditional knowledge
    - Cultural heritage protection mechanisms

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Support comes from federal programs (Nature Fund, Pathways to Target 1), NGOs, philanthropy, and community-based funding
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Indigenous-led teams and organizations with capacity support from partners when requested
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - NGOs and civil society organizations often provide technical support, capacity-building and funding to respected Indigenous leadership

Key Achievements and Results

- Dozens of IPCAs proposed or established across Canada
- Enhanced protection of biodiversity, cultural sites, and Indigenous languages
- Creation of employment, training, and youth engagement through Guardian programs
- Recognized by the federal government as key to meeting conservation targets

Strengths:

- Self-determination and Sovereignty for Indigenous Nations
- Culturally grounded conservation
- Builds community resilience and climate adaptation
- Recognized as effective, ethical conservation aligned with reconciliation
- IPCAs can vary from First Nation to First Nation adaptable to the specific region

Weaknesses:

- Not always formally recognized in Canadian law or policy
- Requires long-term funding and capacity support
- May face jurisdictional or political challenges with governments
- Risk of co-option if partnerships are not Indigenous-led
- No uniform standard of protection employed by First Nations
- IPCAs' approach to environmental protection may differ from the standard view of protection because usually there is a significant emphasis on culturally important protections and ICPAs may allow land uses and activities that do not conform to (for example) IUCN Protected Areas standards. This approach may be reasonable in sustaining First Nations' viability and growth.

Private and NGO-led Conservations Model Profiles

Private Protected Areas (PPAs), Land Trusts and Other Privately Protected Lands

Jurisdiction/Region: Across Ontario and Canada. Typically located on private lands, managed by landowners, land trusts, and non-profit organizations

Overview/Background:
Private protected areas are lands voluntarily conserved by private individuals, families, communities or organizations such as land trusts. They play a growing role in meeting Canada's conservation targets. These areas are legally protected for the long-term conservation of nature, often through conservation easements or outright land donations, and are recognized in national conservation reporting frameworks

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed by land trusts, private landowners or community-based non-profits
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - All private land protected areas (land trust properties and easements) are secured with federal or provincial funding and are protected under legal agreement between the land trust and the government. All private land protected areas secured under the Ecological Gifts Program are legally protected under the Income Tax Act (Canada) with penalties of 50% of the deemed disposition value upon each and any breach.
    - Most land trust protected areas (conservation easement or actual property held by the conservancy) are part of the federal Ecological Gifts Program and have federal designation “Ecologically Sensitive Land”. They are thereby protected under federal statute (with reporting requirements for any change in use).
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Conservation easements
    - Land donations and purchases
    - Stewardship plans developed by land trusts
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Varies includes forests, wetlands, shorelines, rare habitats, farmland, and culturally important lands
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Some land trusts collaborate with Indigenous patterns or local municipalities; however, Indigenous leadership is not guaranteed unless specifically incorporated.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - Individual landowners, land trusts (Ontario Nature, GBLT) and supporting NGOs
- How are decisions made?
    - Georgian Bay Land Trust and Nature Conservancy of Canada

        - Both operate on eastern Georgian Bay. Decisions are made based upon property specific Conservation Management Plans and Baseline Documents Reports, both of which are updated every 5 years. They are both based on internationally recognized conservation methods.
    - Conservation Easements
        - Decisions are governed by the permitted uses and restrictions in the conservation agreement that remains on title in perpetuity. The Conservation Land Act RSO 1990 governs enforcement along with federal statutes including the Endangered Species Act and Income Tax Act when applicable.
    - Land Trusts and Conservancy decisions are also governed by the comprehensive Canadian Land Standards and Practices. Provincially funded land trust properties are protected under legal agreement with the funder.
    - Based on landowner commitments and land trust policies, decisions are often governed by a board of directors or trust stewards
- Indigenous participation?
    - Emerging areas some trusts are now pursuing co-management or Indigenous-led initiative
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Legal easements
    - Monitoring and stewardship programs
    - Education and outreach to private landowners
    - Restoration and habitat management projects

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Funded through philanthropy, donations, government grants, and volunteer support. Supported by ecological gifts program (federal)
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Varies. Many land trusts operate with small staff teams, boards, and volunteers
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Volunteers conduct monitoring, outreach, events, and stewardship work. NGOs provide technical expertise, fundraising and training.

