

Nature Canada's Reconciliation, Indigenous Inclusion and Partnership Work

October 2026

This document summarizes Nature Canada's work to advance reconciliation, Indigenous inclusion and Indigenous-led conservation. It is not an inventory of every activity, but captures key actions connected to Nature Canada's strategic plan commitments.

The work is organized under four related themes: Indigenous-led conservation partnerships; moving resources and building capacity; governance and organizational practice; and learning, inclusion, and public voice.



Indigenous-led conservation partnerships

We work to build and sustain reciprocal relationships through which Nature Canada's conservation, technical, communications, and advocacy capacities support priorities identified by Indigenous Nations and organizations.

Actions

Moose Cree First Nation partnership (2009–present). Nature Canada has worked with the Moose Cree First Nation Lands and Resources Department on conservation initiatives focused on biodiversity and territory-wide resource planning.

Cree Nation Government protected areas work (2012–present). Nature Canada has supported the Cree Nation Government's work to establish protected areas and steward species at risk. Collaborative expeditions have employed local Indigenous guides, used locally-operated camps and created opportunities for youth training.

Two Billion Trees outreach (2021). Through its emerging nature-based climate solutions work, Nature Canada reached out to First Nations to explore how federal tree-planting investments could support Indigenous priorities, including food sovereignty and forest gardens.

Île-à-la-Crosse partnership (2021–present). Nature Canada developed a multi-year partnership with the Métis community of Île-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, providing government relations, communications and networking support for a proposed Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area across traditional hunting and trapping territories.

Six Nations of the Grand River partnership (2022–present). Nature Canada established a species-at-risk stewardship relationship with the Six Nations of the Grand River Wildlife and Stewardship Office. The work has included field placements and ecological surveys focused on declining aerial insectivores, including swallows and bats, on agricultural lands.

Sâkitawâhk IPCA campaign (2022). Nature Canada supported a Métis-led campaign to establish the Sâkitawâhk Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area in northern Saskatchewan. Using Nature Canada’s digital advocacy tools, the campaign generated thousands of letters calling for protection of the N-14 fur block and regional caribou populations.



Mapping support for the Cree Nation Government (2024). Nature Canada worked with Chantal Otter Tetreault, Manager of Protected Areas for the Cree Nation Government, to convert field data and Indigenous knowledge about shorebirds and culturally important species into ArcGIS layers supporting coastal planning in Eeyou Istchee.

Marine conservation collaboration (2025). At the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation’s Marine Conservation Initiative partner retreat, Nature Canada gathered alongside 18 First Nations and other partners to reflect on successes and policy priorities, including completion of the Great Bear Sea Project Finance for Permanence agreement.

Indigenous leadership at Nature on the Hill (2025). Secretary of State for Nature Nathalie Provost agreed to support Lawrence Martin of Mushkegowuk Council in convening a trilateral meeting with the federal and Ontario governments to advance the proposed Mushkegowuk National Marine Conservation Area.

Eeyou Marine Region bird monitoring (2026). Nature Canada entered into an agreement with the Eeyou Marine Region Wildlife Board to monitor birds in parts of the Eeyou Marine Region of the Cree Nation of Waskaganish. Bird survey experts Marc-Antoine Montpetit and Stéphane Menu conducted the fieldwork, with survey data provided to the Wildlife Board.





Moving resources and building capacity

We help Indigenous partners access and control resources for their priorities, create employment and leadership opportunities, and support youth-led projects.

Actions

Young Nature Leaders grants (2017–present). Nature Canada established a national small-grants program that provides \$1,000 grants to young people leading local projects to heal and protect nature. Indigenous recipients and honourees have included Chloe Dragon Smith, Kristin Muskratt of Curve Lake First Nation, Denise Miller of Six Nations of the Grand River, and Chevaun Toulouse of Sagamok First Nation.

