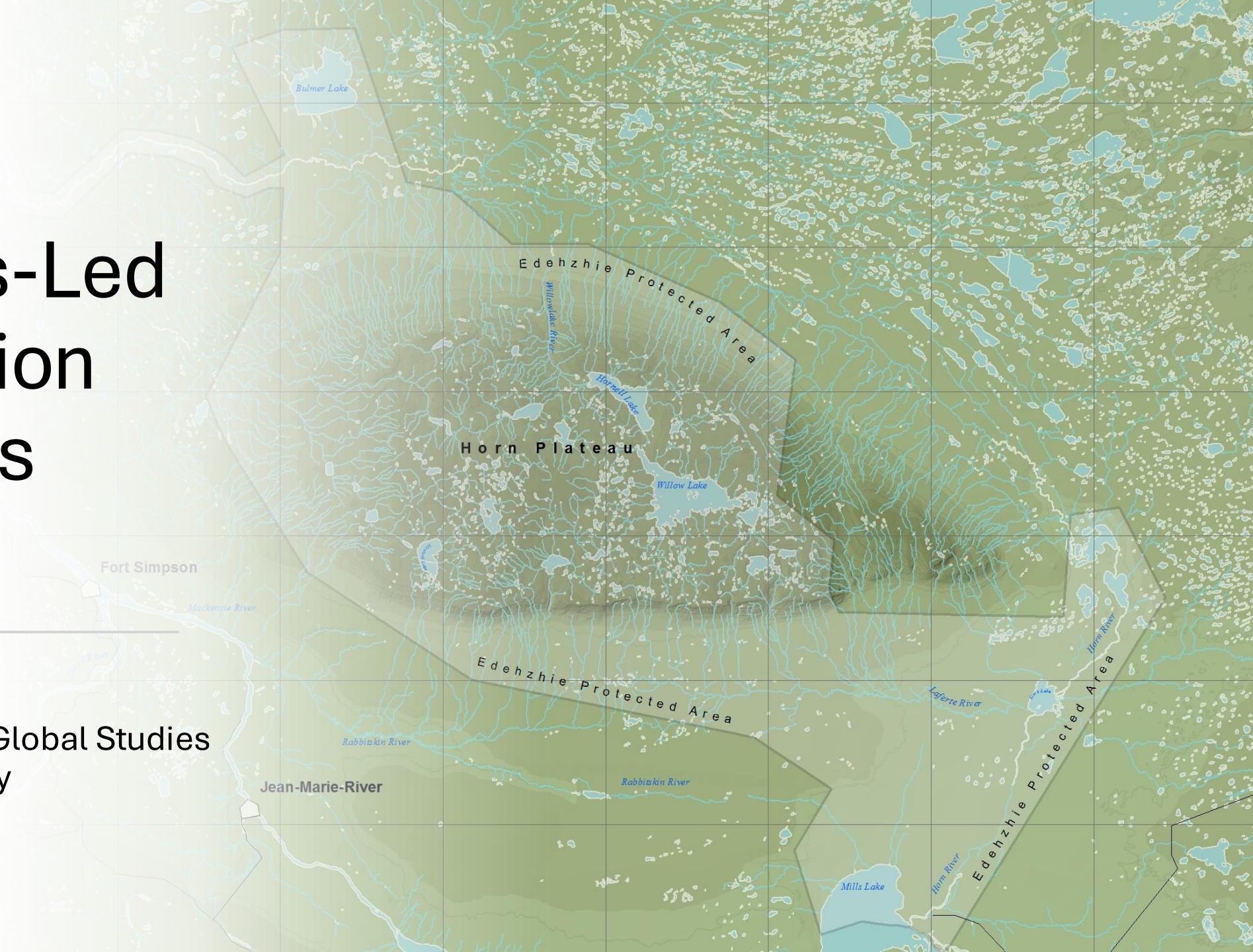




Indigenous-Led Conservation in Canada's North

Alex Latta
Associate Professor of Global Studies
Wilfrid Laurier University



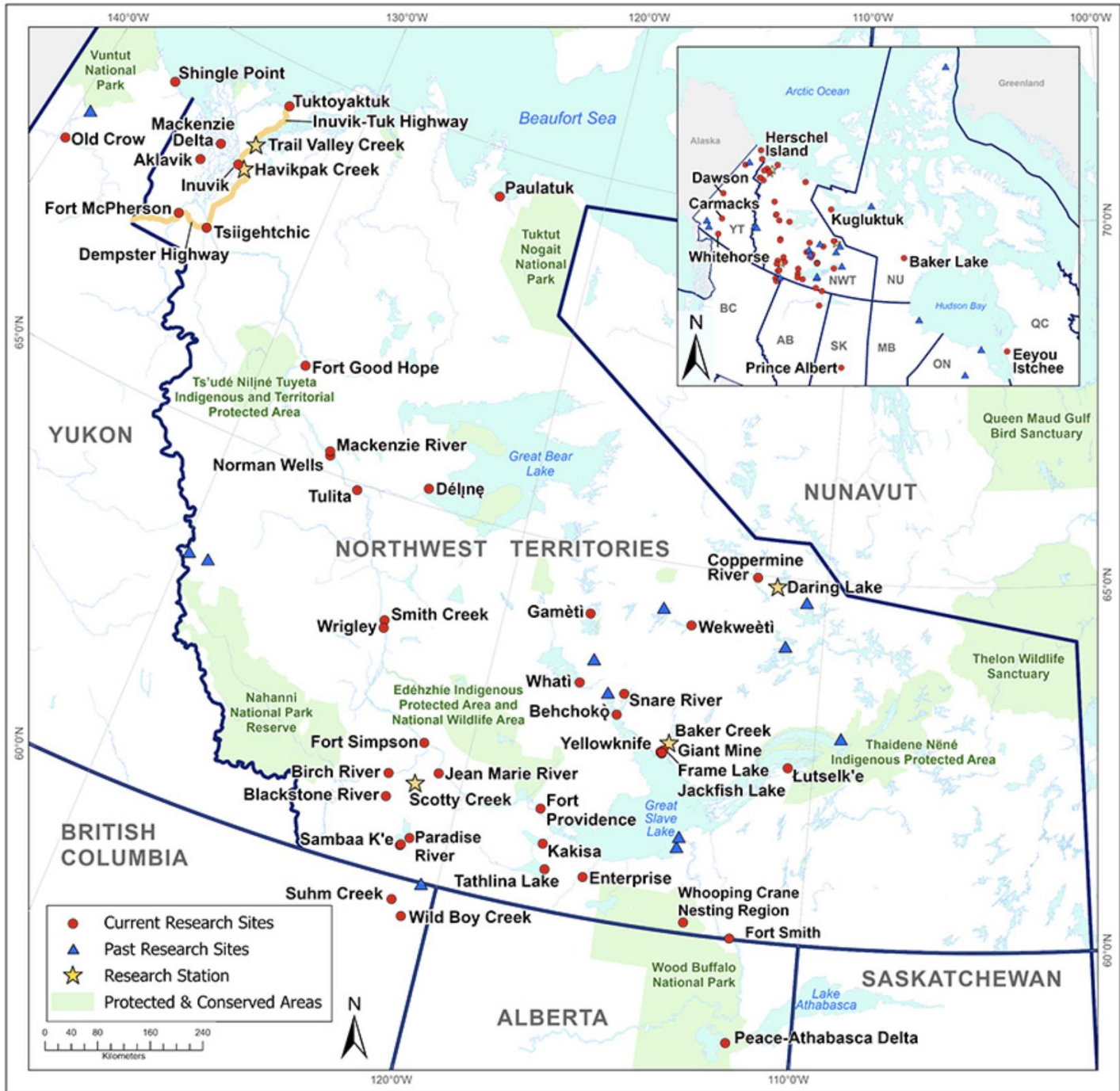


Laurier's
Cold
Regions
Research
Centre

- Established in 1987
- 25 Laurier faculty, 90 student & postdoctoral researchers
- Government of Northwest Territories – Laurier Partnership Agreement (2010-2020, 2020-2030)
- Northern research focused across a range of areas:
 - Permafrost thaw
 - Surface and subsurface hydrology
 - Forest biology
 - Wildlife
 - Fire
 - Greenhouse gases
 - Lake biology
 - Food security
 - Indigenous knowledge



CRRC Research Locations






Acknowledging Land & Peoples




Acknowledging Land & Peoples



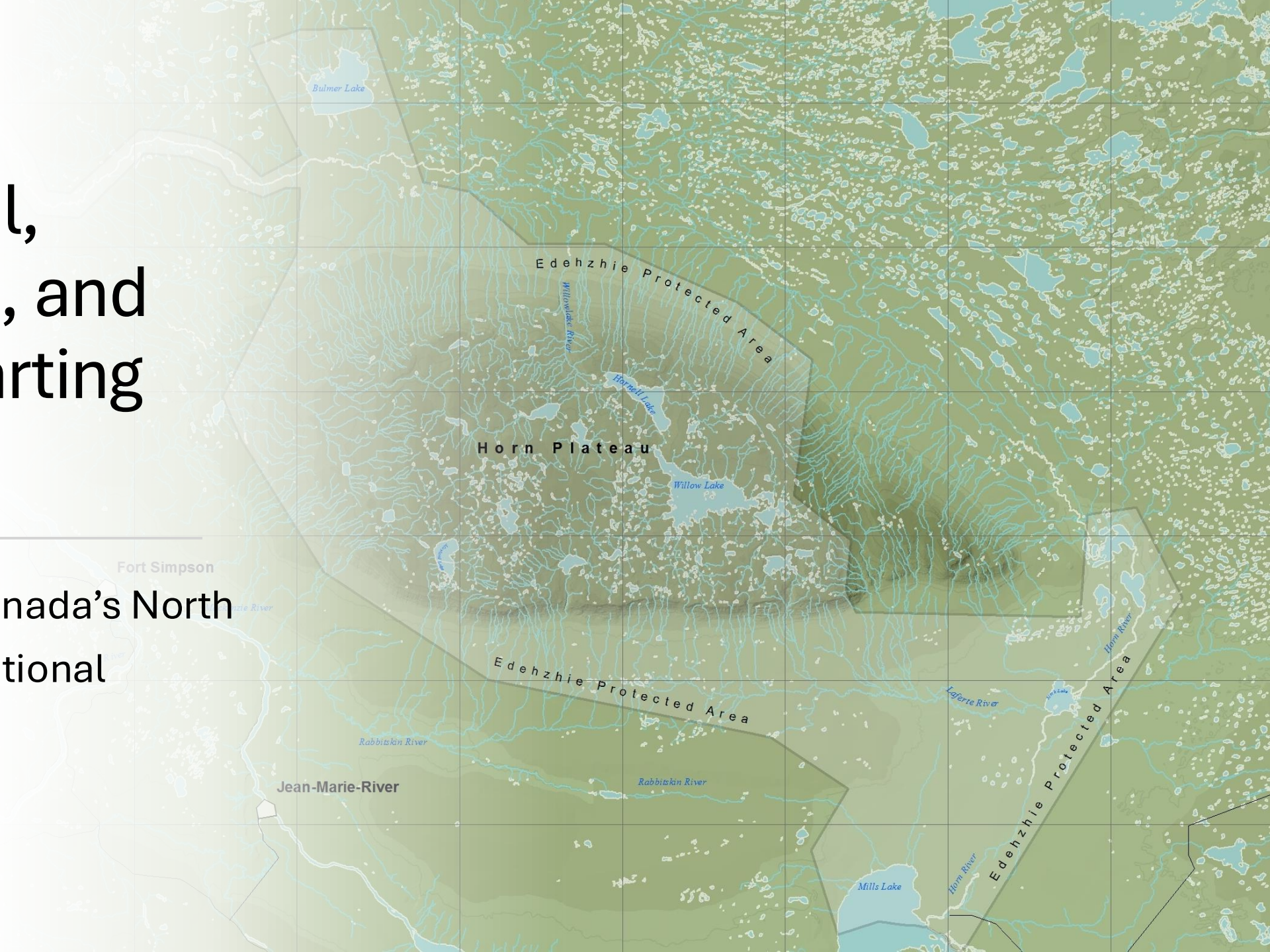
Agenda

1. Historical and conceptual, and political starting points
2. Canada's Indigenous Peoples in Canada
3. Indigenous Peoples and northern protected areas
4. Challenges and opportunities



