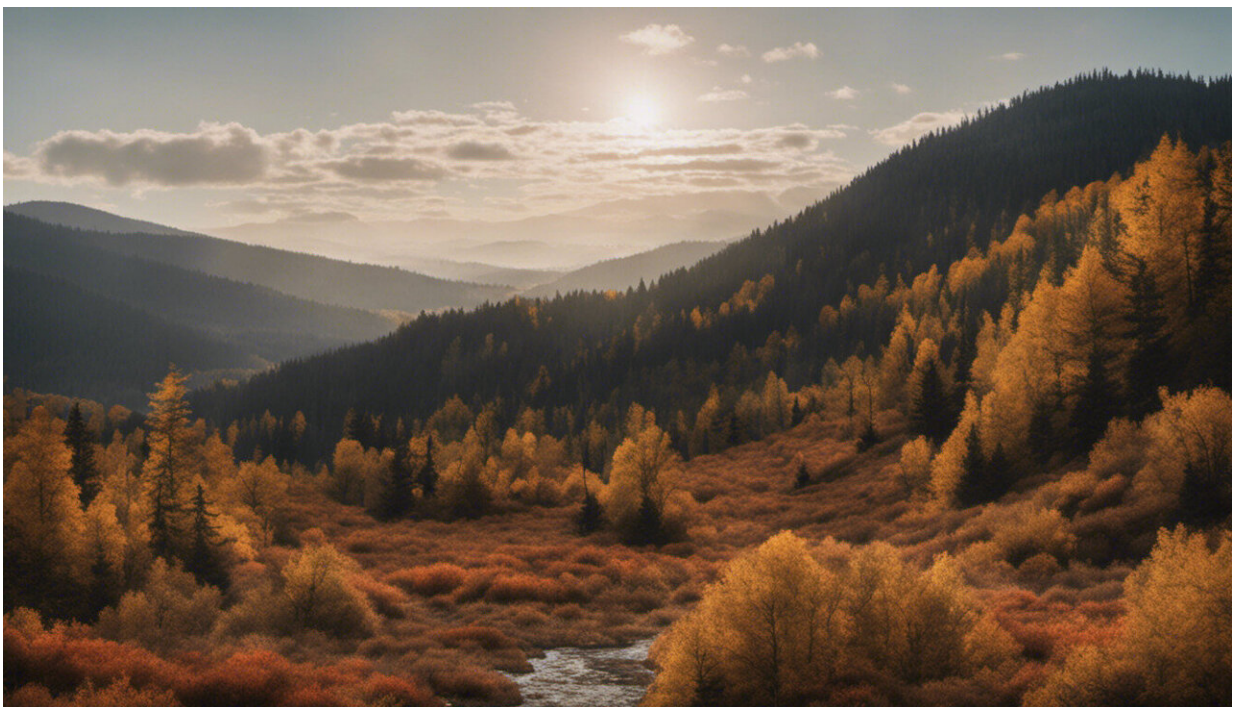


# Respect for Indigenous knowledge must lead nature conservation efforts in Canada

April 22 2021, by Rachel Buxton, Andrea Reid, Joseph Bennett and Paul A. Smith

---



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The past year has taught us important lessons about the consequences of the harm humans are inflicting on the natural world.

We're confronting a [global biodiversity crisis](#), losing species and [natural](#)

places at an unprecedented rate. We've also experienced the repercussions of nature's decline through COVID-19, whose jump from animals to humans may be linked to [habitat destruction](#). And yet the [international community failed to achieve a single Aichi Biodiversity Target](#) to curb environmental destruction by 2020.

To combat the biodiversity crisis, we need to fundamentally shift our economy and society and make nature conservation the norm. We urgently need a better understanding of how to motivate people, overcome political barriers, influence economies and alter politics to benefit nature.

To guide this change, we need to prioritize [Indigenous leadership](#), respect Indigenous knowledge holders as experts and acknowledge Indigenous communities as co-creators of solutions.

## **Canada's role in conservation**

[Over a quarter of the world's intact ecosystems are found within Canada](#), making the country uniquely positioned to make significant contributions to meeting global biodiversity targets.

With vast forests and wetlands that sequester carbon, Canada's environmental policies can have a ripple effect across the entire world. For example, our boreal forests and wetlands store enormous amounts of carbon, and policies that remove protection could have large climate implications.

Canada has a history of taking conservation action—it was the first industrialized nation to commit to meeting conservation targets—and the vast majority of Canadians consider [protecting nature a priority](#). And yet challenges remain.

Many species are in decline, including iconic Canadian species such as [caribou](#) and loons. Canada's economic reliance on natural resource extraction adds difficult dimensions to many decisions.

And Canada's early efforts to protect natural areas dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their land, including the founding of famous parks like [Jasper](#) and [Banff](#).

There remain significant barriers to the meaningful and rightful participation of Indigenous peoples in conservation.

## **The need for action**

Last year in Ottawa, we brought together many of the country's leading experts in nature conservation—from academia, government, NGOs and Indigenous organizations. We set out to assess the information needed to inform policy and practice for biodiversity conservation in Canada. The consensus was that we need to move from collecting information to mobilizing action.

Our biggest information needs are not facts and figures about plants and animals. We already have much of the information we need for [nature conservation in Canada](#).

Instead, we need to make conserving nature part of everything we do, and we need to do this quickly. A key component of moving from information to action will be working across scientific disciplines—conservation biologists teaming up with data scientists, for example. We live in the information age, where petabytes of information to [guide nature conservation](#) are generated by social media and community science.

Also, scientists must team up with decision-makers to ensure that the

[information they generate is useful for policy](#), and policies are based on the best available evidence. Social scientists can play an important role in understanding how to motivate societal change towards widespread nature conservation.

## **The role of Indigenous peoples**

Since time immemorial, Indigenous peoples have lived sustainably in the place now called Canada. Indigenous peoples have unique and diverse ways of knowing and understanding the [natural world](#), and humans' place within it.

Indigenous knowledge systems are shaped by cultural heritage and law, carried by languages and stories, and are tightly linked with a relationship to the land. Colonization attempted to marginalize and extinguish Indigenous ways of knowing.

Yet, [Indigenous peoples remain outstanding caretakers of the natural environment](#). They are typically on the [front lines of land defense issues](#), and lands managed by Indigenous communities tend to be [healthier than other areas](#). In addition, Indigenous rights over land and resources are [enshrined in international resolutions](#).

Indigenous knowledge systems must play a central role for Canada's nature conservation efforts to be successful. A pathway to working together and embracing multiple worldviews includes the Mi'kmaw principle of [Two-Eyed Seeing](#): "Seeing from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other with the strengths of western knowledges and ways of knowing, and learning to use both eyes together, for the benefit of all."

Given the ongoing failure to meet [conservation](#) targets and the continued destruction of nature at rates unseen in human history, new approaches

are needed. Canada can help lead the way towards [nature conservation](#) by focusing on generating societal change and creating more effective action, returning power to Indigenous hands and amplifying Indigenous voices.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Respect for Indigenous knowledge must lead nature conservation efforts in Canada (2021, April 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-04-respect-indigenous-knowledge-nature-efforts.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.