

Canadian

WILDERNESS

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LOOKING BACK ON



YEARS OF CONSERVATION



Celebrating 60 Years of Conservation

CPAWS's diamond jubilee marks decades of pushing for nature protection

JOHN GRANDY



The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society has evolved a lot since its inception in 1963, when the organization was originally known as the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada. Yet, while its name and many other aspects of the organization have changed over the last 60 years, CPAWS has remained true to its core belief: Canada needs quality protection for its unique wildlife, landscapes, and seascapes.

My story converges with that of CPAWS around 12 years ago, when I interviewed CPAWS's then-National Executive Director Éric Hébert-Daly for a report I was writing about Canadian environmental charities. I left that interview with an impression of CPAWS that was so positive I was compelled to join the national board.

In more recent years, I've watched as CPAWS tirelessly lobbied Canada's governments to commit to protecting at least 30 percent of land and ocean in the country by 2030. Before that, CPAWS played a significant role in pushing Canada to try to meet its 2020 targets of protecting 17 percent of land and 10 percent of ocean by 2020. These successive targets offer important hope that we may find the confidence we need to ultimately protect at least half of Canada for nature.

CPAWS's strengths lie in its collaborative approach—across its chapters throughout the country and with Indigenous groups and other environmental organizations—and in the passion of its supporters, who help to amplify CPAWS's message across the country. These strengths have helped CPAWS to become a widely trusted partner in conservation.

I have been a devoted believer of Canada's national parks system since childhood, and I can say without question that CPAWS's work is, has been, and will continue to be, an important part of my life.

John Grandy, President of the National Board of Trustees for CPAWS



CPAWS is Canada's voice for wilderness. Since 1963, we've played a lead role in creating over two-thirds of Canada's protected areas.

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COVER: The Yukon's Peel Watershed. Protecting this spectacular place is among the many victories in CPAWS's six decades of passionate Canadian conservation. Photo: Peter Mather

ABOVE: The scents of spruce and lichen mingle as the landscape transitions to tundra in the Seal River Watershed in Manitoba. Photo: Josh Perlman

Quebec civil society groups launch call to conservation action

In the lead-up to COP15, which took place in Montreal from December 7 to 19, 2022, Quebec civil society came together as never before for the protection of biodiversity. The

civil society collective known as Collectif COP15, an alliance of 104 organizations of all kinds (Indigenous, environmental, youth, financial, unions, etc.), was quickly formed to take action

The Montreal Call launched on December 8, 2023 at COP15. Photo: UN Biodiversity



in the face of the unprecedented loss of biodiversity in Quebec and around the world.

Collectif COP15, of which CPAWS Quebec was an active member, succeeded in raising the awareness of many political decision-makers and the general public concerning a multitude of issues related to the protection of biodiversity. More than 60 side events were open to the general public and were organized in conjunction with COP15, bringing together more than 4,000 people. The March for Biodiversity and Human Rights also brought more than 3,500 people onto the streets of Montreal.

A major three-day international conference on the underlying causes of biodiversity loss organized by CPAWS Quebec concluded with the unveiling of the Montreal Call to Action, supported by representatives of the City of Montreal, the governments of Canada and Quebec, and the Cree Nation Government. The Montreal Call to Action is an invitation to stakeholders around the world to continue the dialogue about systemic changes needed in our societies to protect nature.

Decades-long fight to protect Algonquin Park continues

In 1968, Algonquin Wildlands League was born, issuing a clarion call for a halt to commercial logging in all Ontario parks. In 1980, Wildlands League officially affiliated with NPPAC (CPAWS's old name) to strengthen the two groups' capabilities and effectiveness. By 2007, Wildlands League influenced and supported the passage of the new Provincial Protected Areas and Conservation Reserves Act with ecological integrity management enshrined in law and removing commercial logging from every provincial park, except Algonquin. In 2008, more hard work pays off and the area protected in Algonquin expands from 23 percent of the park to 35 percent and commercial logging is limited to 51 percent of the park. Currently, Wildlands League is campaigning to remove the remaining logging in Algonquin and immediately protect old growth forests, brook trout lakes and streams, as well as shut down and restore more than 40 percent of the 5,000 km of roads in the park.

Seen here in a 1968 photo, Abbott Conway issues "Algonquin Alert" urging the public to report activity that violates wilderness values in the park, and calls for halt to commercial logging. Photo: CPAWS Wildlands League



Global meeting marks sea change for ocean protection

In 1986, Sabine Jessen, long-time volunteer and passionate ocean advocate, joined the CPAWS team and first established the CPAWS Ocean Program with the goal of creating marine protected areas to protect Canada's most important and vulnerable ocean ecosystems and marine species.

In 1987, by sheer chance, scientists with the Canadian government discovered ancient glass sponge reefs off the coast of British Columbia that were thought to have gone extinct. The discovery began CPAWS's first of many marine campaigns.

In the decades since, CPAWS has successfully advocated for the protection of BC's glass sponge reefs, warded off coastal oil and gas exploration, fought to safeguard the vital habitats of the North Atlantic right whale, the St. Lawrence Estuary beluga, and the southern resident killer whale, lobbied to establish a minimum threshold of protection for all marine protected areas, and much more.