1. Historical, conceptual, and political starting points

- Constructing Canada's North
- Legal and institutional contexts



Constructing the Canadian North



Historical, Conceptual, and Political Starting Points

- The long Indigenous history preceding the arrival of Europeans
- Post-contact history: Fur trade, establishment of Canadian sovereignty, wildlife management, permanent settlement & residential schools, resource economy
- Visions of the Canadian North: colonialism, sovereignty, narratives of emptiness, resource riches, nature protection

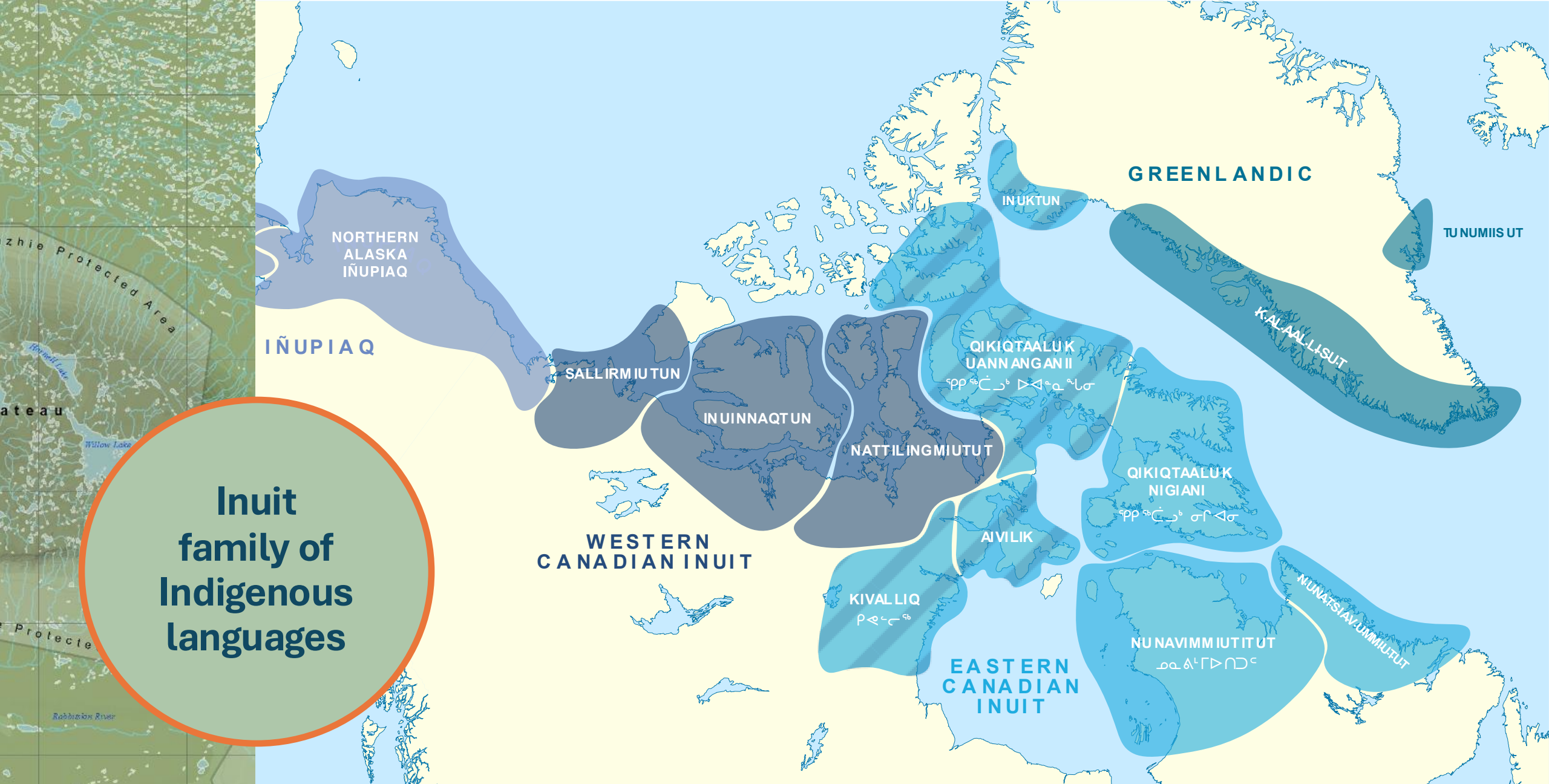


**Cree
family of
Indigenous
languages**

Athabaskan family of Indigenous languages

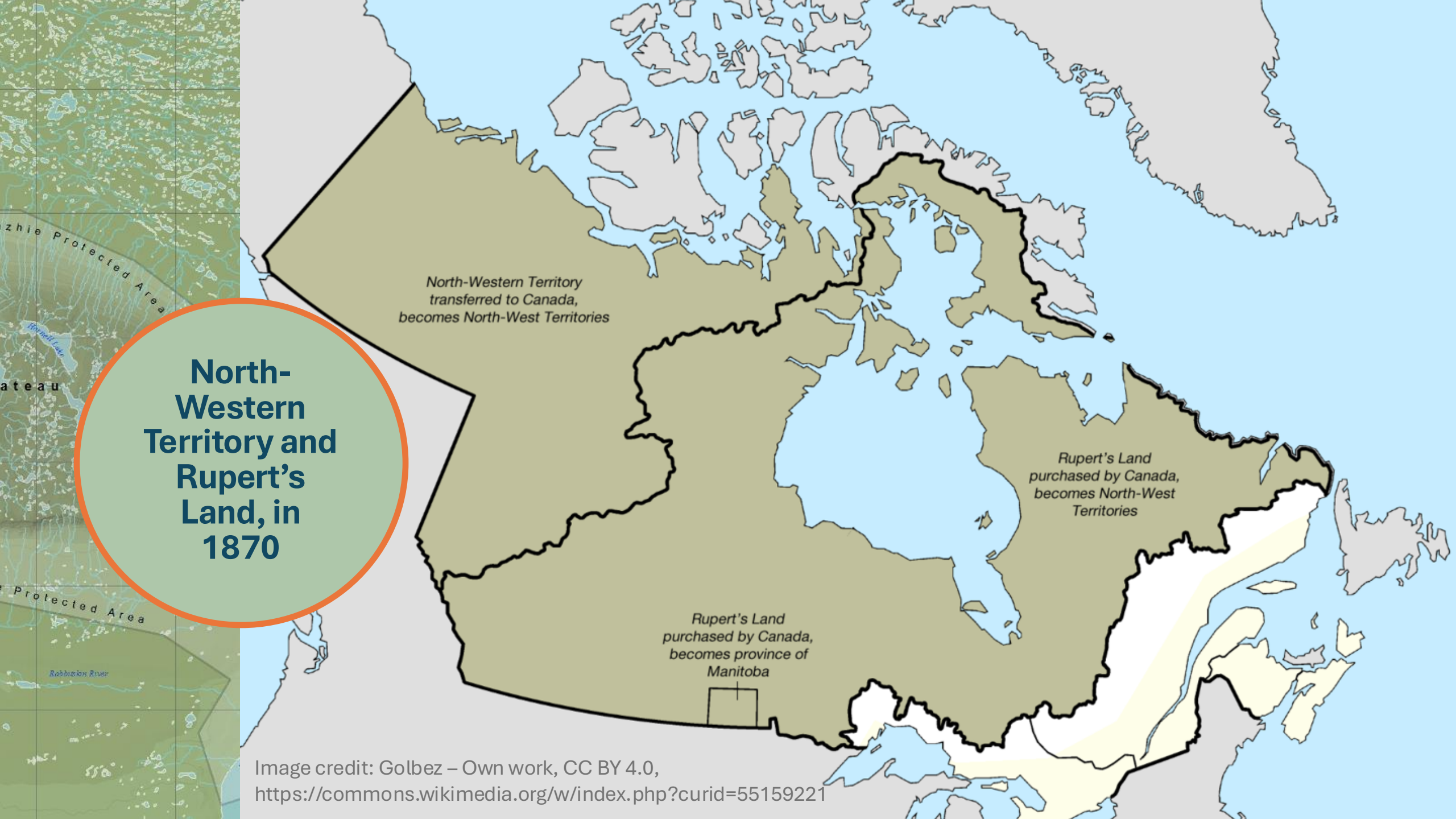


Image credit: By
Noaheditis - Own work,
CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=84015052>



Inuit family of Indigenous languages

Image credit: Noahedits, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

A map of Canada in 1870 showing territorial acquisitions. The North-Western Territory is shaded in olive green, and Rupert's Land is shaded in a darker olive green. The province of Manitoba is shaded in yellow. The map includes labels for 'North-Western Territory transferred to Canada, becomes North-West Territories', 'Rupert's Land purchased by Canada, becomes North-West Territories', and 'Rupert's Land purchased by Canada, becomes province of Manitoba'. A circular callout on the left contains the title 'North-Western Territory and Rupert's Land, in 1870'.

**North-
Western
Territory and
Rupert's
Land, in
1870**

*North-Western Territory
transferred to Canada,
becomes North-West Territories*

*Rupert's Land
purchased by Canada,
becomes North-West
Territories*

*Rupert's Land
purchased by Canada,
becomes province of
Manitoba*

The Numbered Treaties (1871-1921)

1973 Supreme Court decision in Calder et al. v. Attorney-General of British Columbia—recognizing Aboriginal title, established by the 1763 Royal Proclamation.

1982 Constitution Act, Section 35:

1. The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.
2. In this Act, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.
3. For greater certainty, in subsection (1) “treaty rights” includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

2007 International Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
2021 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act

Image credit: Themightyquill - Canada location map.svg, CC- By SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Numbered-Treaties-Map.svg>

Modern Treaties & Resource Co-management

Also referred to as “comprehensive land claims”

