



We stand for wildlife



Ring of Riches

Looking at all the riches in the Ring of Fire – especially carbon – is vital for conserving this globally important area

There has been a lot of attention paid to the potential mineral riches of the Ring of Fire region in the far north of Ontario. A lot less attention has been given to this area's astounding carbon stores. Billions of tonnes of carbon [are locked in the peaty soils](#) of this remote region – carbon we must keep out of our atmosphere if we want to keep warming below the critical threshold of 1.5 degrees C.

These carbon stores are just one of the reasons WCS Canada pushed for a federal regional impact assessment of proposed roads and mineral development in the Ring of Fire. This watery landscape also contains the headwaters of some of North America's last major free flowing rivers, rivers that feed a vibrant coastal ecosystem on Hudson Bay, which is vital to wildlife ranging from polar bears to migratory shorebirds. In many ways, the Hudson Bay Lowland that surrounds the Ring of Fire is as important ecologically as the Amazon – remote, undeveloped, intact, carbon-rich, and a huge source of clean water. Sadly, like the Amazon, it's also another example of one of the planet's last wild places coming under increasing threat ([see our presentation to the Glasgow Climate Summit](#) for more on the importance of this region.)

To us, a regional assessment under the new federal *Impact Assessment Act* represents an opportunity to take a [bold new approach](#) to looking before leaping: properly assessing the combined impacts of roads, mining activity and climate change on the area's wildlife, peatlands, waters, lands, and people *before* considering the viability of individual projects. Without a comprehensive assessment, the business-as-usual, piecemeal approach to development will leave us once again with a fractured landscape. Unfortunately, the draft agreement between the Agency and the Province of Ontario falls significantly short of addressing cumulative effects and protecting the tremendous values of the area, such as the

enormous amounts of carbon stored in this globally important intact area.



The Hudson Bay Lowland landscape is as much water as land. The deep peat soils of the region store billions of tonnes of carbon. Photo: WCS Canada

In fact, the agreement provides few clues about how the assessment would consider – and mitigate – the combined impacts of roads, mines with long lasting impacts (toxic tailings ponds, changes to rivers and streams), and a rapidly shifting climate. The Indigenous Peoples who are the only inhabitants of this remote region are already feeling the effects of a changing climate, with less reliable winter roads, changes to wildlife abundance, and coastal flooding. Yet, this agreement was developed with little input from these communities and fails to acknowledge Indigenous governance or their concerns about proceeding with resource extraction, project planning and new roads while communities are still reeling from the COVID-19 crisis.

We hope the federal government will [take another look](#) at what is at stake (and it is far more than minerals) in this region, and revise its proposed approach. Our scientists have worked in this region for more than a decade, and we have [used our knowledge](#) to recommend an improved approach that is [better suited to the scale, global importance, and long-term thinking that planning for this region requires](#).



The Ring of Fire contains the headwaters of some of North America's last major undammed rivers. Above: WCS scientists and Moose Cree conservation staff have been jointly assessing lake sturgeon populations in these rivers for a number of years. Photo: WCS Canada.

More than a sprinkle of help for bats

It's not magic fairy dust, but the [probiotic powder](#) that WCS Canada helped to develop to strengthen bats' resistance to deadly white-nose syndrome (WNS) is looking very promising. The powder, made of naturally occurring bacteria, has been tested extensively in trials on captive bats at the British Columbia Wildlife Park (in collaboration with Thompson Rivers University) and more recently at a few bat box and building roost sites in the Greater Vancouver region. Now, through support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we are collaborating with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, [Northwest Trek Wildlife Park](#) and other organizations in Washington State to expand our testing.



Testing probiotic powder in Kamloops bat facility Photo: WCS Canada

The NWTrek Wildlife Park, with help from WCS Canada, will start intensive monitoring of bats at structures later this spring. We anticipate that there will be six study sites in Washington this summer, which will give us an opportunity to assess how the preventative treatment works in locations where WNS is already affecting bats.

While a lot of attention is being paid by researchers in eastern North America to ways to treat bats infected with WNS, in the west where WNS has still not spread widely (only a handful of infected bats have been discovered in Washington State), we are [looking for ways to protect and help bats](#) before the disease gets a grip on the region. Our pioneering probiotic is just one of the ways we are doing this, along with identifying important bat habitat for protection and assessing which of BC's 16 bat species are most at risk from WNS.

Our bat expert, Dr. Cori Lausen, recently explained what's at stake for bats in Western Canada [in a presentation to the BC Wildlife Federation](#) covering bat ecology and physiology and exploring the links between bat health, wetland health and community health.