Underscoring CPAWS's role as leading voice for ocean protection, the organization co-hosted the Fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) in Vancouver earlier this year. The symposium was a global gathering of ocean conservation professionals, government officials, and Indigenous Peoples to inform, inspire and act on marine protected areas.

Throughout IMPAC5, CPAWS celebrated as the government of Canada announced its commitment to stronger marine protections, a new National Marine Protected Areas policy, a new Marine Protected Area Network action plan, and a pathway to protect at least 25 percent of ocean in Canada.

CPAWS has worked hard to elevate the importance of protecting the ocean and is not about to slow down. We will continue to hold the government accountable to its commitments and to fight to protect the ocean upon which we all depend.

An orca pod off the coast of British Columbia. Photo: Inger/Adobe Stock





CHAPTER AND VERSE

CPAWS's history of combining a national vision with regional action is quintessentially Canadian

BY PETER CHRISTIE

It was a moment for nature and for the Yukon First Nations and environmental groups, including CPAWS, that had stood up to the territorial government. It was also, for many there that day, a moment for Juri Peepre.

"Juri was very much on our minds," recalls CPAWS Director of Conservation Chris Rider of the December day in 2017 when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of a five-year legal fight to protect the Yukon's Peel Watershed. The team had gathered in an Ottawa hotel room to hear the news. "Everyone was hugging. It was just such an incredible happy moment."

The ruling overturned the Yukon government's plan to ignore an independent commission's recommendation to protect up to 80 percent of the spectacular, 68,000-square-kilometre wilderness. Peepre, who died of lung cancer just months after the court's decision, was devoted to saving the Watershed and, in 1991, founded the Yukon chapter of CPAWS to, among other things, push for its protection.

Peepre had been on the CPAWS national board before moving to Whitehorse, and he understood the value of the organization's national presence. But his work—and the success of the Peel Watershed battle—was rooted in his visceral conviction that conservation lives locally; it's in the river trips, the communities and the First Nations where nature itself is at home.

"The inherent strength of CPAWS is the way that the chapters work on the ground in the provinces and territories, working with the local communities, working with local decision makers, working with local First Nations and Métis communities," explains Rider, who recently joined CPAWS national office after years with the Yukon chapter. "Juri was able to do things that were right for the Yukon and that needed to happen in the Yukon."

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Juri Peepre's formula was the same one that has guided CPAWS for the past 60 years. From its inception in 1963—when its earliest incarnation as the National and



The Yukon's Peel Watershed.
Photo: Peter Mather

Gordon Nelson

More than parks

Gordon Nelson was a young academic at the University of Calgary when, beginning in the 1960s, he helped Toronto-based conservationist Gavin Henderson build CPAWS's forerunner organization, the National Provincial Parks Association of Canada (NPPAC). At first, Nelson, Henderson, and others were joined in their defense of Banff National Park against high-profile development plans. Yet, as the organization quickly grew, so, too, did the realization that forests and wild spaces across the country also needed vigorous protection. Nelson recalls a turning point when the group changed its name from NPPAC to the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) in 1985—the centennial of Canada's national parks system. That transformational moment, says Nelson, expanded the conservation mission of the organization, positioning it as a leading national voice for nature in Canada.

"That, in my mind, marked a change in the nature and development of what was the NPPAC," says Nelson, "because it opened the scope of the agency up. It resolved that we should get involved with more than just parks. And that led to a different phase in which we began to work more to promote conservation of wilderness and landscapes, in the broadest sense, and public lands. ... When that happened, the whole thing began to grow. More people came in. ... It was a major shift in what we did, and it opened up what NPPAC had done and really made it possible for the new organization, CPAWS, to take on the scale and scope of what it's now become—which is very, very much a surprise to me. I'm still quite astonished and enormously pleased at how it's become such an important national group... Its effectiveness has been amazing."



Provincial Parks Association of Canada (NPPAC) formed to defend against industry forces eager to carve up Canada's parks—the group has been, at once, both regional and national, grassroots and pan-Canadian.

It has—perhaps more than any other organization of its kind—kept its feet grounded in the places where conservation is needed, while keeping its central headquarters near the halls of power as a nationwide voice for nature.

"It was a multi-rooted organization from the start," explains one of the organization's early leaders, Gordon Nelson. Nelson, now in his nineties, was a young geography professor at the University of Calgary when he and other conservation-minded colleagues banded together—"very much a grassroots organization"—to protect nature in Banff and Jasper National Parks from surging post-war industrial development and giddy, car-culture tourism.

Through the media, Nelson says, they learned of another group in Ontario advocating for parks across the country. Soon, the two organizations came together, recognizing their two ends of the same common purpose. "In Calgary, we were on the scene," remembers Nelson, who served as NPPAC president in the 1970s. "We could see the changes."