Key Achievements and Results

- Over 110,000 hectares of land are protected in Ontario by land trusts
- Recognition of PPAs in Canada's Protected and Conserved Areas Database
- Long-term protection of key biodiversity areas and ecosystem services
- Growth in the community-led conservation and land stewardship

Strengths:

- Flexible and locally driven conservation approach
- Protects land outside public park systems
- It can be rapidly deployed with community support

- Offers long-term legal protection through easements and or fee-simple securement that occurs through Canada's Nature Heritage Conservation Program or Ecological Gifts Program.
- Often leverages strong local stewardship and volunteerism
- On Georgian Bay, GBLT holds almost all land trust and conservation easements and provides continuity in ensuring conservation values are uniformly upheld according to permitted uses and restrictions.
- Long-term stewardship relies on ongoing funding and volunteer commitment (which is an obligation under the Canada Land Trust Standards and Practices.

Weaknesses:

- No uniform standard for all land trust/easement organizations.

Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs)

Jurisdiction/Region: Canada-wide. Identified across federal, provincial, territorial Indigenous, manual, and private lands and waters

Overview/Background:
OECMs are geographically defined areas that are not formally designated protected areas but still achieve long-term conservation of nature and biodiversity through effective management. As part of the Pathway to Canada Target 1, they are recognized under international targets. OECMs complement traditional protected areas and can include lands managed for other purposes (forestry, Indigenous cultural used military zones) as long as they deliver effective biodiversity outcomes.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed by a range of entities, including Indigenous governments, conservation NGOs, private landowners, municipalities, industry (forestry, hydro, and the military)
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Not governed by a protected areas framework, but must demonstrate long-term conservation through regulations, management plans or customary law
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Long-term management plans
    - Monitoring programs
    - Ecological outcome documentation
    - Can include customary Indigenous stewardship practices
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - Can include forests, wetlands, water bodies, cultural landscapes, marine areas, Indigenous territories, working lands
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - OECMs often reflect Indigenous-led conservation, co-management or community stewardship. Local governments may also designate municipally managed conservation lands as OECMs.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - First Nations, municipalities, private landowners, NGOs or government agencies, depending on the type of land
- How are decisions made?
    - Site-specific decision-making, based on the managing bodies' protocols, planning tools, and governance structure
- Indigenous participation?

    - Central to many OECMs, Indigenous governments are leading or co-leading numerous OECM initiatives
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Laws and Indigenous Stewardship Practices
    - Sustainable land management
    - Habitat conservation integrated into economic or cultural use areas
    - Science-based biodiversity monitoring

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Varies by project, can include federal/provincial funds, NGO support, or community fundraising
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Depending on the governance body, some OECMs operate with formal staffing, others through community or volunteer stewardships
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - NGOs often support technical reporting, monitoring funding applications and community engagement

Key Achievements and Results

- As of 2023, over 1,000,000 square km of Canada's land and marine territory reported as OECMS
- Recognition of diverse conservation methods beyond parks
- OECMs play a key role in Canada's conservation targets and contribute to Indigenous-led conservation models
- Allow for conservation in multi-use landscapes

Strengths:

- Flexible and inclusive conservation model
- Recognizes Indigenous knowledge and leadership
- Supports biodiversity in working landscapes
- Broadens the toolbox for conservation
- Enables community and values-based conservation
- Relies on different mechanisms for funding as opposed to other conservation mechanisms which may only rely on one.

Weaknesses:

- Conservation outcomes depend on management effectiveness, no legal enforcement.
- Risk of being used to inflate protection targets without delivering strong conservation outcomes
- Monitoring and reporting can be inconsistent or under-resourced.

Collaborative and Area-Based Tools Detailed Models

Algonquin to Adirondacks (A2A) Collaborative

Jurisdiction/Region: Eastern Ontario, northern New York State and southwestern Quebec.