Work to Grow (2021–present). This employment program offered environmental organizations wage subsidies of up to 50 per cent to hire youth, with a particular focus on youth facing barriers. In its first year, 52 Indigenous youth received placements, representing 15 per cent of participants. By the end of the program’s third cycle, Work to Grow had supported 75 Indigenous youth.

Indigenous youth journalism initiative (2021). Through Work to Grow, Nature Canada hired five young Indigenous journalism associates, supervised by editor Alex Gillis, to develop their skills and tell stories about Indigenous-led conservation. One participant, Matteo Cimellaro, went on to an award-winning journalism career with Canada’s National Observer.

TD intermediary fundraising pilot (2023). In response to a request from TD Bank, Executive Director Emily McMillan and Naturalist Director Ted Cheskey developed a model through which Nature Canada could help direct corporate funding to Indigenous-led conservation. TD provided \$30,000 for the first phase. The pilot was also intended to identify barriers that Indigenous communities encounter in conventional corporate application and funding processes.

TD Phase One evaluation (2024). Nature Canada’s report to TD identified barriers including rigid timelines and restrictions that did not reflect the needs of complex, community-led projects, such as site preparation and hazard removal.

Similkameen First Nation funding (2025). Through the second phase of the TD initiative, Nature Canada helped Similkameen First Nation secure a standalone TD grant of \$150,000 over two years for an ecosystem restoration nursery, climate work and youth field training.

Bagida’waad Alliance funding support (2025). Nature Canada provided proposal-writing assistance to the Bagida’waad Alliance from the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation for a TD application to launch its Aski Guardians youth conservation initiative, which was funded for two years.

Aligning ENGO financial practices (2025). Nature Canada contributed to the development and launch of Aligning ENGO Financial Practices With Commitments to Indigenous-led Conservation. Researched by the RAD Network, EcoAnalytics and Environics Research, the report and practical tool are intended to help environmental organizations identify and address funding inequities.

Six Nations restoration funding (2026). Six Nations of the Grand River Elected Council received an \$85,000 TD grant for restoration of the Sloat property, which provides habitat for the threatened Barn Swallow. Nature Canada supported the proposal and administrative reporting.



Governance and organizational practice

We make reconciliation a shared and continuing organizational responsibility by embedding it in governance, policy, decision-making, data practices and the way Nature Canada organizes its support for Indigenous partners.

Actions

Independent strategic assessment (2019–2021). Nature Canada commissioned an arm’s-length assessment led by Dan Pujdak of Watershed Partners and Rachel Arsenault of Wiikwemkoong Unceded First Nation. The assessors interviewed staff and managers and reviewed Nature Canada’s program work. Growing Indigenous Inclusion and Engagement: A Strategic

Assessment of Nature Canada’s Commitment to Reconciliation found strong commitment among staff, while identifying a lack of confidence about how to initiate reciprocal, long-term relationships without making them transactional.

Board Reconciliation Working Group (2020–2026). The Board created a working group to advise on reconciliation. Its work included developing terms of reference, providing guidance on Indigenous protocols, considering Board training needs, reviewing governance policies for colonial or exclusionary language and practices, distributing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, and creating a central resource library.

Statement on Anti-Racism and Equality (2021). The Nature Canada Board developed a public statement connecting racial justice with reconciliation and the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Review of Nature Canada’s assets and offerings (2024). Advisor Kelly Patrick interviewed senior leaders and prepared an inventory of ways Nature Canada could support First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners. The resulting document recommended that services be coordinated across departments and grounded in the principle “Nothing about or for us without us.”

Board representation (2025). Nature Canada met its strategic plan targets for at least half of Board members to identify as Black, Indigenous or People of Colour and at least half to identify as women.

Reconciliation becomes a whole-Board responsibility (2025–2026). Having completed much of its foundational work, the Reconciliation Working Group recommended that its responsibilities return to the Board as a whole. The working group ceased meeting in March 2026, and reconciliation was incorporated into the Board’s regular governance calendar. Travelling Board meetings include place-based learning connected to local Nations; reconciliation is included in annual Board self-assessment; and Board members prepare localized land acknowledgements.