Modern Treaties, 1975-present

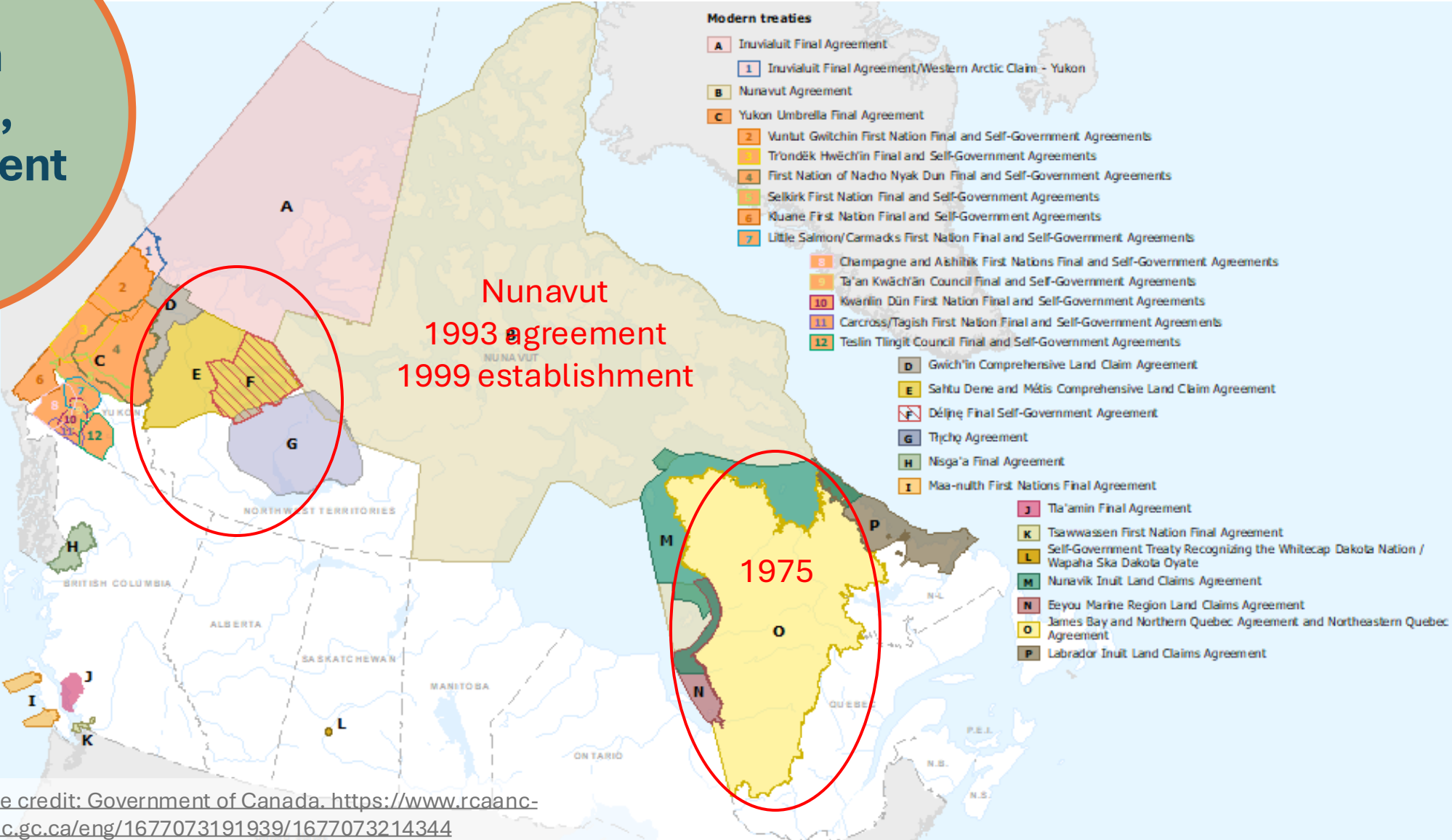
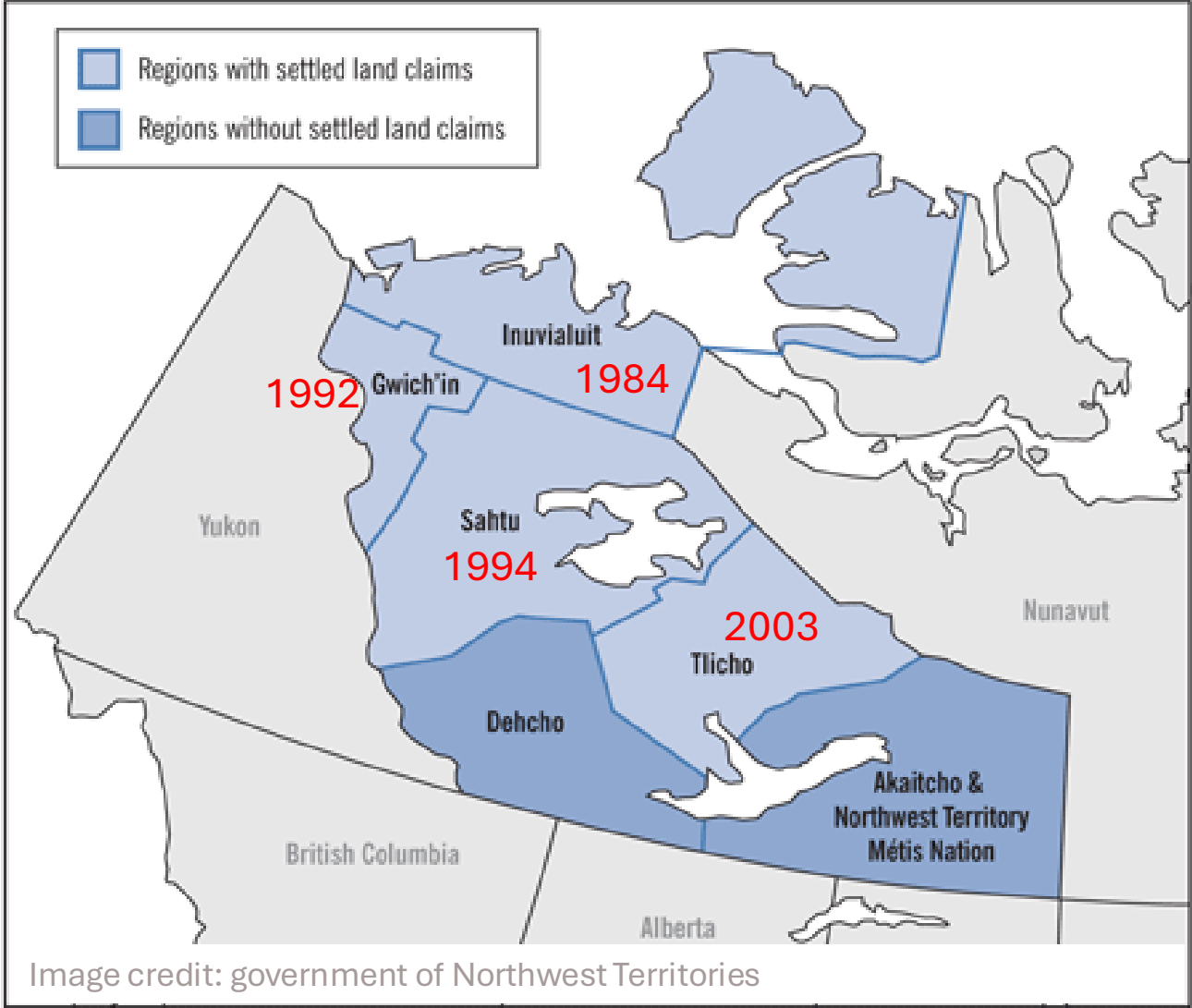


Image credit: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1677073191939/1677073214344>

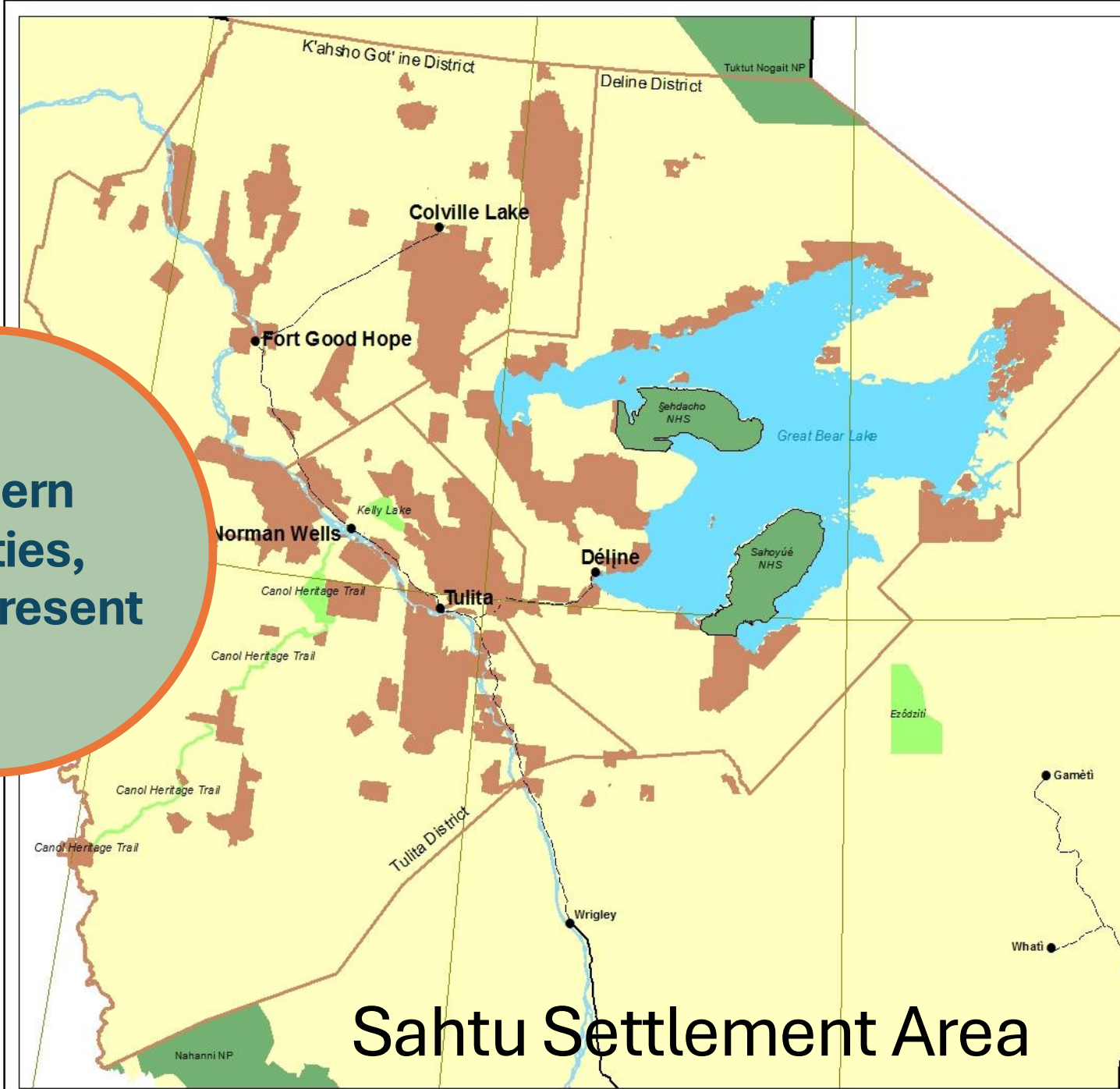
Modern Treaties & Resource Co-management

Modern Treaties, 1975-present



Comprehensive land claims in the NWT

**Modern
Treaties,
1975-present**



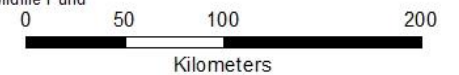
Sahtu Settlement Area

-  Sahtu Settlement Area
-  Sahtu Private Lands
-  National Parks and National Historic Sites
-  Protected Areas from Land Claim Agreements
-  Year-round Roads
-  Winter Roads

Key Map



Datum: North American Datum 1983
 Projection: Northwest Territories Lambert Conformal Conic
 Date: March 2011
 Data Sources: Northwest Territories Protected Areas Strategy;
 World Wildlife Fund



Sahtu Settlement Area



AURORA RESEARCH INSTITUTE
 AURORA COLLEGE

Modern Treaties & Resource Co-management



Resource Co-Management

- Northern co-management boards have been established through the land claims process.
- These are regulatory (not policy) decision-making bodies.
- White (2020) describes them as institutions of public government, but not belonging to any one level of government— “They exist at the intersection of the three orders of government in Canada: federal, provincial/territorial, and Indigenous.”¹