Overview/Background:

The A2A collaborative is a transboundary conservation initiative focused on connecting and protecting biodiversity across a critical ecological corridor between Algonquin Park in Ontario and the Adirondack Mountains in New York. This corridor is vital for species migration, ecological resilience, and climate adaptation. The initiative promotes connectivity conservation by working with landowners, communities, Indigenous peoples, NGOs and governments.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Non-profit collaborative with a Board of Directors and various working groups; operates under a cooperative model involving multiple stakeholders.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - A2A is not a regulatory body but works with existing legal and planning frameworks at local, provincial/state, and deferral levels to influence land use and conservation priorities.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - It uses the Conservation Action Planning (CAP) framework (developed by the Nature Conservancy) to guide strategic priorities, identify threats, and set measurable objectives for biodiversity conservation.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - It spans over 93,000 square kilometres across international borders, encompassing forests, wetlands, rivers, and agricultural lands.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Engages Indigenous communities and seeks to integrate Indigenous knowledge into conservation work. Local municipalities are partners in land use and corridor planning.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - The A2A Collaborative is overseen by a Board of Directors and an Executive Director. It includes multiple member organizations, volunteerism and cross-sector collaborators.
- How are decisions made?
    - Decisions are consensus-driven within working groups and the Board. Strategic direction comes from the CAP process and stakeholder input.
- Indigenous participation?

    - Indigenous involvement is recognized as essential, with outreach and partnerships ongoing to integrate Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems better.
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Corridor mapping and ecological connectivity assessments
    - Habitat restoration projects
    - Landowner stewardship programs
    - Public education and outreach campaigns
    - Research and monitoring tools (i.e. wildlife crossings)

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Funding is done through government grants (Canada and the US), private foundations, donations, and fundraising campaigns.
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - A dedicated volunteer network and a board of directors support a small staff team.
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Key partners in implementation, such as local land trusts, environmental NGOs, and volunteer naturalist groups, assist in stewardship, education, and monitoring efforts.

Key Achievements and Results

- Developed robust A2A trail systems and wildlife corridor mapping across a transboundary region
- Published a conservation action plan to guide regional strategies
- Launched landowner outreach programs supporting connectivity and habitat protection
- Helped raise awareness and establish partnerships across international and jurisdictional boundaries.

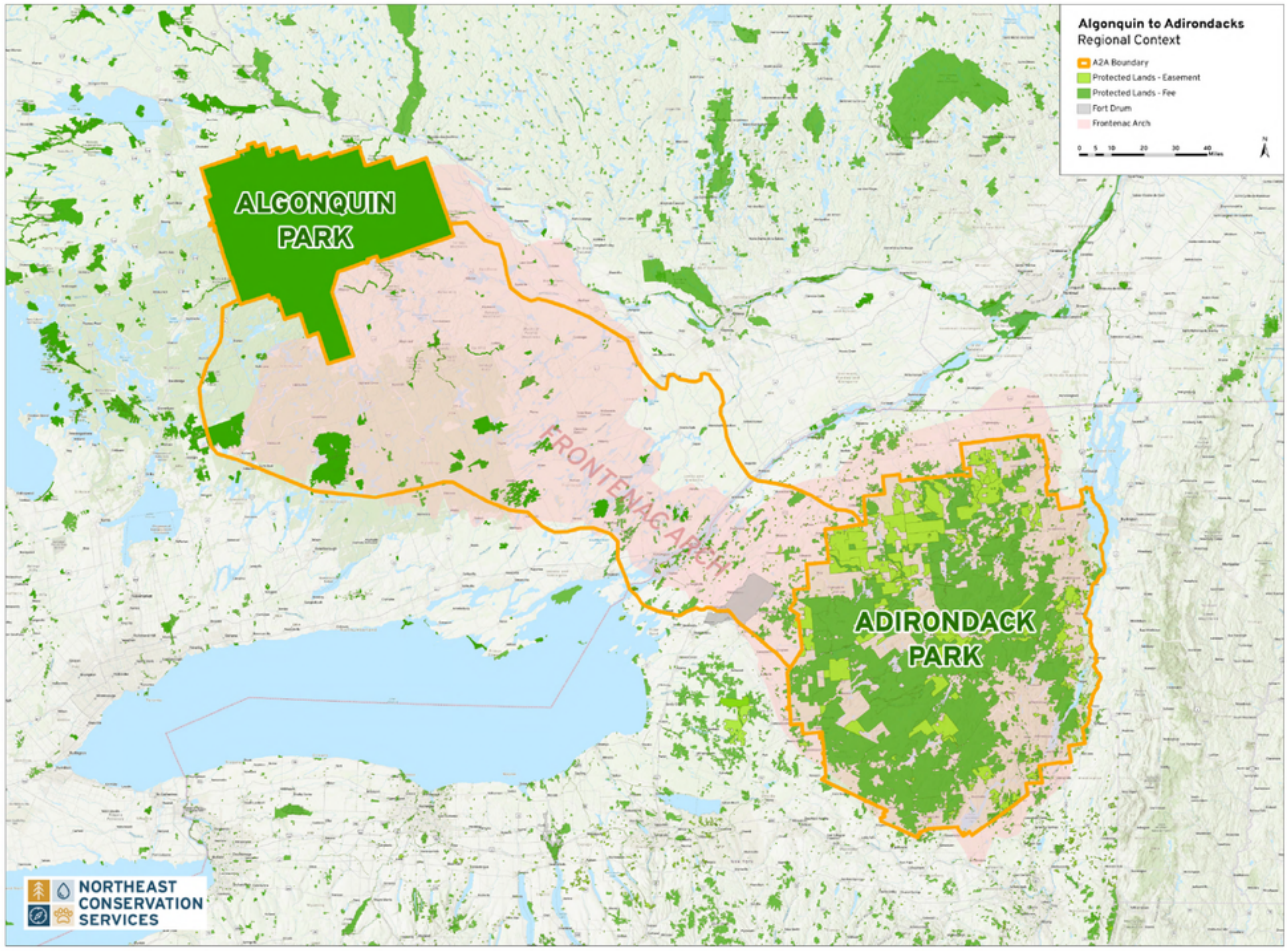
Strengths:

