

Media Backgrounder: Integrating Private Lands in Large Park Networks: Case Studies and Recommendations

1. Overview

Large parks play a vital role in providing residents with meaningful experiences in nature while also providing important physical and mental health benefits. As Ontario grows, we need more park space but also unique solutions for the complex realities in southern Ontario.

A recent report explores opportunities to create contemporary solutions to integrate private lands into large park networks, including trail systems, particularly in urban and near-urban areas with high demand for access to nature and high levels of private landownership.

The report goes further to connect park planning and access to nature with commitments to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and advance opportunities for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. These goals mirror Parks Canada's new National Urban Parks Program and align with the recent Province of Ontario interest in exploring provincial urban park models – but can be applied to other park planning initiatives, including programs that involve private lands.

2. Challenges

A large majority of the Canadian population live and own property along our southern border. The population in these areas is rapidly growing and park expansion is necessary to accommodate a growing population. Southern Canada boasts the highest concentration of biodiversity, much of which is at risk due to habitat loss and fragmentation caused by land use change compounded by climate change. Private land conservation and stewardship is crucial to protect habitat and ecological connectivity corridors for biodiversity. and can provide greater access to nature for both urban and rural residents in areas with high private ownership.

Approximately 89% of the country is unceded (Crown) land, meaning it was never legally ceded or given up by the Indigenous Peoples. From time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples have lived and upheld the responsibility of taking care of the land in which is now known as Canada but connections to the land, Indigenous stewardship and cultural practices have been severed through colonialism. Since contact Indigenous Peoples have been fighting for their rights and to uphold those responsibilities which continues today. Private land conservation programs can support and increase opportunities for reconciliation for large populations of Indigenous Peoples living in urban areas.

Nascent western-Indigenous relations, knowledge and financial barriers, loss of development rights, and liability concerns hinder the participation of private landowners in increasing public access. Private land conservation programs and partners can prioritize how to provide greater co-benefits to communities and balance access with maintaining ecosystem health.

3. Purpose

To achieve maximum benefits, resources can be directed towards private properties that build or expand networks between parks, protecting and creating ecological corridors and connecting trails to enable the free movement of wildlife and people.

Private land protection and park network integration in Canada are primarily facilitated through non-profit land trusts, recreation and trail associations, or government programs. Landowners consider their motivations and the permanency of options when choosing the most appropriate approach. Conservation, economic benefits, and access to liability insurance are among the main factors driving landowners' participation.

The report provides details on existing programs, showcases five successful case studies, offers information on the importance of engaging and including Indigenous Peoples as well as guidelines regarding Indigenous engagement. It concludes with recommendations for selecting the most effective approach, establishing standards of practice, enacting new legislation, and fostering coordination to protect ecological corridors and increase public access.

4. Case Studies

- Almond Marsh Conservation easement collaboration, Illinois, USA
- Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs Trail Network, Ontario
- Bruce Trail Conservancy's MapleCross Nature Reserve at Canning's Falls, Caledon, Ontario
- Right to Roam and Public Rights of Way, England
- Walpole Island Land Trust, Ontario

5. Key Report Recommendations

- Government and other funding agencies should prioritize programs such as the Land Trusts Conservation Fund to support land donations and conservation easements to protect land and provide access to nature in areas with high private ownership. These programs must also formally recognize Indigenous Rights and Responsibilities, creating opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to connect to the land.
- Targeted outreach with landowners of properties that are of prime importance for access or ecological connectivity in a large park network may reduce the educational and resource barriers for landowners to find and apply for programs and could also be used to educate about Indigenous histories and create access for hunting, harvesting, and fishing Rights and Responsibilities.
- Government and land trust stewardship programs based on tax incentives should provide other benefits for private landowners such as First Nations who are already tax exempt.
- Government and other funding agencies should enhance incentives for private landowners to participate in conservation.
- Governments and other funding agencies should consider new programs to support landowners in enhancing their properties to make them eligible for land stewardship programs with habitat quality criteria such as the federal Ecological Gifts Program or Ontario's Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program. Programs would support Canada's recent commitment to restore thirty per cent (30%) of degraded lands.

- Governments and land trusts are encouraged to develop relationships with Indigenous Nations and Communities affiliated with the lands that are donated or sold for stewardship or placed under a conservation easement to ensure proper engagement.
- Land trusts should follow the Canadian Land Trust Alliance's Standards and Practices; but, in the absence of detailed standards for Indigenous engagement and respect for Indigenous Rights, land trusts must voluntarily adopt and adhere to existing guiding documents, such as the IUCN's Guidelines for Privately Protected Areas and relevant Rights and obligations from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in their decision-making.
- Government or other funding agencies can prioritize existing and create new programs to support Indigenous land trusts and Indigenous engagement in other private land conservation.
- Government programs for private land stewardship should include public access as an objective, where ecosystems can tolerate the disturbance, in alignment with Indigenous Rights and Responsibilities.
- Land trusts should expand their purpose to include public access to nature, especially in southern Canada where there is less public land.

6. Resources from Cambium Indigenous Professional Services (CIPS)

Websites

- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#)
- [Wise Practices: Indigenous Communities Share Their Stories](#)

Books

- “Decolonizing Wealth, Indigenous wisdom to heal divides and restore balance” Edgar Villanueva, Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc 2018
- "21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act: Helping Canadians Make Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples a Reality" Bob Joseph, Indigenous Relations Press, 2018.

The Greenbelt Foundation is a charitable organization solely dedicated to ensuring the Greenbelt remains permanent, protected and prosperous. We make the right investments in its interconnected natural, agricultural and economic systems to ensure a working, thriving Greenbelt for all. Ontario's Greenbelt is one of the world's largest with over two million acres of farmland, forests, wetlands and rivers working together to provide clean air, fresh water and a reliable local food source. greenbelt.ca.

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About Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)

Since 1957, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), as enabled through the provincial Conservation Authorities Act, has taken action to enhance our region's natural environment and protect our land, water, and communities from the impacts of flooding and increasingly extreme weather events – Ontario's leading cause of public emergencies.

As the region's first line of defence against natural hazards, TRCA maintains vital infrastructure and provides programs and services that promote public health and safety, protecting people and property.

TRCA mobilizes a science-based approach to provide sound policy advice, leveraging its position as a not-for-profit operating in the broader public sector to achieve collective impacts within our communities and across all levels of government.

To learn more about TRCA, visit trca.ca.

About Cambium Indigenous Professional Services (CIPS)

Cambium Indigenous Professional Services (CIPS) is a Procurement Strategy for Aboriginal Business (PSAB) Certified Indigenous-owned and operated organization based in Curve Lake First Nation (CLFN). Uniquely owned, operated and all Indigenous staffed, the CIPS team has years of experience in First Nation environmental, economic development, project management, strategic planning and meeting facilitation. The CIPS Team are experienced and knowledgeable consultants, working primarily with Indigenous Communities and organizations. Particularly projects that require Community engagement and direct engagement with Community leaders, members, and knowledge carriers. CIPS philosophy is that every client and every project deserve an effective, sustainable, and affordable solution that fits their needs and forwards their capacity and future endeavours critical to them. Services from CIPS result in unique solutions that were provided by professionals with a broad range of expertise in multiple facets of Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmental and cultural consultancy.

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