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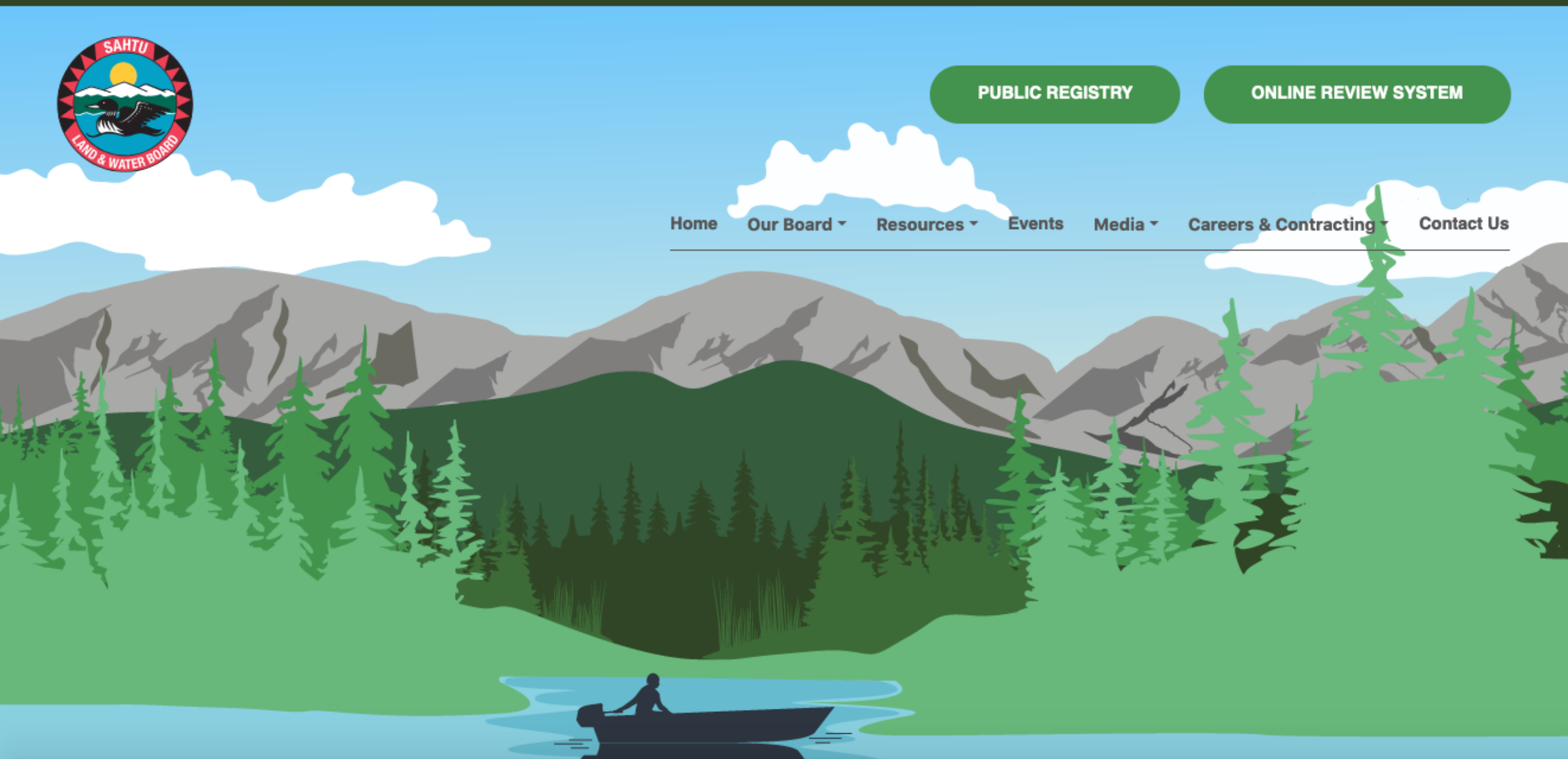
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Mackenzie Valley Co-Management Boards



Resource Co-Management

Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board

Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board

Representation:

- 50% Indigenous governments
- 50% Public governments

Sahtu Land and Water Board

Gwich'in Land and Water Board

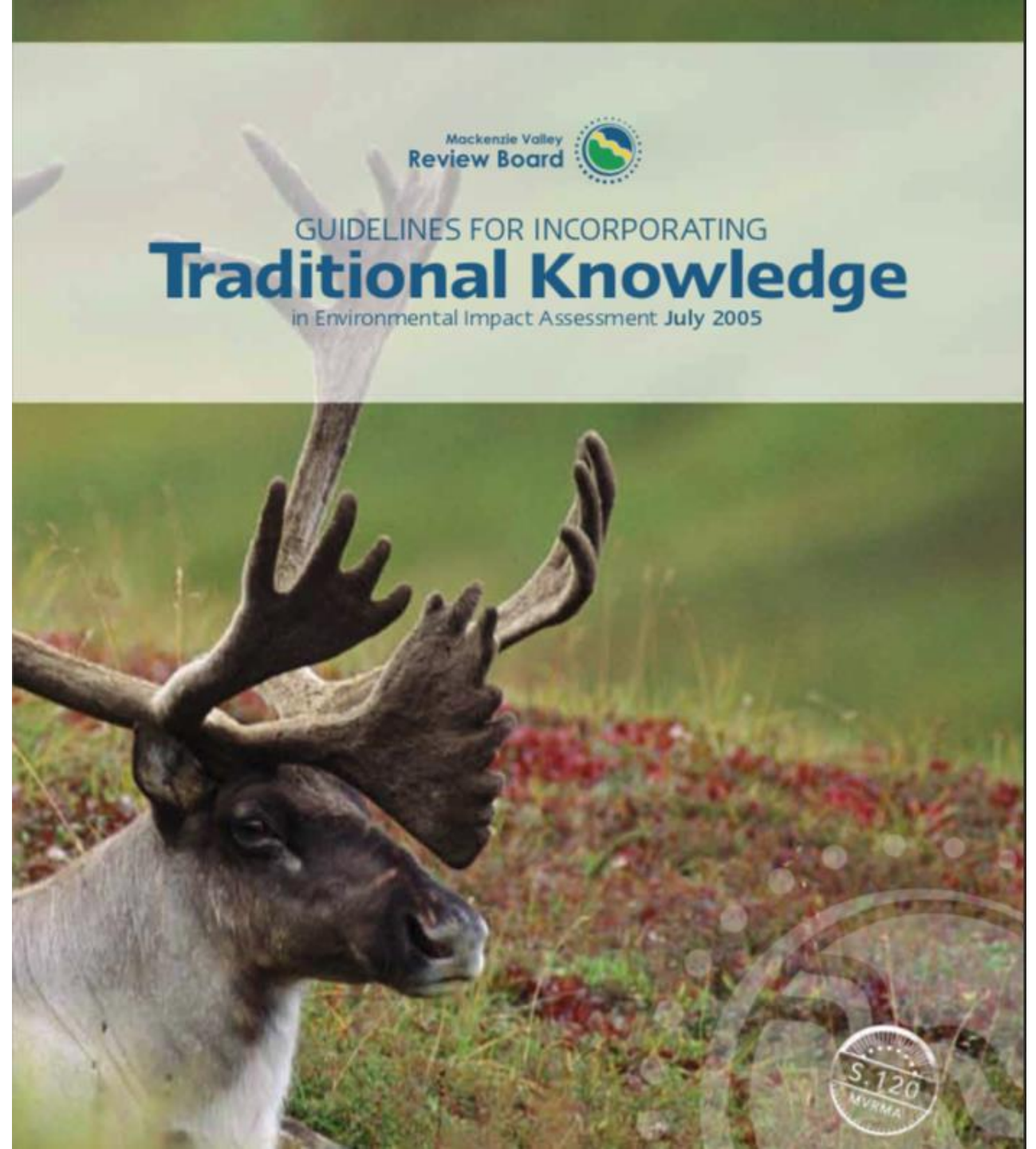
Wek'eezhii Land and Water Board



zhie Protected
ateau
Protected Area
Rabbinon River

Resource Co- Management

Incorporating
Indigenous ways of
knowing in decision-
making processes.



Layers of opportunity for Indigenous stewardship

Protected and conserved areas



Resource co-management

Indigenous-owned lands

Indigenous rights and title

Basis in modern treaties

Constitutional and international rights

Summarizing context



2. Conservation and Indigenous Peoples in Canada

- Canada's Conservation Commitments
- Agenda for Indigenous leadership in Conservation
- Conservation as reconciliation?





Canada's Conservation Commitments

UN Convention on Biological Diversity

- 2010: Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets: protect 17% of terrestrial and 10% marine areas by 2020²
 - Canada Target 1 Pathway (2015)
- 2022: Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, protect 30% of terrestrial and marine areas by 2030³
 - Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy (2024)

Canada Target 1 Pathway (2020 goals)

- Commitment: 17% of terrestrial and marine areas protected
- 2016 federal & provincial/territorial Working Group
- 2018 ministerial commitment to

*work with Indigenous Peoples to further elaborate the concept of Indigenous protected and conserved areas, and clarify their contributions to Canada Target 1 and to Indigenous cultural and conservation priorities. We will work in the spirit and practice of reconciliation, consistent with legal duties and mutual commitments in treaties, land claim and self-government agreements, and other agreements as required.*⁴

2. Convention on Biological Diversity (2020). Aichi Biodiversity Targets. <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets>

3. Convention on Biological Diversity (2024). Global Biodiversity Framework. <https://www.cbd.int/gbf>

4. Canada Pathway to Target 1 (2025). <https://www.conservation2020canada.ca/the-pathway>



Agenda for Indigenous leadership in Conservation

2018: Indigenous Circle of Experts report sets the agenda for Indigenous-led conservation



Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas are “lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems”.⁵

We Rise Together

Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 through the creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the spirit and practice of reconciliation



THE INDIGENOUS CIRCLE OF EXPERTS' REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
MARCH 2018

5. Indigenous Circle of Experts. (2018). *We rise together. Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 through the creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the spirit and practice of reconciliation*. Parks Canada. Page 5. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.852966/publication.html>

Reconciliation as national narrative



Conservation as Reconciliation?

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁶
 - Reconciliation is “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships...a critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change. Establishing respectful relationships also requires the revitalization of Indigenous law and legal traditions.”
- Government of Canada on Reconciliation⁷
 - Addressing past harms and supporting healing
 - Supporting Indigenous Peoples to build strong and healthy communities
 - Advancing self-determination

6. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Canada’s Residential Schools: Reconciliation, The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Volume 6. Page 11.

7. Government of Canada (2024) *The Reconciliation Journey*. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1651868378940/1651868435684>

In the conservation space, much to reconcile...



Conservation as Reconciliation?

- A history of dispossession and forced removal for park creation: Conservation as colonization
- Government hunting and trapping regulations as mechanisms of colonial control
- Gulf between worldviews: humans & nature
 - Non-Indigenous “fortress conservation” & recreational use, based on a dualistic Western view of humans standing apart from nature
 - Holistic Indigenous worldview emphasizing reciprocity between all beings within Creation; interwoven material, cultural, spiritual relationships

Reconciliation or decolonization?



Conservation as Reconciliation?

- Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE) report: healing to restore relationships, both between people, and between people and the land.⁸
- Thomas Nesbitt: Reconciling Canadian sovereignty with the prior existence of Indigenous societies and territories—involving an effort to balance across both *interests* and *worldviews*.⁹
- In their 2019 *Land Back* report, Pasternak and King, of the Yellowhead Institute, talk not about reconciliation but *restitution*.¹⁰

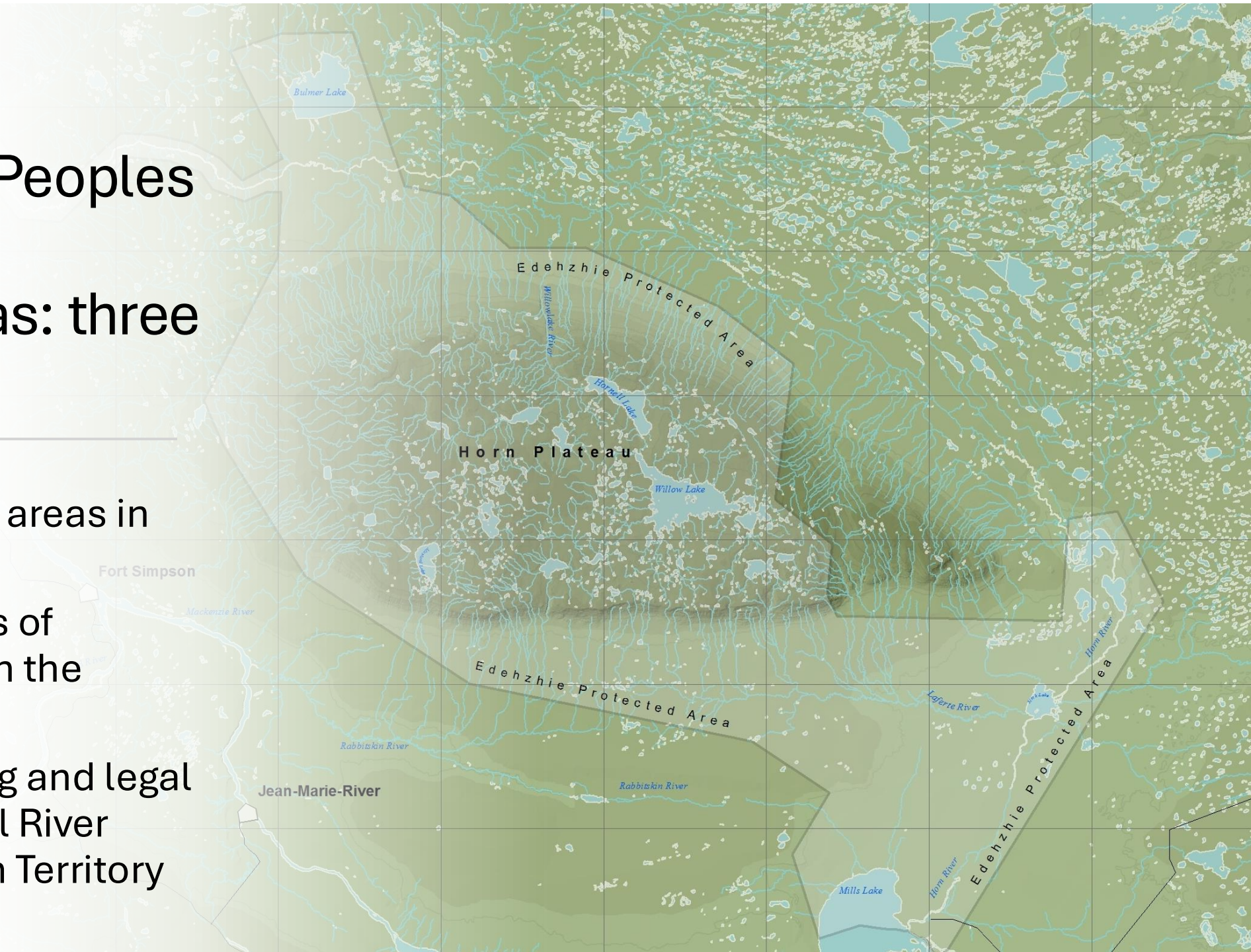
8. Indigenous Circle of Experts. (2018). *We rise together. Achieving Pathway to Canada Target 1 through the creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas in the spirit and practice of reconciliation*. Parks Canada. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.852966/publication.html>

9. Nesbitt, T. H. D. (2016). Increasing Cooperation and Advancing Reconciliation in the Cooperative Management of Protected Areas in Canada's North. In T. M. Hermann & T. Martin (Eds.), *Indigenous Peoples' Governance of Land and Protected Territories in the Arctic* (pp. 43–67). Springer International Publishing.

10. Pasternak, S., & King, H. (2019). *Land Back* (p. 65). Yellowhead Institute. <https://redpaperyellowheadinstitute.org/>

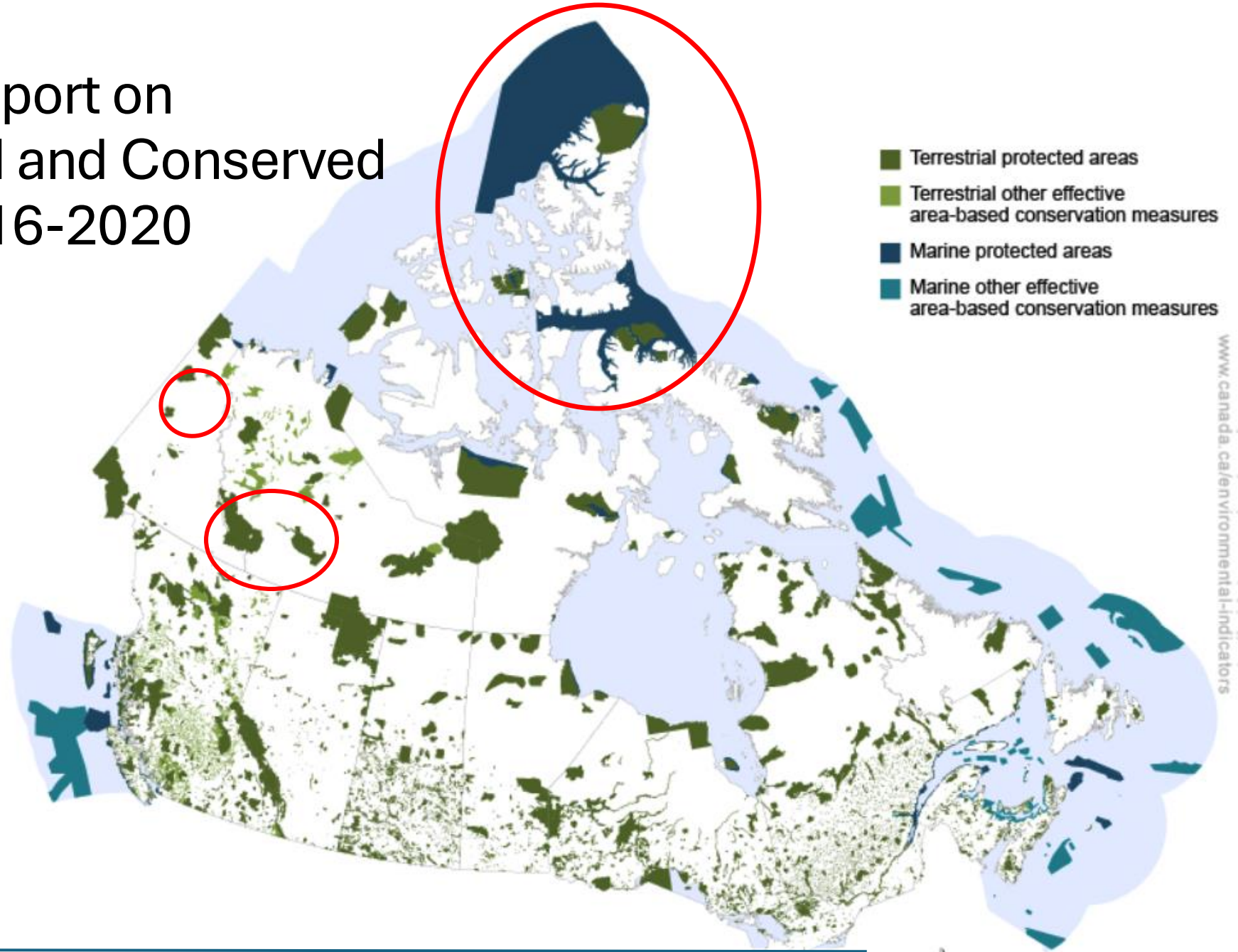
4. Indigenous Peoples and northern protected areas: three case regions

- Marine protected areas in Nunavut
- Three generations of protected areas in the Dehcho, NWT
- Land use planning and legal battles in the Peel River watershed, Yukon Territory



Status Report on Protected and Conserved Areas 2016-2020

Indigenous Peoples and northern protected areas



New Arctic Marine Protected Areas

- A. Tuvaijuittuq Marine Protected Area (319,400 km²). Est. 2024. Fisheries and Oceans Canada.
- B. Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area (108,000 km²). Awaiting final establishment. Parks Canada.

Parties:

- Government of Canada
- Government of Nunavut
- Qikiqtani Inuit Association



Tallurutiup Imanga Timeline¹¹

A map of the Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area in Nunavut, Canada. The map shows the coastline, several rivers (including the Rabbasin River), and various lakes. A large green circle with an orange border is overlaid on the map, containing the text 'Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area'. The map also shows a 'Protected Area' and 'Protected Area' labels.

Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area

- First contemplated in the 1980s
- Negotiations began in 1990s, after Nunavut Land Claim settlement
- 2009 Memorandum of Understanding for feasibility assessment and Steering Committee
- 2010 federal proposal for 44,300 km² area leads to 2011-2016 study and consultations
- 2017 Steering Committee report recommending more than doubling the area
- 2019 Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement, opening the way for establishment
- Establishment funding through 2026, ongoing Inuit Stewardship and Co-Management Board operation