FIGHT FOR LAKE LOUISE

By 1972, when the federal government signaled its support for an Imperial Oil-backed plan for a massive, 4,000-visitor resort complex at Lake Louise, NPPAC's one-two, regional-plus-national strategy proved indomitable. Local rallies and outcry, combined with Canada-wide attention, caused the government and the developers to back down.

"That fight really put NPPAC on the map," explains Harvey Locke. "It was citizens pushing back who said, 'no, that's not what our national parks are for.' And they stopped it. It was a tremendously important moment in national park history."

Banff-based Locke is long-time national and international conservation leader. He joined NPPAC in 1981—not long before the group changed its name to CPAWS in 1985—and served as its president from 1990 to 1995. He has



Top: Virginia Falls, Nahanni.
Photo: Mike Beedell. Left: Lake Louise,
Alberta. Photo:Anthony/AdobeStock.
Above: Pictured here circa 1995,
Juri Peepre was instrumental in saving
the Peel Watershed. Photo: Ken Madsen

Éric Hébert-Daly

A trusted partner



A critical piece of CPAWS's success, says Éric Hébert-Daly, has always been its unique level of access and trust among the governments of the day. Hébert-Daly, who was the organization's national executive director for almost a decade beginning in 2009, remembers nudging Ottawa on multiple fronts to meet its 2010 international promise to protect 17 percent of land and 10 percent of its oceans by 2020 under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. With the deadline looming, Canada was nowhere near its targets. CPAWS's response was not to chide the government, but to point to places across the country where Canada could make protected area gains. The nation's subsequent protected-areas push was nothing short of remarkable and paved the way for its current commitment to protect 30 percent of Canadian land and seas by the end of the decade.

"I think the key to CPAWS's success is our ability to be a trusted partner with governments," Hébert-Daly explains. "I'm always conscious of the fact that CPAWS has this ability to be practical and to push when things need to be pushed. But no one sees us as unreasonable. No one ever sees us as attacking for no reason. And for the most part, that builds the kind of relationship that you want to build. And I think, in this particular case, it was able to launch a process that not only developed a significant number of protected areas in a relatively short period of time, but created a hunger and ambition for protected areas in the longer term, which is why now we're looking at even bigger targets, looking at 30 percent and trying to push that."

written widely about the vital role for civil society in conservation—especially local citizens and activists—to counter the moneyed forces of industry and development.

In the decades after the Lake Louise victory, new CPAWS groups began forming in regions across the country, often in direct response to local and regional conservation threats. Wildlands League—an Ontario advocacy group with a history almost as old as NPPAC's—merged with the organization in 1980.

Before long, says Locke, CPAWS's scattered collection of vigorous regional chapters along with its national Ottawa office (which moved from Toronto in the 1990s) began to look and feel like a conservation mirror of the Canadian federation itself. "It is an especially unusual organization in that sense," says Locke. "I always said that CPAWS looked like Canada."

It's strength—like Canada's—was, and is, in its power to amplify a common sense of purpose across different regions; CPAWS members in one part of the country, for instance, could be counted on to feel passionately about conservation campaigns thousands of kilometres away.

Consider, says Locke, CPAWS's successful work with the Dehcho First Nations in the Northwest Territories to raise national awareness ahead of the Nahanni National Park Reserve expansion in 2009. "The people in the Nova Scotia chapter had to believe that the Nahanni was about them and then do something about it," says Locke. "And, you know, they did, just as every other chapter did. ... And that's that magic combination of local presence and national reach."

A BALANCING ACT

The magic was powerful, helping CPAWS succeed in campaign after campaign throughout the country, but it came with challenges: balancing multiple regional interests with a central conservation vision proved inherently tricky.

"Of course, there were questions," recalls Mary Granskou, "about how we share decision making, how we reach decisions

that really reflect the entire organization, and how we share benefits.”

Granskou was CPAWS national executive director during a period of significant chapter growth and expansion in the 1990s. She took the reins just after the CPAWS Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Yukon chapters were established in the early 90s. CPAWS Northwest Territories joined in 1996.

“So, was it fractious? There were always rich debates—and always will be—within CPAWS. That’s part of its strength; it’s a confluence of a lot of ideas, views, strengths, and smarts coming together.” Granskou laughs. “I would often say that from chaos is born true creativity.

“It’s not clean. But that collaboration that happens is the result—that collaboration in the places that we know and love.”

A COLLABORATIVE VISION

In Chris Rider’s recollection, that sense of collaboration—locally seeded and nationally nourished—is what typified Juri Peepre as an exceptional conservationist and as a remarkable CPAWS stalwart. Peepre, who received an Order of Canada for his conservation work in 2014, was devoted to the people of the Watershed as much as to its forests and rivers.

After his death at age 65, Peepre’s ashes were scattered in the Peel’s wilderness waters. His commitment, says Rider, nevertheless survives among the many others like him who share CPAWS’s regional-national vision and its passion for Canadian nature.

“Juri was certainly a key figure,” recalls Rider, “but there were just so many people like that in the [Peel Watershed] campaign. It was the legacy of so many people on the ground. ... It comes back to that grassroots thing: It can’t be overstated how important all of those voices were. Every single person who stood up to speak at a public hearing, every person who was involved in the consultations, every person who wrote into the Yukon government—they each had an impact in the success of that campaign.”



