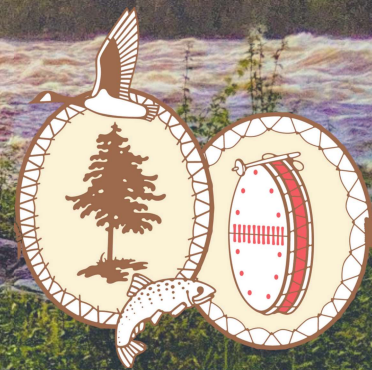


# Protecting & Conserving Land in Eeyou Istchee



NATURE  
CONSERVANCY  
CANADA



This document was prepared by the Cree Nation Government and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. This document summarizes what has been achieved by Cree communities in advancing the protection and conservation of the lands and waters of Eeyou Istchee.

## Implementing the Cree Regional Conservation Strategy

With the support of the Cree Nation Government (CNG), the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), and the Québec Government, nine Cree communities of Eeyou Istchee have identified 23 new areas of land for protection and conservation. The selection process was guided by the Cree Regional Conservation Strategy (the Strategy), a Cree-led strategy that prioritizes braiding Cree and scientific knowledge to inform decision-making for land protection and conservation. Community-level engagement sessions and interviews with Cree tallymen, land users and other groups led this process and Cree cultural values guided the selection of new areas for protection and conservation, which now total 23 per cent of Eeyou Istchee. Through Cree vision and leadership, Cree communities are on track to reach the goal of 50 per cent of land in Eeyou Istchee protected and conserved by 2035.

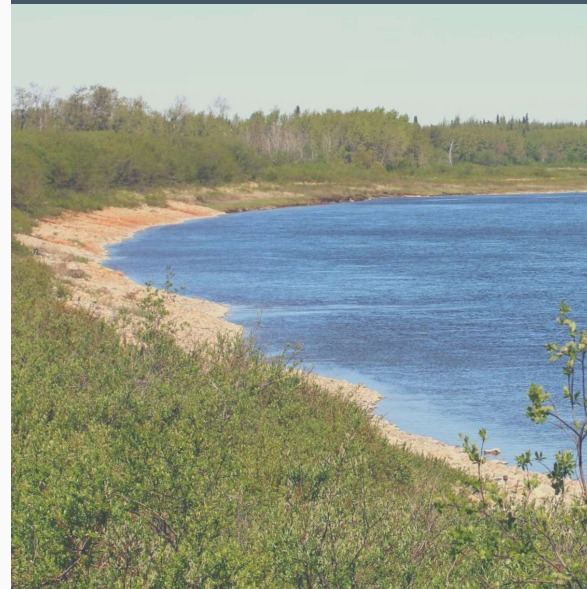


## The Cree Regional Conservation Strategy

Cree rights to hunt, fish, trap, and practice a Cree way of life continue in all parts of Eeyou Istchee. The land and water need to be protected and conserved to allow the practice of these rights and responsibilities to continue for future generations. Previously, protected and conserved areas in Eeyou Istchee were selected and established by Crown governments and exclude many areas of importance to Cree communities. The Cree Regional Conservation Strategy was put together to ensure that Cree knowledge and priorities guide future land protection and conservation.

In Eeyou Istchee, the Cree Regional Conservation Strategy guides all work towards meeting conservation and protection goals established by the Governments of Canada and Québec. Thanks to the Strategy and collaboration between Cree communities, Canada's goal of protecting and conserving 17 per cent of land and Québec's goal of protecting and conserving 20 per cent have been exceeded.

**“Our Vision is to maintain strong ties to the Cree cultural heritage and way of life, and sustain biodiversity by creating a large, interconnected network of conservation areas in Eeyou Istchee.”**  
– Cree Regional Conservation Strategy







## Cree Knowledge and Selecting Protected and Conserved Areas for Eeyou Istchee

Cree communities have each been working on land protection and conservation within Eeyou Istchee for decades before the creation of the Strategy. Since 2015, these processes of selecting land for protection and conservation have come together in a coordinated way. Technical and logistical support for this work is provided by a partnership between the Cree Nation Government and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). As a result of this great work, additional funding was provided in 2019 by the Government of Canada, the Québec Government, and a number of private foundations to further Cree-led protected and conserved area planning and establishment in Eeyou Istchee.