- Strong focus on ecological connectivity and climate resilience
- Inclusive and collaborative governance model
- Effective cross-border cooperation
- Grounded in science-based planning
- Supports grassroots and landowner-led initiatives
- A2A and other corridors are the precursors to Canada's 2024 designation of "Key Ecological Corridors" These designations bring public and political awareness to the importance of maintaining connected landscapes and are key players in driving the creation of conserved areas that connect existing PAs.

Weaknesses:

- Limited regulatory authority, must rely on partnerships and influence
- Small staff and budget can limit capacity

- Cross-jurisdictional coordinator is complex and can slow implementation
- Indigenous engagement is ongoing but not yet fully embedded



European Greenbelt

Jurisdiction/Region: Runs along the former Iron Curtain across 24 European countries from the Barents Sea (north of Finland and Russia) to the Black Sea (Bulgaria), spanning over 12,500 km.

Overview/Background:
The European Greenbelt is a large-scale ecological network and peace project that follows the route of the former Iron Curtain. Once a line of division during the Cold War, it symbolizes unity and a continuous green corridor supporting biodiversity, cultural heritage, and sustainable development. This initiative promotes transboundary conservation and connects national parks, nature reserves and cultural landscapes across the continent.

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Coordinated by the European Greenbelt Association, a registered non-profit organization. It operates through four regional Greenbelt focal points (North, Central, Southeast and Balkan) with a Europe-wide coordination office.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - The initiative itself has no direct legal authority, but it works within existing EU policies, national conservation laws, and UNESCO and Natura 2000 designations.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Promotes collaborative conservation planning, ecological network development, and sustainable regional development. It also utilizes regional working groups, thematic workshops, and EU-supported projects to develop action plans and strategies.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - It covers over 12,500 km of ecologically rich land, including forests, wetlands, mountains, river valleys, and meadows. It acts as a continental corridor for migratory species and climate adaptation.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - Local communities, municipalities, and stakeholders are essential implementation partners. While Indigenous governance has no formal role, there is a strong emphasis on cultural landscapes and traditional land uses.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - The European Greenbelt Association oversees the coordination, with regional implementation led by the designation of Focal Points and local partners.
- How are decisions made?
    - The EGB Association's board and general assembly include representatives from member organizations. Consensus-based and participatory decision-making is emphasized.
- Indigenous participation?
    - It is not applicable traditionally, but the initiative deeply respects local knowledge, cultural heritage, and community participation in stewardship.
- Important conservation tools/measures