Alison Woodley

Putting biodiversity on the map

Alison Woodley was as surprised as anyone when the UN Convention on Biological Diversity announced last summer that its long-delayed summit would take place in Canada (instead of China). The December meeting—with its ambitious Global Biodiversity Framework—has been hailed as a potential conservation game-changer. For Woodley, CPAWS national senior strategic advisor, it was also something of a hometown homerun following the organization’s determined push to urge the Government of Canada to think big about area-based conservation and to finally spend big on nature. While CPAWS, as a national organization, has less international reach, Woodley and dozens of other CPAWS staff from across the country provided key support behind the strenuous Canadian efforts to coax nations to sign a framework that could make a difference to biodiversity conservation. And equally important, the group was there to back initiatives to protect 30 percent of land and ocean in Canada by 2030.

“We put so much into it,” says Woodley. “It was getting to the point where I thought, oh my gosh, the whole conservation community is obsessed about this meeting. How can it possibly live up to expectations? But then, it was actually fantastic. I think it was worth all the effort. ... We [CPAWS] went in with two goals. One was to do what we can as a national conservation organization to help land an ambitious global biodiversity deal—understanding that we’re not the big influencers at the international level. The second was to push for real conservation on the ground in Canada, using the meeting as leverage for conservation announcements in this country. And I think, on both counts, it was a success. It was quite amazing—really amazing. ... It felt like biodiversity was on the map in a much bigger way. Now the hard work begins on implementation!”

● TIMELINE

For six decades, CPAWS has been a driving force for the protection of Canadian nature

1960s

1963. The National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada (NPPAC) – later to be renamed CPAWS – is created by a group of dedicated conservationists to advocate for Canadian national and provincial parks.



1967 and 1968. NPPAC's first regional chapters take root in Calgary and Edmonton. The Calgary/Banff Chapter (re-named Southern Alberta in 2008) and the Edmonton Chapter (re-named Northern Alberta Chapter in 2006) link the organization's identity to its grassroots, volunteer-driven support base that will eventually span the country.



1972. NPPAC leads a national and local campaign to successfully stop a proposed resort complex called Village Lake Louise in Banff National Park. The group's victory quashing the plan—which had been supported by Ottawa and backed by Imperial Oil—marks a turning point in national parks history.

1977. Saskatchewan and British Columbia chapters established.

1964. NPPAC's first major achievement is successfully lobbying for Canada's first conservation-focused national parks policy. The policy ensures that parks stay true to their protection aims in the face of a tremendous upsurge in outdoor recreation and park use.

1970. Ottawa Valley chapter established.



1973. NPPAC plays a crucial role in mounting public pressure to successfully end commercial logging in Quetico Provincial Park, Ontario. The prohibition is hailed as a triumph for nature in the beautiful, 4,600-square-kilometre park.



1970s

1980s



1985. Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) becomes the new name for NPPAC. The change reflects a new, broader mandate for the nationwide conservation organization.

1988. CPAWS joins First Nations and public protests that help end logging on South Moresby Island. Bowing to pressure, the federal and provincial governments agree with the Council of the Haida Nation to protect the area by creating the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve.



1991. CPAWS Manitoba and Yukon chapters established.

1980. Ontario's Wildlands League becomes a chapter of NPPAC.

1986. CPAWS adds marine protection to its conservation mandate. The organization begins work with the federal government on a new strategy for creating Arctic marine conservation areas.

1990. CPAWS Nova Scotia chapter established.



1992. A legal challenge by CPAWS and Sierra Legal Defense stops logging in Wood Buffalo National Park, Alberta. In the precedent-setting case, the federal court rules logging in the park is illegal.



1990s

1980: Jennifer Berney; 1988: Gwaii Haanas, iStock.com/milehightraveler; 1991: CHBaum/AdobeStock; 1992: Logging in Wood Buffalo National Park, Brian Milne

60 years of · ans de CONSERVATION

2000's

2005. CPAWS adopts a new 10-year conservation plan that includes the organization's long-term vision to protect at least half of Canada's public lands and waters. The "nature needs half" mission will animate the organization's work far into the future.



2000. CPAWS leads efforts with First Nations and many others to convince the federal and provincial governments to conserve the vast, 6.4-million-hectare Muskwa Kechika region of British Columbia. The pristine home to moose, bear and many other wildlife is known as the "Serengeti of the North."



2003. CPAWS Newfoundland and Labrador chapter established.

1996. CPAWS's campaign to protect Banff National Park results in legal caps on commercial development. The limits to development are announced by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien at the 1996 World Conservation Congress in Montreal.

2001. CPAWS Quebec chapter (SNAP Québec) established.



2004. CPAWS New Brunswick chapter established.

1990's

2020s

2023. CPAWS celebrates 60 years of conservation. Reflecting on CPAWS’s conservation gains and on the people who made those successes possible, the anniversary provides an opportunity to inspire a new generation of conservation enthusiasts with a common vision: to permanently protect at least half of land, freshwater, and ocean in Canada.