Often, protected and conserved areas planning is guided by methods based on western knowledge only. In this partnership, Cree Knowledge and values drove the process and was considered alongside western knowledge at each step. Computer modelling software mapped potential protected and conserved areas in a way that was guided by the best available knowledge, Cree values and priorities and principles of western knowledge. Multiple protected and conserved area network options could then be compared by their achievements towards the goals identified in the Strategy and were presented to decision-makers for consideration. This unique approach brought together the strengths of both ways of knowing to select mutually agreed to protected and conserved areas.



Frequently engaging with the nine Cree communities at all levels, from tallymen and land users to families; community leaders; and local and regional organisations, was key to the success of this project. Cree leaders and community members informed which areas of Eeyou Istchee should be protected and conserved. Cree tallymen, land-users, Elders, women, youth, and other groups participated in multiple engagement sessions to map their knowledge, share their perspectives, and express their concerns for protecting and conserving Eeyou Istchee. Community members placed a lot of trust in the process by sharing their perspectives and knowledge despite knowing that not all of these important and interconnected areas could be protected and conserved during this stage of planning.

Cree knowledge was then brought together with data and input into a computer model. This model upheld both ways of knowing, and placed water as the central value as identified by the Strategy. Individual catchments and the headwaters of watersheds were prioritized as the most important areas to protect and conserve. It also considered areas already impacted by industrial development to create the strongest networks that would be robust to the impacts of climate change. The final product was a map of potential protected and conserved areas that tallymen and land users reviewed and provided feedback on.

Cree Chiefs and council members made the final decision on what areas should be protected and conserved, based on the input and concerns of the communities they represent. Some communities chose lands identified by the computer model, while others chose lands based on different considerations. Each Cree community chose based on the values, knowledge and considerations that are unique to their relationship with the land.







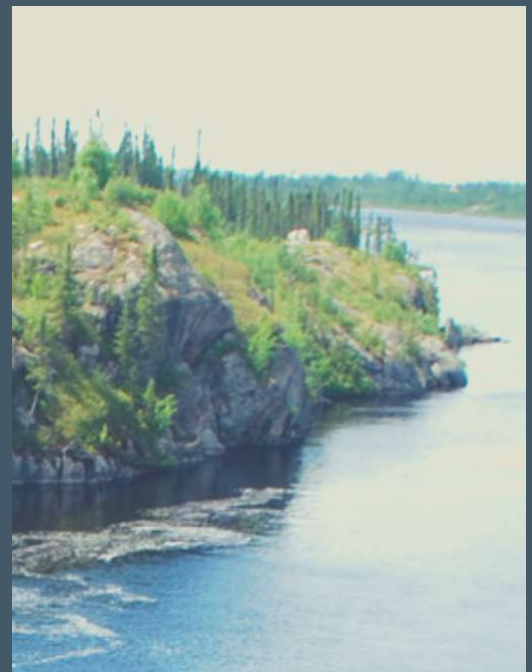
These selections were then brought forward and negotiated with the Quebec Government. The result is a network of 23 areas for protection and conservation, covering about 39,000km<sup>2</sup> that were identified as priorities by Cree communities. When added to existing protected and conserved areas, about 23% of Eeyou Istchee is now set aside for protection and conservation. This goes beyond Canada's goal of 17% and Quebec's goal of 20%.

To learn more about how areas for protection and conservation were selected, please visit: <https://www.eeyouconservation.com/>

## What's next?

The Cree Regional Conservation Strategy emphasizes that Cree Knowledge and western knowledge should work together. Together with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Cree Nation Government will work with the Quebec MELCC (Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques) and other provincial government ministries, to develop a 30-year infrastructure plan for Eeyou Istchee - one which prioritizes a government-to-government relationship.

Several initiatives are already underway. CNG and MELCC are working towards identifying an additional 30 per cent of area to be protected and conserved using other tools and mechanisms other than protected areas; these are still being defined.