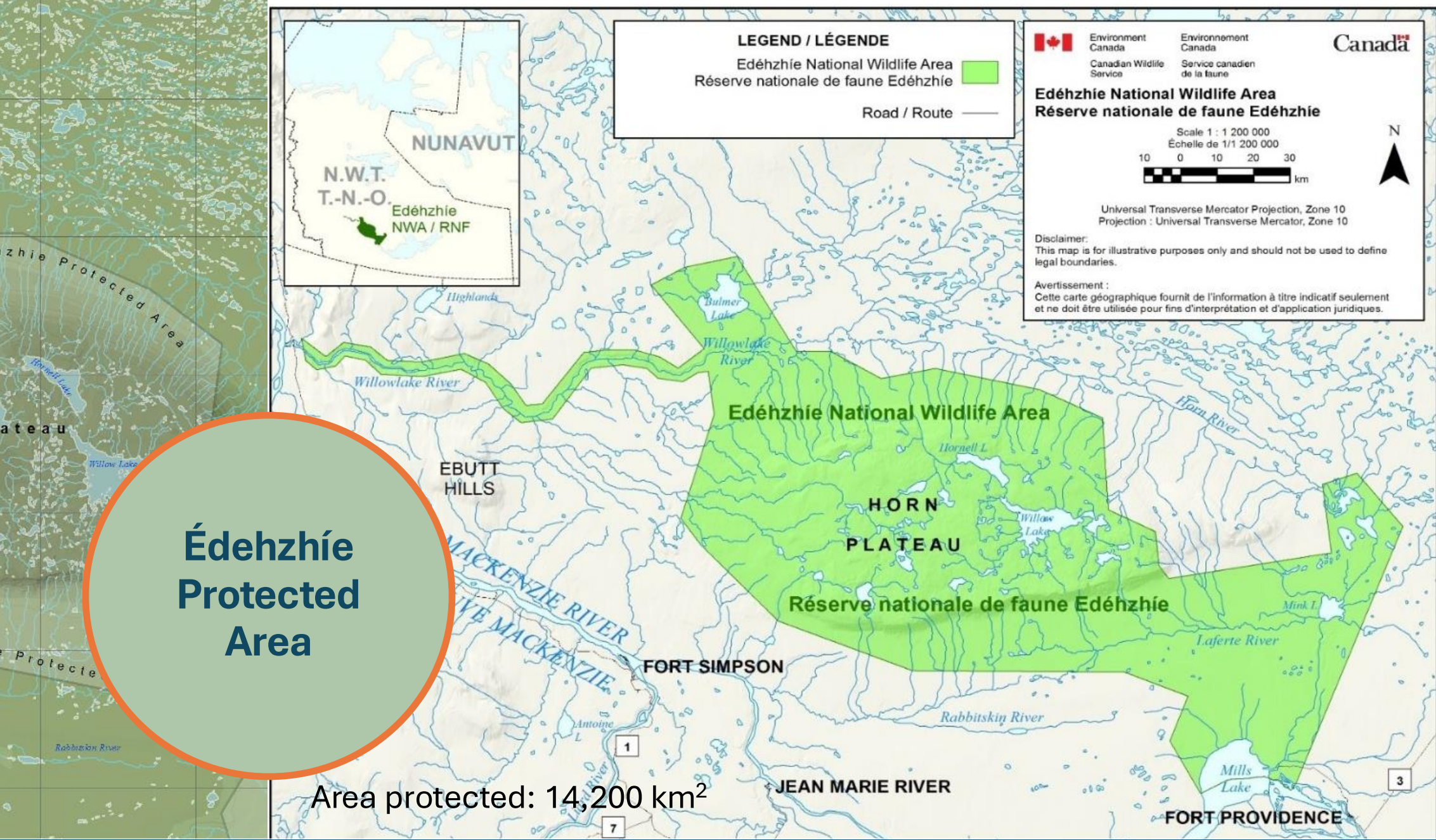
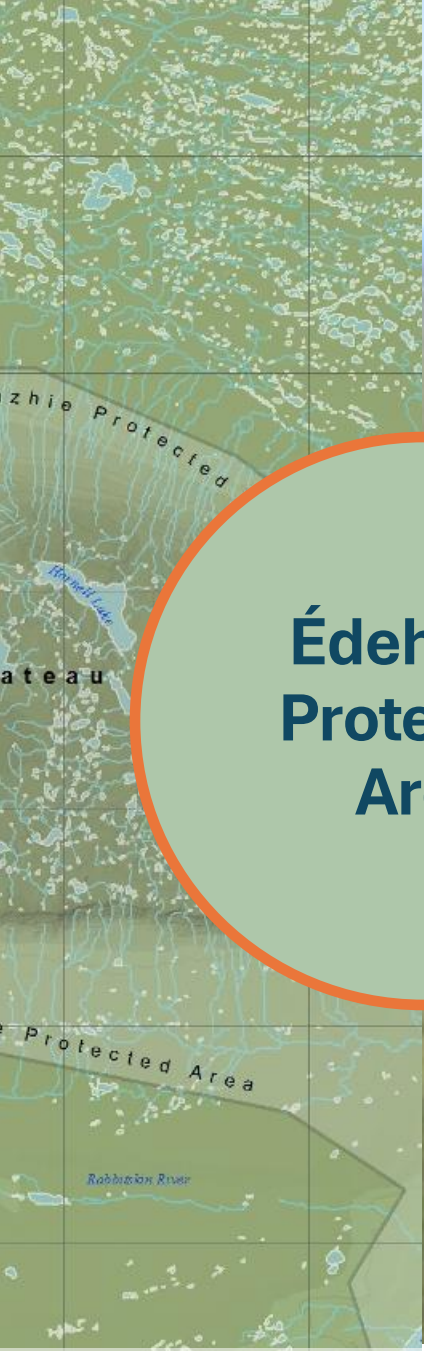
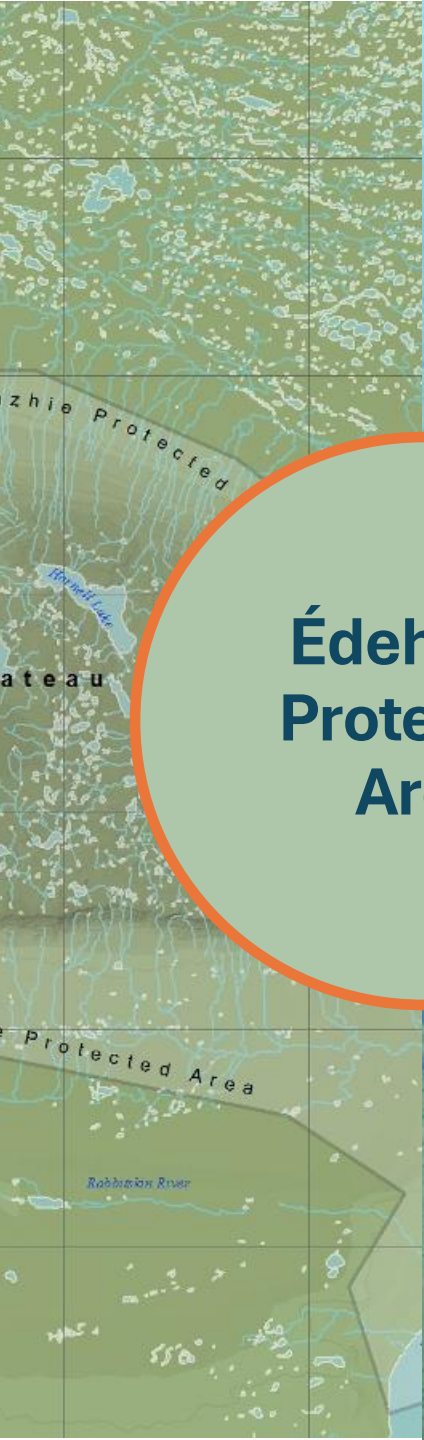


Image: Government of Canada. (2022). Edézhíe National Wildlife Area and Dehcho Protected Area. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/national-wildlife-areas/locations/edehzhie.html>



Édehzhíe Protected Area





**Édehzhíe
Protected
Area**



From the establishment agreement:

A map of the Edézhíe Protected Area, showing a green landscape with blue water bodies and a grid overlay. A large green circle with an orange border is overlaid on the map, containing the text 'Édehzhíe Protected Area'. The map includes labels for 'Edézhíe Protected Area', 'Robbison River', and 'Robbison Lake'.

Édehzhíe Protected Area

1. *Edézhíe is a spiritual place that is ecologically and physically unique. Its lands, waters and wildlife are integral to the Dehcho Dene culture, language and way of life;*
2. *The Dehcho Dene are keepers of these lands, waters and wildlife given to them by the Creator, and are responsible for upholding Dene laws and the directions of their Elders to protect Edézhíe;*
4. *Canada and the Dehcho Dene are committed to reconciliation and a renewed government-to-government relationship that recognizes and respects the ongoing presence and inherent rights of the Dehcho Dene within Edézhíe...*

From the establishment agreement:



Édehzhíe Protected Area

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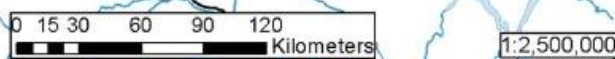
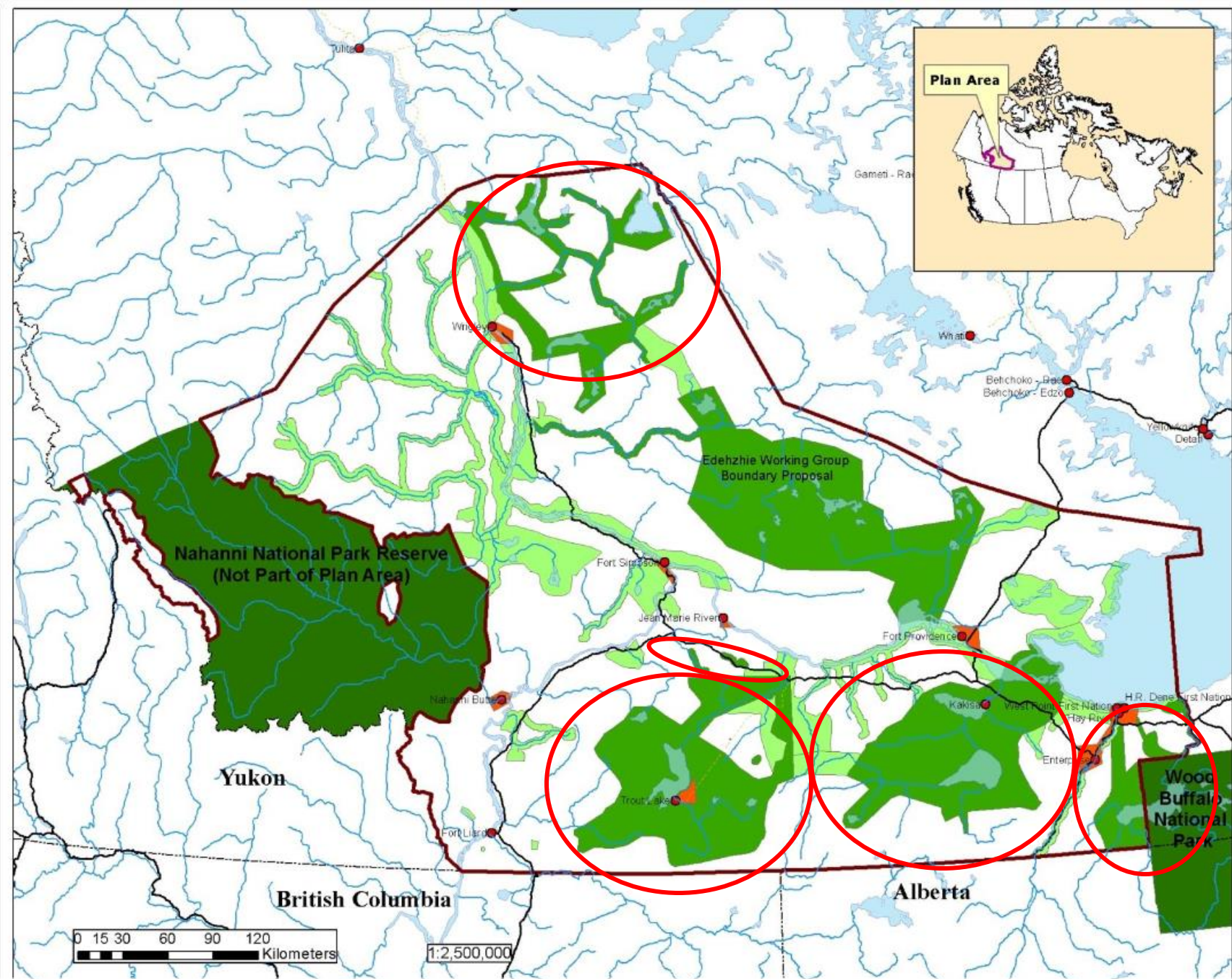
Map of Areas Where Mining, Oil and Gas, Commercial Timber Development, and Agriculture

Legend Not Permitted

- Communities
 - Community Boundaries
 - Plan Area
 - Territorial Border
 - All-Season Roads
 - Winter Roads
- Land Use Zones**
- | ZONE TYPE | Color |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| National Park Reserve | Dark Green |
| Candidate Protected Area Zone | Medium Green |
| Conservation Zone | Light Green |

Dehcho
Candidate
Protected
Areas

Map updated by: DPI Territorial Consulting
 Map created in: June, 2012
 Data Source: DLUPC, GeoBase, Geogratis, GNWT
 Map Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic
 Central Meridian: 122w
 Reference Lat: 60n
 Standard Parallels at 60n and 65n



Dehcho protected area development



The map on the left shows the Dehcho region in the Northwest Territories of Canada. It features a grid and labels for 'zhie Protected' and 'Protected Area'. A large green circle with an orange border is overlaid on the map, containing the text 'Dehcho Candidate Protected Areas'. The map also shows geographical features like 'Robbison River' and 'Plateau'.