2017. Canada’s Supreme Court rules in favour of First Nations, CPAWS, and other groups to overturn a decision by the Yukon government that would imperil the magnificent Peel River Watershed. The ruling paves the way for the signing of the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan that protects the area from mining and development.



2009. CPAWS helps the local Dehcho First Nations in the Northwest Territories mount a public campaign to dramatically expand protection for the South Nahanni Watershed. The campaign, including a 20-city nationwide “Nahanni Forever” tour, convinces the federal government to protect 30,000 square kilometres in the Nahanni National Park Reserve.



2020. CPAWS and the Alberta Environmental Network lead the “Defend Alberta Parks” campaign and pressure the province to halt plans to cut protections at 175 park sites. The victory successfully defends nature from mining and other development across the province.

2012. Campaigning by CPAWS’s Quebec chapter, Indigenous groups and local communities makes the case for the creation of the 26,000-square-kilometre Tursujuq National Park. The vast, new park protects the only landlocked freshwater seal population in the world.

2018. CPAWS leads a push by conservation groups that convinces the federal government to allocate \$1.3 billion over five years to protect land, ocean, and wildlife in Canada. The Budget 2018 announcement is the nation’s largest-ever investment in nature and marks a quantum step in conservation funding in Canada.



2022. CPAWS staff from across the country attend the summit of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in Montreal—hailed as watershed moment for conservation. A new Global Biodiversity Framework is a highlight and promises to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

2010s



FIRST PEOPLES FIRST

How lessons from Indigenous conservation
have shaped the CPAWS mission

An outstanding First Nations campaign in Manitoba that's now on the cusp of creating one of the largest Indigenous protected areas in the country had a modest beginning—as a conversation with CPAWS Manitoba about how to save caribou.

Some of the mosses found in Manitoba's Seal River Watershed.
Photo: Josh Perlman

“CPAWS was among the earliest groups to embrace the fact that conservation can’t—and shouldn’t—happen without Indigenous leadership first”

CPAWS helped Bussidor apply for federal funding and to start the ambitious protected area push, says Thorassie, but then the organization deftly stepped back, providing support while making way for the Alliance to take the lead. “CPAWS began in a role of really helping with everyday project stuff, and now that’s changed to really being a supporter and partner in Indigenous-led conservation.”

The Seal River Watershed campaign is among the latest examples of CPAWS’s work in recent decades to get behind Indigenous efforts to create vast protected areas on traditional territories throughout Canada. It’s work that reflects CPAWS’s now-fundamental recognition—one that’s evolved during its 60 years of place-based conservation—of the central role for Indigenous culture and stewardship.

“CPAWS was among the earliest groups to embrace the fact that conservation can’t—and shouldn’t—happen without

“It was about trying to think of ways to organize to advocate on behalf of the caribou,” recalls Stephanie Thorassie, Executive Director of the Seal River Watershed Alliance and a member of the Sayisi Dene from Tadoule Lake, Manitoba.

The Alliance is a group of the four Manitoba First Nations now negotiating the terms of a feasibility study with the province and federal government on the way to protecting the vast,

50,000-square-kilometer Seal River Watershed—an area bigger than Nova Scotia. In 2017, former Sayisi Dene Chief Ernie Bussidor sparked the campaign with a call to CPAWS Manitoba’s Executive Director Ron Thiessen to raise the alarm about the region’s dwindling caribou. Ron visited Tadoule Lake shortly after and their discussion quickly evolved to launching an effort to conserve the watershed and Sayisi Dene’s way of life.



Barren Ground caribou at the Seal River Watershed. Conserving the watershed began with concerns about the well-being of the caribou population by the Sayisi Dene. Photo: Josh Perlman

Indigenous leadership first,” explains CPAWS National Executive Director Sandra Schwartz. “These days, that idea animates our mission and everything we do.”

CPAWS’s initiatives alongside First Nations, Inuit, and Métis have helped to establish several of the estimated 80 Indigenous protected and conserved areas (IPCAs) now found across Canada, including the 26,000-square-kilometre Tursujuq National Park in Quebec, the equally expansive Thaidene Nëné National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories, and many others.

CPAWS—along with other members of the Green Budget Coalition—was also influential in coaxing the federal government to provide significant financial support for Indigenous-led conservation. In December 2022, for example, Ottawa announced another \$800 million over seven years to support IPCA proposals that could



Herb Norwegian

Principles based on harmony

For Herb Norwegian, now in his fifth term as Grand Chief of the Dehcho First Nations in the Northwest Territories, CPAWS has been a valued and like-minded ally for decades, supporting Indigenous efforts to manage and protect vast tracts of pristine traditional lands. Norwegian recalls the example of CPAWS’s work toward the 2009 agreement to expand the Nahanni National Park Reserve—a 30,000-square-kilometre Indigenous-led protected area across the entire South Nahanni River watershed. The CPAWS Northwest Territories chapter and CPAWS national office complemented the tireless years of negotiations by Norwegian and others to convince Ottawa and the territorial government to agree. CPAWS worked as a critical conduit to help sell the idea to Canadians in the south. CPAWS stalwart Harvey Locke and others toured with Norwegian to speak in cities across the country. It was a time, remembers Norwegian, when the lasting trust between CPAWS and his First Nations was cemented.