    - Transboundary protected area management
    - Habitat connectivity and restoration projects
    - Sustainable tourism and greenbelt initiatives
    - Mapping and monitoring tools for biodiversity and land use
    - Cultural heritage preservation programs

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Primarily supported by the EU, national governments and international conservation NGOs, as well as private foundations and project-based grants
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - Small core team at the European level, supported by regional coordinators and local implementation teams
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Central to the model, hundreds of NGOs and local associations are involved in everything from habitat restoration to education and advocacy

Key Achievements and Results

- Transformed the former Iron Curtain into one of the largest ecological corridors in the world
- Linked hundreds of protected areas across borders
- Strengthened cross-border collaboration and peacebuilding through conservation
- Inspired sustainable economic activities (ecotourism) in rural communities
- Elevated awareness of Europe's shared ecological and historical heritage

Strengths:

- Highly symbolic and unified conservation model
- Large-scale connectivity across diverse ecosystems and countries
- Strong civil society and grassroots involvement
- Integrates nature conservation with cultural heritage and sustainable development
- Effective use of EU funding and regional partnerships

Weaknesses:

- Limited centralized authority depends on collaboration and voluntary participation
- Complex governance across many jurisdictions
- Uneven implementation capacity in different regions
- Project-based funding can limit long-term continuity
- There is no formal integration of Indigenous worldviews, although strong on local culture.



Figure 6. European Greenbelt Map

Stockholm Archipelago

Jurisdiction/Region: Stockholm, Sweden, encompasses over 30,000 islands, islets, and skerries extending from Stockholm to the Baltic Sea.

Overview/Background:
The Stockholm Archipelago is one of Europe's largest archipelagos and a vital ecological and cultural landscape. Recognized as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance since 1989, the region is protected through a combination of national parks, nature reserves, and Natura 2000 sites. The area balances conservation with sustainable tourism and local livelihoods, guided by Sweden's strong environmental policies and the principle of Allemansratten (the right of public access)

Core Features/Structure:

- Governance structures
    - Managed collaboratively by multiple entities, including the Archipelago Foundation, Stockholm County administrative board, region Stockholm, and municipal governments. The archipelago foundation is a significant landowner responsible for preserving and developing recreational areas.
- Legal authority or policy framework
    - Protected under Swedish national legislation, EU directives (Natura 2000) and international agreements like the Ramsar Convention. The area benefits from statutory recognition as a protected region.
- Planning tools or mechanisms
    - Utilizes ecosystem-based marine management approaches as seen in initiatives like the Pilot Stockholm Archipelago project, which aims to develop regional management models through local involvement.
- Scope of land/ecosystem covered
    - It covers approx. 1,700 square km with about 530 square km of land. The archipelago includes diverse habitats such as forests, wetlands, and marine environments.
- Role of Indigenous communities or local governments
    - While there are no Indigenous communities in the traditional sense, local communities play a crucial role in the governance and implementation of conservation measures. Collaborative efforts involve multiple municipalities and regional authorities.

Implementation and Governance:

- Who oversees it?
    - The Archipelago Foundation, in partnership with regional and municipal authorities, overseas conservation and sustainable development efforts
- How are decisions made?

    - Decisions are made through collaboration among stakeholders, including governmental bodies and local communities, ensuring a participatory approach to governance
- Indigenous participation?
    - It is not applicable, as there are no Indigenous populations in the region
- Important conservation tools/measures
    - Designation of protected areas
    - Ecosystem-based management strategies
    - Sustainable tourism initiatives
    - Environmental education and public engagement programs

Funding and Resources:

- Public or private funding sources
    - Funded through a combination of public and private. EU grants, national and regional budgets, etc.
- Staff or organizational infrastructure
    - The Archipelago Foundation employs staff dedicated to conservation, maintenance, and visitor services across the archipelago.
- Role of volunteer groups and NGOs
    - Volunteer groups and NGOs participate in various activities, including habitat restoration, monitoring and environmental education.