Dehcho Candidate Protected Areas

- 1998 work begins on Edéhzhíe as a candidate protected area, Federal protection in 2022
- Between 2003-2009 work begins on Ejié Túé Ndáde, Ka'a'gee Tu, Łue Túé Sųłái, and Sambaa K'e , and by 2011 all assessments complete
- 2014 a pause is put on protected area development after Canada and NWT sign a devolution agreement
- 2016 Dehcho First Nations launches the Dehcho Guardians program
- 2022 Dehcho First Nations receives federal Nature Fund support to proceed with these candidate areas
- Ongoing: a decision on the legal mechanisms for protection

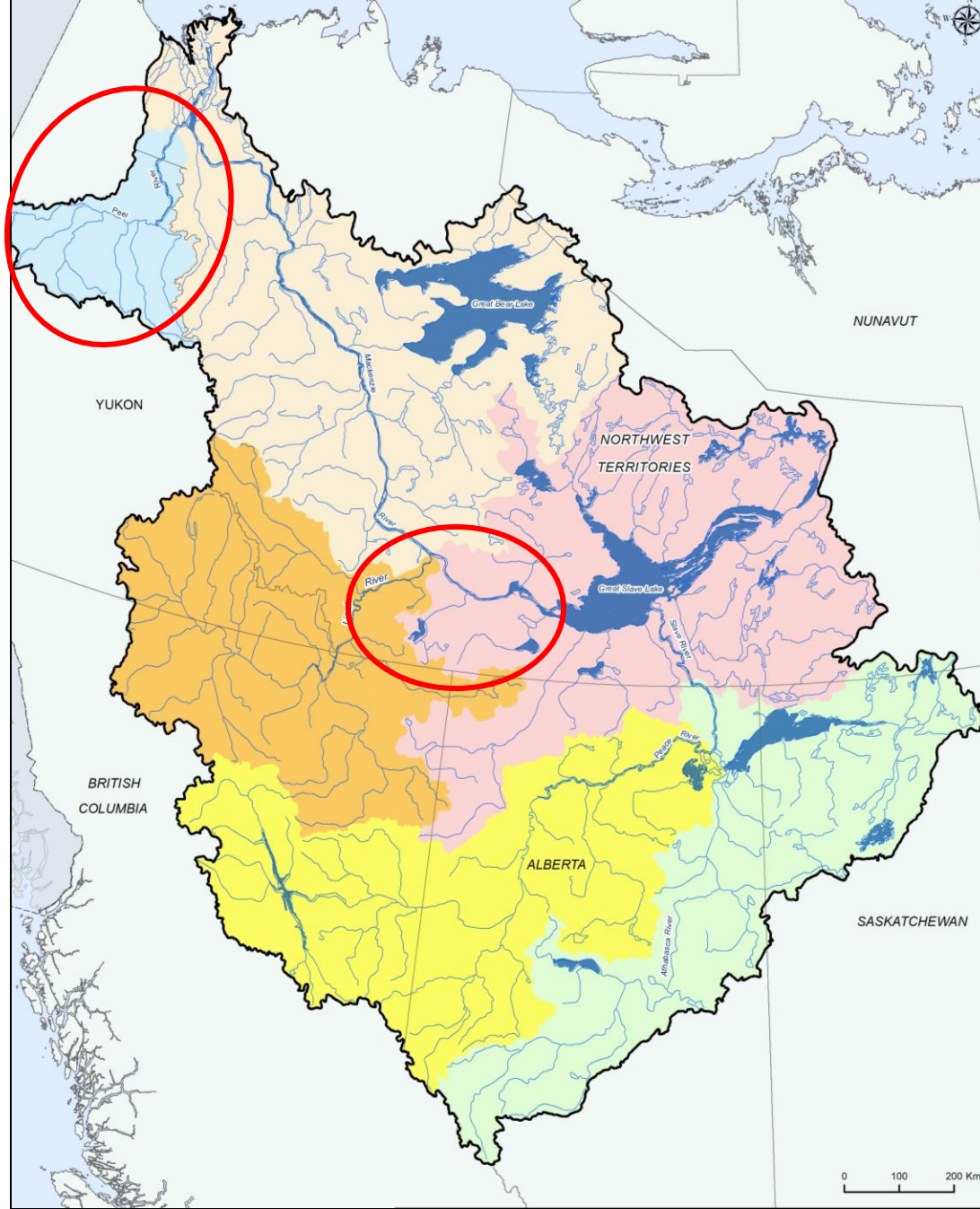
Snake River Valley, upper Peel Watershed

**The fight for
the Peel
Watershed**



Peel
Watershed

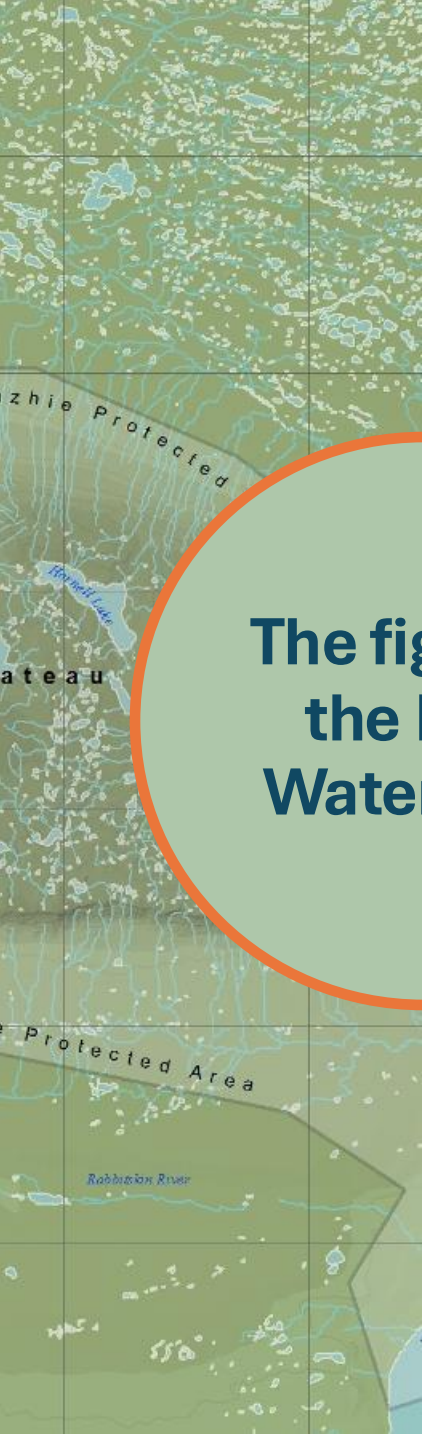
The fight for
the Peel
Watershed



Mackenzie
Basin

Map: Mackenzie River Basin Board. <https://mrbb.ca/>

A rocky road to land protection



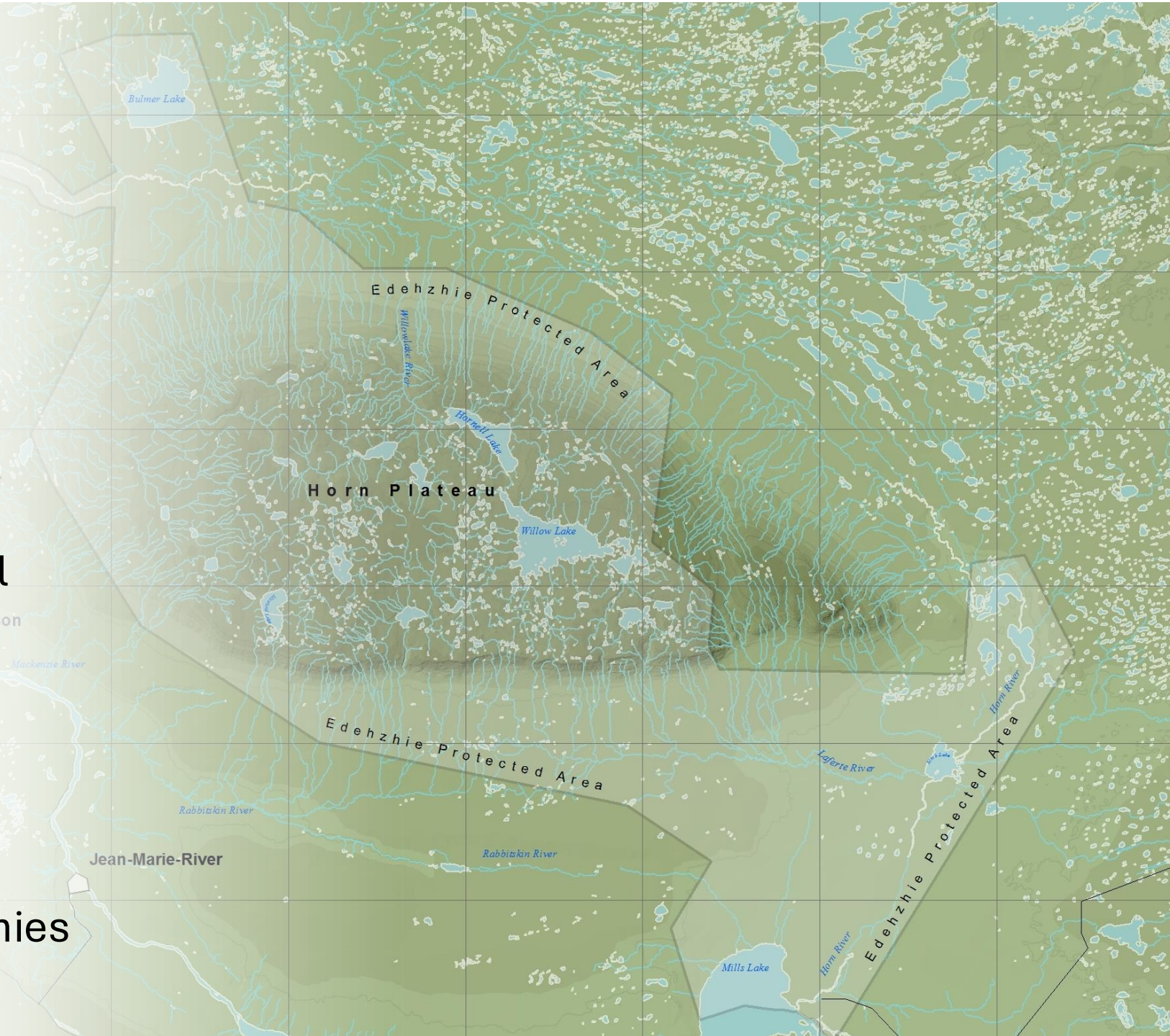
The fight for the Peel Watershed

- Peel watershed 67,431 km²
- 2004 Peel Planning Commission established, in accordance with the 1990 Umbrella Final Agreement
- 2011 Final Recommended Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan recommends 80% protection from development
- 2014 Yukon Government announces a Regional Land Use plan that deviates significantly from the recommended plan—71% open for development; Indigenous governments launch a legal challenge
- 2017 Decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, ruling against the Yukon Government
- 2019 Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, Gwich'in Tribal Council and the Yukon government sign the Regional Land Use Plan
- The final plan protects 55%, another 25% with interim protection.
- April 2024, feasibility study announced for a 3,000 km² protected area in the heart of the watershed



3. Challenges and opportunities

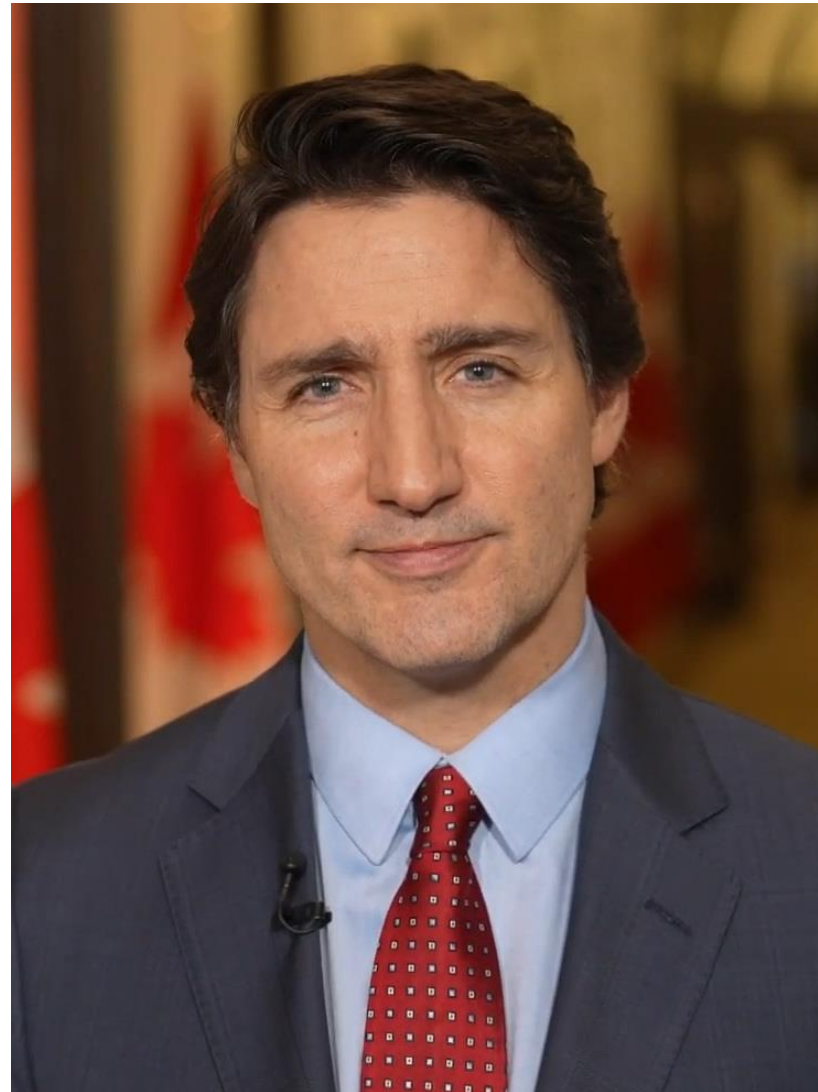
- The duration of political will
- Questions of leadership, jurisdiction, and authority
- Financing and long-term sustainability
- Climate change: the long shadow of colonial economies



Canada on the cusp of a political turn



**Political
will:
maintaining
momentum**





**Leadership,
jurisdiction,
and
authority**

What is the true meaning of Indigenous leadership?