Natural areas like this deeply forested Yukon river valley, are vital to our efforts to combat climate change.
Photo: Chrystal Mantayka-Pringle/WCS Canada

Conserving natural areas key to avoiding worst impacts of climate change, IPCC says

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is getting increasingly blunt with its warnings that if we don't act on climate change today, it will be too late to avoid deep impacts tomorrow. Its [new report on climate change adaptation and impacts](#) warns that the world needs to quickly get serious about keeping warming below 1.5 C and adds that even at that level, life is going to be no picnic. In fact, it projects that nine percent of the world's species

are at risk of extinction and impacts on human health will be particularly severe for low income and marginalized communities and countries with 1.5 degrees of warming.

As WCS Executive Director of Forests and Climate Change, Daniel Zarin [said in response to the report](#), “we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors of the global economy and keep intact nature’s carbon storage and sinks – primarily forests and peatlands. While those tasks are difficult, we know they are possible, and cost-effective when compared to the enormous economic and human costs of inaction.”

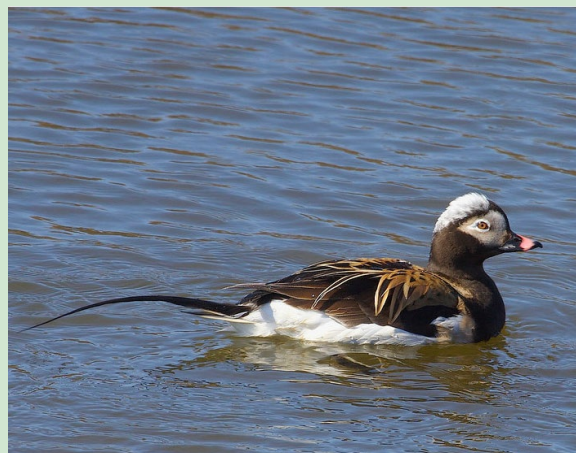
High carbon ecosystems, such as Canada’s peatlands, are already showing signs of stress due to drying, thawing permafrost and increased wildfires, the report notes. Which is why it also urges world leaders to embrace a goal of protecting 30% to 50% of Earth’s land, freshwater and ocean areas, including all remaining areas with a high degree of naturalness and ecosystem integrity (e.g., much of northern Canada), to help protect biodiversity, build ecosystem resilience and ensure essential ecosystem services. Crucial to achieving this goal will be the involvement of Indigenous people who, as the report notes, like the natural ecosystems themselves are simultaneously most at risk from impacts and in the best position to enhance ecosystem resilience through the application of cultural knowledge.

Far from being a dry scientific assessment, the IPCC report pulls few punches in blaming the fossil fuel industry for impeding action on climate change and warning about dangerous action detours, such as growing use of biomass energy. Instead, the science-based report calls for putting the conservation of natural areas front and centre in our efforts to combat climate change and to ensure impacts on everything from fresh water to coastal flooding are mitigated as much as possible.

WCS Yukon scientist Chrystal Mantayka-Pringle [talks about what we can to embrace natural carbon solutions in the Globe and Mail’s broad overview](#) of the benefits of acting on climate adaptation, a piece that notes that “nature is not a side issue, but a crucial pillar for developing the country’s overall climate resilience.”

Keying in on biodiversity protection

Having good intentions is one thing. Knowing what to do about them is another. That is a bit of the situation Canada finds itself as it works to meet its commitment to protect 30% of its lands by 2030. The question is: What 30%? And that's where the work of WCS Canada's Key Biodiversity Area program can be a big help notes our Director



of National Conservation, Dan Kraus, [in a blog for Canadian Geographic](#). Whether it is finding important pockets of nature in surprising places or understanding where there are big opportunities to take bold action, the KBA program [is providing exciting answers](#).

Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*). Just one of the species that our KBA program is helping. Photo: Gregory 'Slobirdr' Smith/ Creative Commons

Plains talking

WCS Yukon team scientist Chrystal Mantyka-Pringle returns to her prairie roots [in an interview with CBC news](#) about what the future holds for the Canadian prairies under climate change.



Something to celebrate: Tigers rebound!

As the Year of the Tiger got underway on Feb. 1st (the Lunar New Year), the WCS tiger team was excited to report that these awe-inspiring animals have been making a comeback over the past five years. As Dale Miquelle, WCS Tiger Program co-ordinator, stated “As the world’s eyes turn to the tiger, there’s reason to be hopeful that this magnificent predator is beating the odds against extinction. Since 2016, tiger numbers have been increasing – today there may be as many as 4,500 occurring across 10 countries, including Russia, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.” The big cats are still far from secure, however, and that’s why we are equally excited to report that WCS has joined with five other major conservation organizations to develop a vision statement, “[Securing a viable future for the tiger](#),” which outlines a path to continued tiger conservation success. And don’t miss some of the jaw-dropping tiger photos from photographer Sachin Rai posted [on the WCS Year of the Tiger page](#).



Bengal tiger. Photo: Cristian Samper/WCS

Support our work to save wildlife!

At WCS Canada, we stand for wildlife and are in the field every day working to save wildlife and wild places. You can support our work by [making a secure donation](#) right now!

Top banner image of Canada Lynx: Phil Walker

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