Key Achievements and Results

- Recognition as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance
- Development of sustainable tourism infrastructure, such as the Archipelago Trail connecting multiple Islands
- Implementation of ecosystem-based management practices
- Enhanced collaboration among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders

Strengths:

- Strong legal and policy frameworks supporting conservation
- Effective collaboration among multiple governance levels
- Integration of conservation with sustainable tourism and local development
- High public access and engagement through Allemanstrtten

Weaknesses:

- Complex governance structure may lead to coordination challenges
- Balancing tourism growth with conservation objectives requires ongoing management
- Dependence on public funding can be vulnerable to political and economic shifts.



Figure 7. Stockholm Archipelago Map

Analysis

The models profiled in this report illustrate various approaches to protecting natural areas, biodiversity, cultural landscapes, and ecological integrity across Canada and the world. While the governance structures, legal foundations, and conservation tools vary, several core themes emerge, offering insights into how these models may be leveraged individually or in combination to advance conservation outcomes in the Georgian Bay region and beyond.

Governance Diversity and Trends

The models use four primary governance types as recognized by the IUCN:

- Government-led models such as National Parks, Provincial Parks, and Conservation Reserves provide legal certainty, planning tools, and institutional infrastructure. However, they often lack mechanisms for Indigenous or community participation unless it is otherwise built-in.
- Indigenous-led and co-managed models, such as IPCA's co-management of Park Reserves and Marine Conservation Areas, represent a growing and critical direction in Canadian conservation. These models align with reconciliation goals and Indigenous sovereignty and offer culturally grounded, place-based stewardship practices.
- Privately governed models such as land trusts and private protected areas are flexible, locally driven and often cost-effective. They protect lands that public systems may not reach, although they may suffer from inconsistent funding and fragmented oversight.
- Shared governance and functional connectivity models such as A2A, the European Greenbelt, and OECMs prioritize collaboration and large-scale ecosystem connectivity. They rely on soft power, shared vision and partnerships rather than regulatory authority.

Legal Authority and Permanence

Models such as national parks, provincial parks, and IUCN categories in I-II areas offer the strongest legal protections, supported by statutory frameworks that often limit development and regulate land use.

OECMs and Private Protected Area’s legal protection greatly depends on whether the OECM received federal funding. For OECM’s that received or receive federal funding the parties must sign a legal agreement with penalties for non-compliance. The agreements are enforceable.

Indigenous governance models may or may not be enshrined in Canadian law but derive legitimacy and authority from Indigenous law and stewardship practices. Their legal recognition is improving but remains uneven.

Indigenous Leadership and Inclusion

Indigenous participation ranges from fully Indigenous-led models to co-managed frameworks as seen in Sable Island, and limited consultations, as seen in the Niagara Escarpment Plan

The most progressive models position Indigenous Nations as land stewards, not just stakeholders. These models are essential for ethical conservation and reconciliation and are increasingly central to deferral and provincial policy strategies.

Ecological Scope and Connectivity
Large landscape scale models such as A2A, the European Greenbelt, and the IUCN framework emphasize ecological corridors and functional connectivity across jurisdiction boundaries. These are vital for species migration, climate adaption and long-term resilience.

Site or small area-specific models such as Sable Island and the Massasauga Provincial Park deliver high-value protection but may require integration into broader regional planning to ensure landscape connectivity.

Conservation Tools and Approaches
Across the models, the key conservation strategies include:

- Land-use zoning and restrictions
- Traditional knowledge and law
- Voluntary stewardship and easements
- Monitoring and science-based planning

Each model's success depends on implementation quality, local context, and sustained engagement. This includes clear legal or policy frameworks, sound governance, ongoing engagement and availability of sufficient resources for programs and administration.

Strengths and Limitations Summary

Model Type	Strengths	Limitations
Government-led	Legal clarity, enforcement tools, established frameworks.	Slow to start, limited Indigenous governance, bureaucratic barriers.
Indigenous-led	Culturally grounded, self-determined.	Underrecognized in law, funding and capacity are growing, but still underfunded compared to some other models.
Private/NGO	Flexible, rapid implementation, community buy-in.	No uniform standard for all private/ NGO conservation efforts, vary by region, long-term reliance on volunteers and donors.
Corridor/OECM based	Ecologically strategic, cross-jurisdictional, builds partnerships.	There are no legal mandates; success depends on collaboration and sustained resources.