- Is reconciliation the same as decolonization?
- Is protection through combined Indigenous and Canadian law merely symbolic?
- Does co-management achieve meaningful incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and governance practices?
- Will Indigenous Guardians gain the authority to play enforcement roles, and what laws will they enforce?
- How to address gaps in capacity that prevent meaningful Indigenous leadership?

The funding landscape



Conservation finance




Philanthropy

E.g.
Pew Charitable
Trust



Government funding

E.g. federal
Guardians
funding



Impact-Benefit Agreements

E.g. Tlicho
Government with
Diavik and Gacho Kué
diamond mines



Purpose-built Foundations

E.g. Coast
Conservation
Endowment
Fund

Tallurutiup Imanga gets full-time guardians

In 2023, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association decided to allot its Harvesters Support Grant boost funding for their Nauttiqsuqtiit Guardians program.

They can now have full-time positions through 2026.¹³

**The
precarity of
financing**

**When/how will sustainable funding come to
Indigenous Guardians programs?**

13. Jamal, M. 2023, Feb 2). Qikiqtani Inuit Association makes Nauttiqsuqtiit guardians full-time positions. *Nunatsiaq News*. <https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/qikiqtani-inuit-association-makes-nauttiqsuqtiit-guardians-full-time-positions/>

Pew Charitable Trusts and the PFPs^{14, 15}

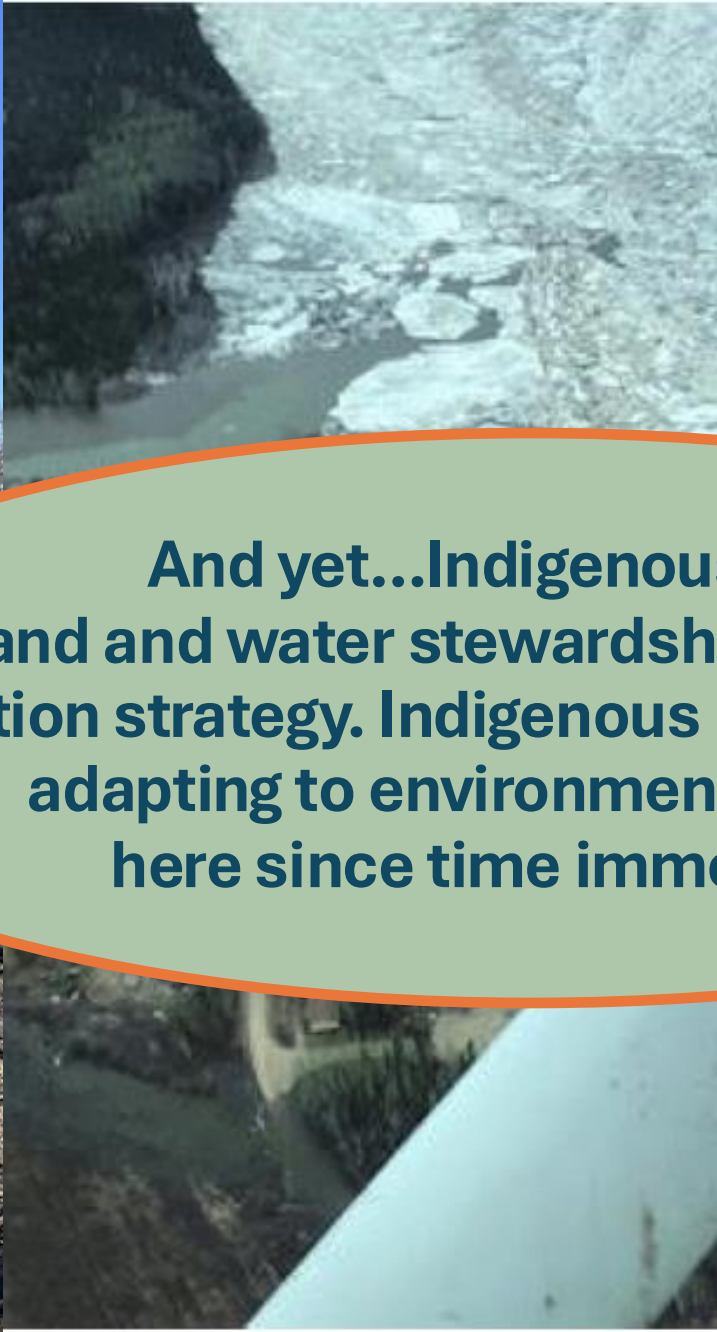
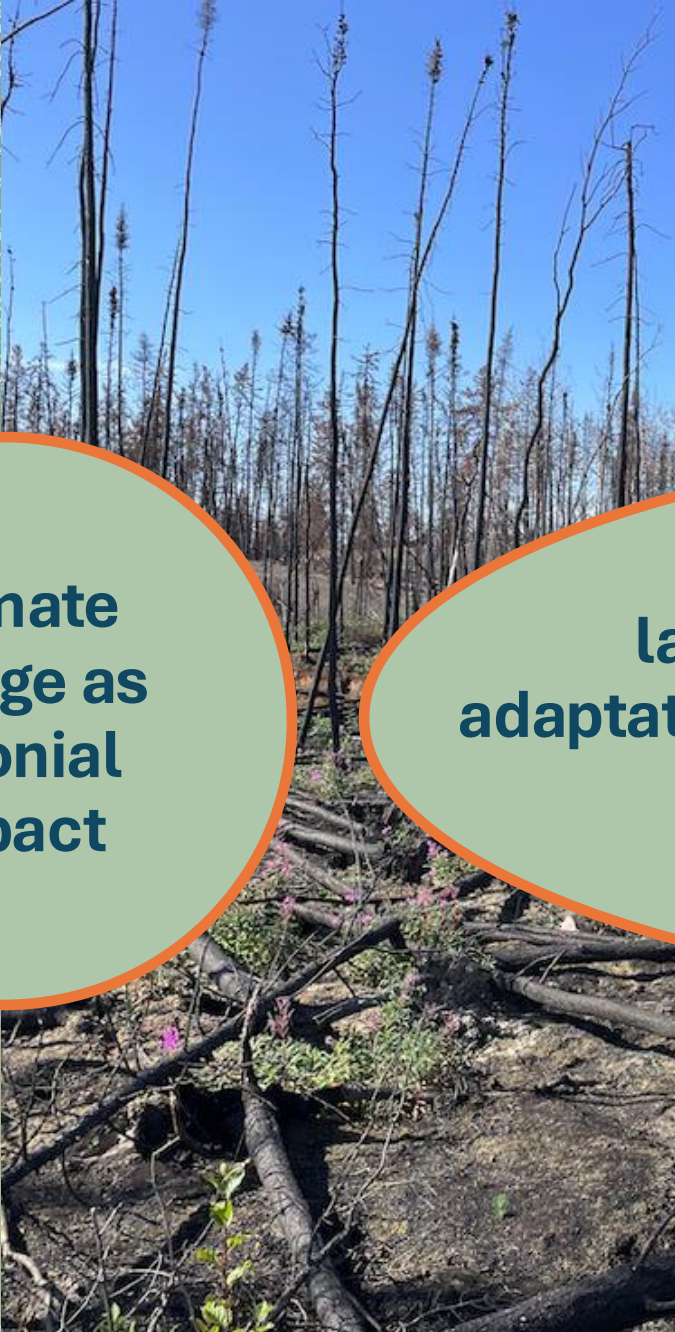
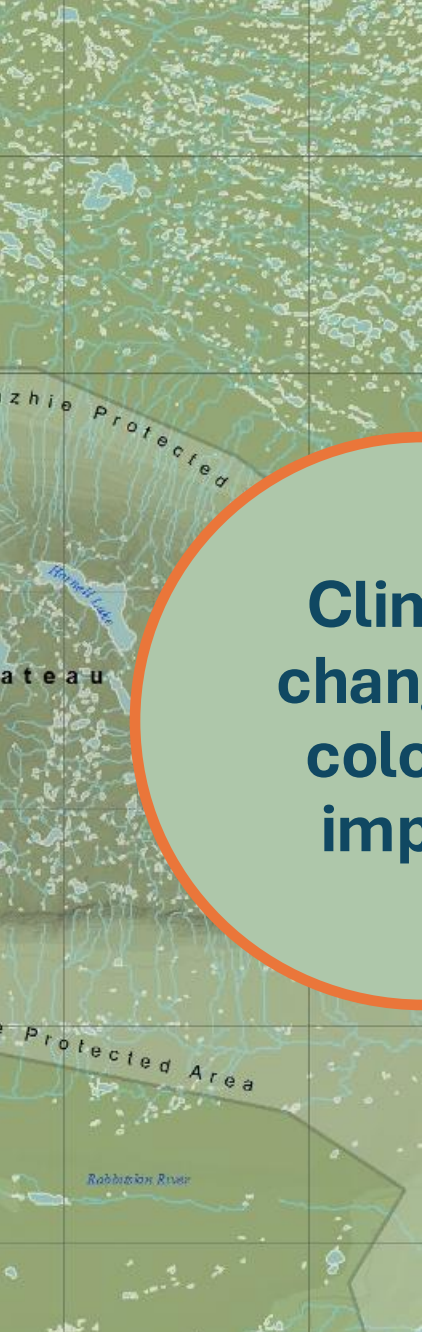


Historic funding agreements

- “Project Financing for Permanence”
- November 2024, PFP agreement signed by Indigenous, territorial, and federal government representatives, and by various private philanthropy organizations
- \$375 million dollars over ten years (\$75 million from the private donors)
- Protect up to 379,000 km² (2% of Canada’s land mass)

14. Williams, C. (2024, Nov. 21). \$375M Indigenous-led conservation deal just signed in the Northwest Territories. *The Narwhal*. <https://thenarwhal.ca/nwt-pfp-agreement-signed-behchoko/>

15. Government of Canada (2024). <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/nature-legacy/about/project-finance-for-permanence/northwest-territories.html>



Climate change as colonial impact

And yet...Indigenous-lead land and water stewardship is the best adaptation strategy. Indigenous Peoples have been adapting to environmental change here since time immemorial.

Middle image: Government of NWT, via CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/jean-marie-river-flood-1.6019948>

Right image: Steve Kokelj, Government of Northwest Territories. <https://images.app.goo.gl/8kj5EcJWGJz1Wb979>

Thank You!

Acknowledging my Indigenous research partners and federal funders:



Contact: alatta@wlu.ca