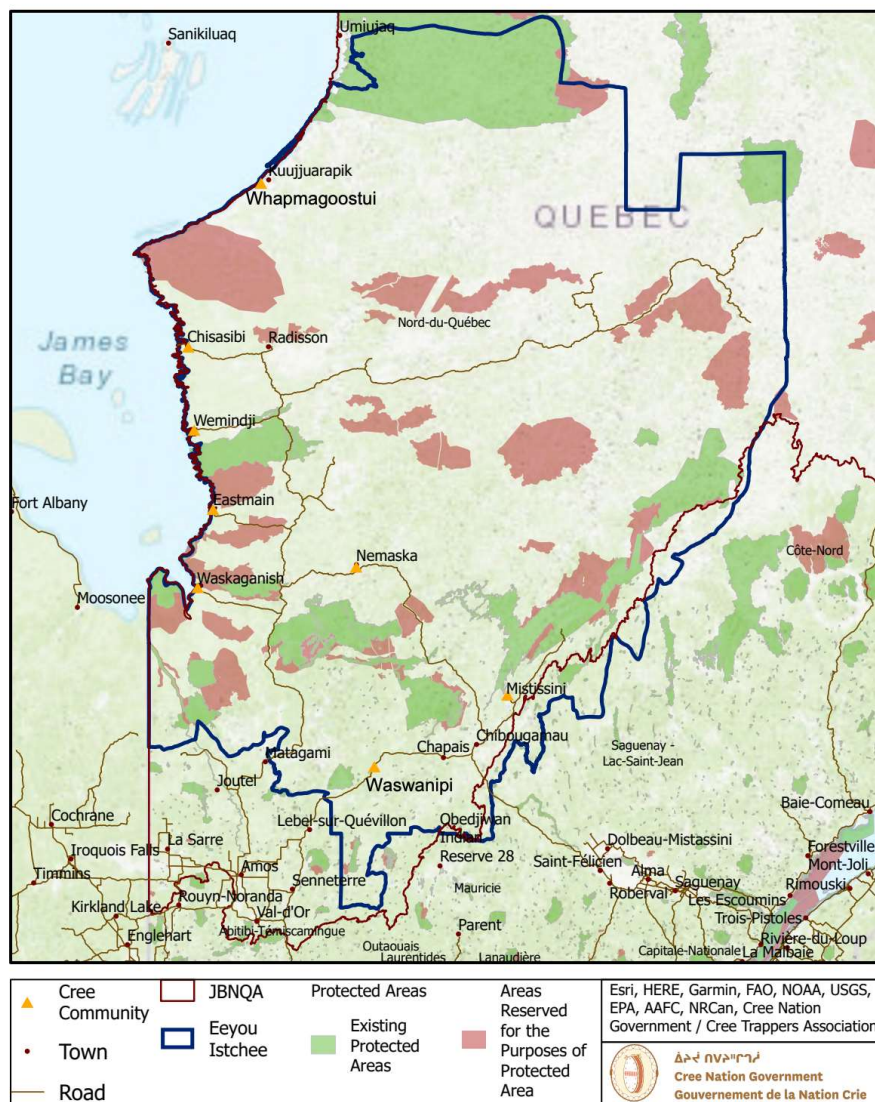


Therefore, there will be a total of about half of the territory protected and conserved (23 per cent in legislated protected areas, 27 per cent using other legal and policy tools) by 2035. The Cree Nation Government is also exploring different methods of managing protected and conserved areas over the coming years – particularly methods that bring together Cree community values with western knowledge planning approaches. These can bring a range of benefits, including more learning opportunities for Cree youth and communities on the land.

Additionally, protected and conserved areas can increase on-the-land employment, skill building and sharing, and fosters a sense of community, culture, and pride in Cree culture and way of life. Protected and conserved areas provide nature-based solutions for a transition to a green economy.

Ultimately, it is hoped that Eeyou Istchee Land Keepers will be put in charge of managing protected and conserved areas and working alongside the tallymen as the stewards of their traplines. This would make sure that all stages of land protection and conservation from selection of lands down to management of protected and conserved areas, is for, and by, Cree people.

## Protected Areas in Eeyou Istchee



**To learn more about Eeyou Istchee protection and conservation, please visit:**  
[www.eeyouconservation.com](http://www.eeyouconservation.com)

**To learn more about the Cree Nation Government, please visit:**  
[www.cngov.ca](http://www.cngov.ca)

**To learn more about the Nature Conservancy Canada, please visit:**  
[www.natureconservancy.ca/en](http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en)