Hybrid models	Balance of authority, community, and conservation objectives.	Complex management requires capacity and a shared vision.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The review of these models offers critical insights that should inform future planning and policy development for the Georgian Bay Vision 2050 Initiatives

Diversity of Models Reflects Flexibility and Fragmentation
Canada's conservation landscape includes many models, including National Parks, Provincial Parks, Indigenous-led Areas, Marine Conservation Areas, and Privately Conserved Lands. This diversity allows flexibility in protection approaches but results in fragmentation, particularly along ecologically connected regions such as Georgian Bay's coast. Without a unifying framework, many of these models operate in isolation with varying policies and approaches, which is they advocate for a framework for Eastern and Northern Georgian Bay.

Legal Protection Varies Significantly
There are wide disparities in the strength of legal protection and permanence. Federally legislated models such as National Parks and Marine Conservation Areas generally offer strong legal frameworks and oversight. In contrast, conservation reserves and OECMs are often overseen by organizations that receive different streams of government funding. No uniform standard for OECM management exists nationally or internationally, there are specific areas which have the ability to create a uniform standard for what works in said specific region, GBLT makes a strong argument for OECM management in a uniform standard.

Indigenous Leadership is Central to Conservation
Many promising and evolving models, such as IPCAs, co-managed reserves, and type D IUCN models, highlight the essential role that Indigenous peoples play in conservation. Indigenous knowledge and stewardship traditions are increasingly recognized as the foundation of long-term ecological and cultural resilience in areas where these models take place.

Connectivity is Critical but Underdeveloped
Ecological corridors and connected conservation networks are widely acknowledged in conservation science and policy. However, most models reviewed focus on individual sites or areas rather than landscape-level connectivity. Contrary, GBLT's Natural Area Conservation Plan and its Corridor Plan do recognise and integrated conservation across Eco district 5e-7. The protected and connected approach is still emerging and must be more formally integrated through regional frameworks.

Capacity and Funding are Uneven
National and provincial models typically have stable public funding and initial infrastructure. In contrast, many local and private models, and community-led initiatives, face resource constraints that limit their effectiveness, scalability, and longevity. This uneven capacity can lead to imbalanced conservation outcomes.

Planning Tools are Inconsistent
Some models, especially those under federal jurisdiction, include well-defined planning tools such as management plans, ecological monitoring, and regulatory enforcement. Others, less formal or newly emerging models, may lack structured tools for adaptive planning or long-term evaluations or a lack of resources to carry them out.

Public Support and Access Matter
Models that integrate public access to recreational and tourism benefits, such as national and provincial parks, tend to enjoy broader support and more secure funding. Demonstrating direct benefits to local communities and economies is key to securing a long-term say in conservation efforts.

Need for a Regional Framework
A regional conservation framework must recognize the diversity of land types across eastern and northern Georgian Bay, public lands, private lands, and Indigenous lands each with distinct land tenure systems, governance structures, and rights. While the overarching conservation goal should be unified the policy mechanisms to achieve them must be tailored to each land category.

- Public lands will require the involvement of municipal, provincial, federal, and Indigenous governments, alongside meaningful public engagement
- Private lands will rely on collaboration with municipalities, landowners, and land trusts to shape effective and voluntary conservation strategies.
- Indigenous Reserve Lands are governed through their own land management frameworks. Where appropriate, Indigenous communities may share their conservation priorities as part of a broader regional dialogue.

While many effective conservation tools exist, their application must be site-specific, based on ecological function, landscape connectivity, land rights (including Indigenous rights) and land use.

A successful policy framework must be grounded in detailed, place-based understanding of the region's ecosystems and conservation values. In this context, the development of a Natural Area Conservation Plan, supported by mapping, ecological assessment, and stakeholder workshops, may be necessary precursor to policy formation. This foundational planning would support the thoughtful, context driven application of conservation tools across the region.

The absence of a coherent regional planning framework for Georgian Bay creates a large policy gap. Most existing models do not address a full coastal system. Vision 2050 has the opportunity to unite disparate efforts into a coordinated approach, informed by the strengths of existing models but focused on long-term ecological integrity, cultural inclusion, and adaptive resilience.

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