“CPAWS was always effective,” Norwegian recalls. “Just working with the individuals that I knew, it didn’t take long for us to strike an understanding on where we were going. That’s because CPAWS, as an environmental organization, has principles based on harmony, on protecting the land and on taking care of the land in the interest of the public. The Dehcho principles are similar. We’re out there. We’re harvesters, and we come from the land. So, it worked out quite well that we were able to bring this organization that thought the same way and had the same values of the land and had the same interests, which was really, really important. So, we solidified a relationship, and based on that, and it just took off.”

Mary Granskou

Grassroots beginnings



Mary Granskou was CPAWS national executive director throughout much of the 1990s, spanning a period of remarkable expansion for the organization. New chapters had just emerged in several provinces and territories, and, as CPAWS's federated model of regional chapters began to look more like Canada itself, the national office—which moved from Toronto to Ottawa during this time—also increased CPAWS's pan-Canadian voice and presence. CPAWS membership and national funding surged. A clear sense of a common purpose coalesced among CPAWS staff and supporters across the country, says Granskou. The result was a dynamic camaraderie that she credits with creating CPAWS reputation for credibility, commitment, and integrity with Indigenous groups, with governments, and throughout the Canadian conservation world.

"We were born out of grassroots passions for wild places and an inclusive spirit of activism," explains Granskou. "That's really at the heart of the magic of CPAWS. We didn't start in every region of Canada, but we had aspirations to have a strong presence on the ground throughout the country. We operated very much like a family. I told the board when I left that I had never felt as loved or as challenged in any role in my life, and I have so many relationships that have continued on from there. CPAWS has always been about where relationships and knowledge meet. It can be messy, but it is an empowering model for supporting Indigenous-led conservation and protecting nature in Canada."

mean another one million square kilometres toward the federal pledge to protect 30 percent of land and ocean in Canada by 2030.

AN UNEASY HISTORY

It wasn't always this way. Conservation in Canada—as in many world nations—had an uneasy history with Indigenous peoples.

Early proponents of Canadian parks considered the exclusion of Indigenous communities (and their use of parkland wildlife) as essential to conservation. In the 1920s and 30s, for example, James B. Harkin—the first commissioner of the Dominion Parks Branch and the father of Canada's national parks—was an ardent proponent of this colonial view.

Through much of the last century, a lack of understanding for Indigenous concerns also affected non-government conservation organizations. Among them was CPAWS's predecessor, the National Provincial Parks Association of Canada, which was created in 1963 to defend nature from the threat of development in Canadian parks.

"We hardly had any consciousness of Indigenous interests," recalls Gordon Nelson, one of NPPAC's founding figures. "It wasn't that we didn't quite quickly come around to it once we realized that what we were doing was ignoring their traditional rights."

By the late 1970s, Canada's dawning awareness of Indigenous conservation gained national attention with the release of Justice Thomas Berger's inquiry into oil pipeline development in the Northwest Territories. Berger's report—which emphasized recognition of First Nation's land rights and the protection of nature—became a *cri de cœur* for many environmental groups and highlighted the complementarity of many Indigenous values and conservation aims.

"A lot of the interest arose as a result of the Berger stuff," remembers Herb Norwegian, Grand Chief of the Dehcho First Nations in the Northwest Territories. "After that, as we continued to raise issues up North here, we were able to bring a lot of groups on our side. ... CPAWS was right there at the earlier stages, at the driving edge of it."



CPAWS’s alliance with the Dehcho faced an important early test of the organization’s then-evolving commitment to Indigenous conservation: a decade-long campaign to expand protection of the South Nahanni River Watershed. In 2009, the successful push resulted in the expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve—a 30,000-square-kilometre IPCA that’s now among the largest in the world.

Norwegian recalls early on-the-ground work by CPAWS helping the First Nations to document traditional land use in the watershed. Once negotiations with Canada and the territory began to look promising, CPAWS helped organize a cross-country tour to major Canadian cities to drum up national support for the plan.

“We had to educate the public, and CPAWS was effective at that,” explains Norwegian. “We wanted to make sure that people didn’t feel that they were letting something go. In fact, the



Top: The Seal River Watershed, a vast, 50,000-square-kilometre area bigger than Nova Scotia. Photo: Ron Garnett.

Bottom: Stephanie Thorassie and Ron Thiessen at the COP15 in Montréal, in 2022

message that we were delivering then was that the Nahanni is a gift to the world. ... CPAWS was right there. We were natural allies and partners."

Mary Granskou was CPAWS National Executive Director for much of that time. She remembers the bond forged with the Dehcho as pivotal in the organization's early recognition of Indigenous leadership. Since then, CPAWS efforts to help create more IPCAs across Canada have benefitted from those early lessons.