OCAP® and Indigenous data governance (2024–2026). Ted Cheskey and Lara Falkiner completed Fundamentals of OCAP® training in 2024. In 2026, Nature Canada added a section on OCAP® and Indigenous data governance to its Personnel Policies. Staff are required to respect Indigenous data sovereignty, involve trained colleagues early when projects include information concerning First Nations lands and communities, and follow the relevant Nation’s governance and expectations.





Learning, inclusion, and public voice

We strengthen how Nature Canada learns, communicates, recognizes Indigenous leadership, and creates opportunities, while using its public platforms to amplify Indigenous-led conservation respectfully.

Actions

Staff and Board learning (2020–present). Learning has included anti-racism training with Future Ancestors; Board training on reconciliation and Indigenous-led conservation with the Iisaak Olam Foundation; staff workshops on microaggressions with Bloom Consulting; organization-wide work planning supported by Coeuraj; a staff retreat at Mādahòkì Farm; place-based Board learning led by Mark Albany of the Songhees Nation in Victoria;

and a Deeper Dive Beyond Land Acknowledgements session with ReconciliActionS Inc., Tim O’Loan of the Sahtu Dene First Nations and local Elders. In fall 2022, many staff participated in an optional six-module online training, The Indigenous Circle Approach to Cultural Confidence, which incorporated Indigenous perspectives, traditional and contemporary worldviews, guest panelists, and resources grounded in medicine wheel teachings.

Sector learning and public education (2021–present). Nature Canada hosted Sustainability Network webinars on engaging racialized communities in nature and on its strategic assessment. Nature Canada regularly uses its website, newsletters and social media channels to amplify Indigenous-led conservation, share the work and perspectives of Indigenous partners, mark significant dates and events, and direct audiences to Indigenous-led resources and campaigns.

Indigenous Lands Symposium (2024–2026). Nature Canada provided annual \$5,000 sponsorships to the symposium organized by Wahkohtowin Development. Staff participation supported learning and relationship building with organizations including the RAD Network and Mushkegowuk Council. In 2026, the available event pass was assigned outside the Naturalist department to broaden learning across the organization.

Indigenous governance and conservation law (2024). Nature Canada engaged with the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership and supported Akaash Maharaj’s participation in the Reweaving the Legal Fabric: Indigenous Governance and Conservation Law in Canada summit, which explored relationships among Indigenous law, Crown law and conservation.

Communications guidance (2024–2025). Nature Canada incorporated the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership’s Balancing the Narrative: Communications Guidelines for Indigenous-led Conservation into its communications practices. The guidelines address respectful storytelling, oral knowledge systems and non-extractive relationships. They were also shared with the 24-member Digital Communications Community of Practice through facilitated training.



National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act (2025-2026). ECCC asked Nature Canada’s policy team to assist it with fulfilling the department’s new statutory obligations “to develop a national strategy to promote efforts across Canada to advance environmental justice and to assess, prevent, and address environmental racism”, which includes combatting anti-Indigenous discrimination and exclusion. Members of the Policy team participated in the department’s working sessions, reviewed drafts of the strategy and proposed improvements, and acted as a catalyst for consultations with off-reserve Indigenous peoples.

IPCA Knowledge Basket digital campaign (2025). Nature Canada’s communications team worked with the Digital Communications Community of Practice to support a national campaign for the IPCA Knowledge Basket. The campaign tested messaging that presented Indigenous-led conservation in terms of culturally grounded community well-being rather than primarily through institutional “nation-building” language.

Métis National Council Nature Summit (2025). Nature Canada sponsored the gathering and helped organize its Ottawa reception.

Recognition of Indigenous leadership (2017–present). Nature Canada has recognized Indigenous leadership through Young Nature Leaders, the Douglas H. Pimlott Award and other public platforms. In 2025, Nature Canada presented the Pimlott Award to Valérie Courtois for her leadership in Indigenous-led conservation and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas through the Indigenous Leadership Initiative.