"At that time, we were just mustering up the courage to create relationships," Granskou says "We were learning—and it's always learning, right?—about what does it really mean to be an ally, to be supporting their leadership, their governance, their history, their aspirations? What does that mean?"

Today, Indigenous relationships are central to CPAWS's mission. CPAWS chapters in regions across Canada benefit from partnerships with many Indigenous governments and communities. Recently, as a gesture of reconciliation, CPAWS

national office changed the name of its biannual "Harkin Award" for Canadian conservation.

INSPIRING SUPPORT

For Stephanie Thorassie of the Seal River Watershed Alliance, it was CPAWS's heavy lifting in the early days of the campaign that made a significant difference. In particular, she credits the organization's capacity to inspire support among Manitobans—thousands of whom have sent sent encouraging letters—as important to the campaign's momentum.



Now, an agreement to finally protect the traditional territories of many Dene and Cree Peoples within Manitoba is getting closer. Following a recent Manitoba cabinet shuffle, Thorassie expects signatures on a memorandum of understanding for a feasibility study of the new IPCA sometime soon.

“CPAWS was really helpful in some of the engagement work we have to do,” she says. “That’s the sort of thing CPAWS is really great at doing, advocating Manitobans for support. ... “We’re really grateful and thankful.”



Riverside and rocks, Seal River.
Photo: Ernie Bussidor



Catherine McKenna

A champion for nature

No moment in recent Canadian conservation history is perhaps as pivotal as the day of the 2018 federal budget. Ottawa’s decision to invest \$1.3 billion in new protected areas and species at risk marked not only a first quantum leap in conservation spending for the country (there have been others since) but (arguably) a sea change in Canada’s consciousness

of our need to save nature. Catherine McKenna, then Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada, was among its key champions. As she remembers it, CPAWS was there, too, building a convincing case—one that McKenna could take to the prime minister, to the finance minister, and to Canadians—for the need to make nature a priority. The organization’s input, says McKenna, was central, but so was its capacity to marshal support across the country—among other conservation groups, among Canadians, and among philanthropic foundations that stepped up to match government funding.

“To be fair, in the early days, I was extremely focused on getting a climate plan,” McKenna recalls. “It wasn’t that I didn’t care about nature, but I had to get a climate plan. But CPAWS reminded me about the important connection between climate and nature. ... They made that connection very clear to me, and they really encouraged me to step up on the nature piece. ... I think CPAWS is sophisticated in the sense that they understand the challenge. As minister, you have a lot of competing priorities, but they certainly made an extremely compelling case that this was a massive opportunity for Canadians. ... CPAWS has always been a real champion for nature, and they were certainly leading the call to make the largest-ever investment in nature in the 2018 budget. The reality is you can want that as a minister, but you can’t do that by yourself.

“I love CPAWS. The opportunity to work with such great people who are so committed—and their broader network—was really personally rewarding. It isn’t just about what you’re able to do, it’s actually about working with good people on important issues.”



Royal Creek joins the Wind River, a tributary of the Peel River in northern Yukon Territory. Photo: Peter Mather

YUKON

The Peel is protected for future generations! After nearly two decades and a trip to the Supreme Court of Canada, many people rejoiced at the signing of a plan to protect over 55,000 km². Along with First Nation partners, **CPAWS Yukon** played an integral role to bring remote Yukon landscapes into the homes of Canadians, and the joint lawsuit against Yukon Government set a precedent for conservation. Learn more about this historic campaign: cpawsyukon.org/protect-the-peel.



Top: Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park. Photo: Christopher Czymak
Bottom: Castle Parks. Photo: Katie Morrison

ALBERTA

In 2015, **CPAWS Northern Alberta** successfully campaigned against new commercial development in caribou and grizzly habitat at Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park. To this day, the struggle remains to find a balance between ecological integrity and tourism in our National Mountain Parks. Learn more: cpawsnab.org/jasper-national-park

In 2020, **CPAWS Northern and Southern Alberta** successfully mobilized Albertans throughout the province to “Defend Alberta Parks” after the Government of Alberta announced 175 of its parks would be closed or delisted. Learn more: cpawsnab.org/defend-alberta-parks

In 2017, Albertans saw a monumental win for nature. The Castle Parks area—an ecologically and socially important region that is home to the headwaters of the Oldman Watershed and habitat for provincial and federal species-at-risk — was previously a multi-use area

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Since 1977, **CPAWS BC** has been a steadfast advocate for the protection of unique deep-sea ecosystems on the Pacific Coast. In 2003, the Endeavour Hydrothermal Vents in BC were designated as Canada’s first marine protected area (MPA) under the Oceans Act. CPAWS-BC has led conservation groups in the planning for the new Deepsea Oasis MPA, a proposed marine protect area that would be four times the size of Vancouver Island. Now, First Nations and Canada are working together to finalize plans for the Tang. gwan-ḥačx^wiqak-Tsigis MPA. It will be the largest MPA in Canada and contribute to protecting 25% of marine and coastal areas by 2025. Learn more: DeepseaOasis.com.



An energetic Dumbo octopus. Photo: Ocean Networks Canada

allowing industrial activity such as logging. After extensive advocacy from local groups and conservation organizations, including **CPAWS Southern Alberta**, the Government of Alberta designated the Castle as a Wildland and Provincial Park and initiated consultation on a management plan. Learn more: cpaws-southernalberta.org/conservation/defend-the-castle



Lifelong land user and advocate for Kitaskīnaw, Gary Carrier, in his airboat on the Saskatchewan River Delta. Photo: Nathan Puffalt, Prairie Rising Productions.

SASKATCHEWAN

On June 10th, 2021, Chief Rene Chaboyer released the Cumberland House Cree Nation Declaration on Jurisdiction and Protection of Kitaskīnaw (Saskatchewan River Delta). This declaration, supported by **CPAWS Saskatchewan**, was the culmination of years of dedicated work by Indigenous leaders and communities. The work of Ya' thi Néné and the Dēnesuḡīnē of northern Saskatchewan has further added to communities keen to protect their way of life. Indigenous-led conservation is making significant contributions to critical habitat protection for many at-risk species in Saskatchewan.



Moose Island at sunset on Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba, 2012. Photo: Ron Thiessen.

MANITOBA

Fisher Bay Provincial Park, 84,150 hectares protected in 2011. It took more than a decade before Fisher Bay Provincial Park along the sandy shores of Lake Winnipeg was established in 2011. A record 25,000 people signed postcards in support of protecting the area. The lengthy battle helped forge a deep and lasting partnership between the Fisher River Cree Nation and **CPAWS Manitoba** as they continued to work together to establish more protected areas in the region. Learn more about their initiative to protect the southeastern Interlake at frcnconservation.ca.

ONTARIO

In 2016, **CPAWS Wildlands League** in partnership with CPAWS national staff helped to establish Canada's first National Urban Park and set the stage for creating 15 more urban parks across the country. Rouge National Urban Park is home to more than 2,000 species and 80 square kilometres of beauty within an hour of 7 million Canadians. Rouge National Urban Park is protection for nature on the frontlines of the biodiversity crisis.

In 2008, after many years of work by **CPAWS OV** and Indigenous and community partners, the government of Quebec announced the largest new protected area in southern Quebec in generations – the Dumoine River Aquatic Reserve. Initially covering approximately 1445 square kilometres, the protected area was expanded to 1776 square kilometres in 2022 to protect one of the last rivers without a dam, and its watershed containing some of the last remaining mature and old-growth forest, in southern Quebec. The area provides a vital north-south connection between the forests of the Ottawa Valley and more northerly boreal forests.

QUEBEC

In December 2020, Quebec announced the additional protection of 96,000 square kilometres of its territory, becoming the second province in Canada to reach the international target of 17 percent protected areas. Quebec now leads the country in absolute protected area coverage with more than 257,000 square kilometres, an area larger than the United Kingdom. These exceptional results are the fruit of years of continuous work by many stakeholders, including **SNAP Québec** and the leaders of many Indigenous nations.



Eaton Canyon on the Caniapiscau River, Quebec. Photo: Francois Léger Savard

NEW BRUNSWICK

After decades of **CPAWS NB's** supporters speaking up for nature, the New Brunswick government fulfilled its commitment in December 2022 to protect 10% of NB lands and waters. More than 400 new protected areas were created throughout the province. It was the largest one-time increase in protected areas in New Brunswick's history and a significant leap forward for nature and wildlife. Learn more: cpawnsb.org/largest-protected-areas-increase.

NOVA SCOTIA

In 2013, the Nova Scotia government publicly released the "Our Parks and Protected Areas Plan", which committed Nova Scotia to protecting an additional 250,000 hectares of land and creating nearly 300 new parks and protected areas. **CPAWS NS** played a key role in selecting these sites and building broad public support for their protection. This plan was an important milestone that helped establish Nova Scotia as a leader in Canada for nature conservation.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the most ecologically-rich landscapes in Canada, yet only 6.7 percent is currently protected. In 2019, after over 25 years, the "Home for Nature" plan was made public. The plan, originally known as the "Natural Areas System Plan," aims to increase protected areas to 13.2 percent. **CPAWS NL**, which began working towards this goal in 2010, was thrilled to see the plan publicly released and eagerly awaits next steps. Learn more: cpawnsnl.org/protectionplan.

Western Brook Pond, Norris Point, NL. Photo: Timothy Holmes



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CPAWS Annual General Meeting


Teleconference at 8pm ET

September 25, 2023

For more information, contact:
info@cpaws.org
or 1-800-333-9453

CPAWS 2023 CONSERVATION AWARD

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS



The CPAWS Conservation Award recognizes the outstanding lifetime contribution of an individual to the conservation of Canada's land, freshwater, ocean, and wildlife.

More details at cpaws.org/award



Legacy giving



For details about how you can include a lasting gift to CPAWS in your Will, please visit:

cpaws.org/ways-to-give

Want to help fundraise for CPAWS with your event, product, or activity?
Contact Vicki Dimillo at vdimillo@cpaws.org



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