

News Release

For Immediate Release

Government of Canada and Mushkegowuk Council successfully complete feasibility assessment and take a major step toward officially protecting western James Bay and southwestern Hudson Bay
Proposed national marine conservation area spans 86,000 km² and is home to Omushkego Cree and iconic Canadian species

February 21, 2024

Kashechewan, Ontario

Parks Canada

Today, the Mushkegowuk Council and the Government of Canada announced the successful completion of the feasibility assessment to establish a proposed national marine conservation area (NMCA) in western Weeneebeg (James Bay) and southwestern Washaybeyoh (Hudson Bay). This is a major step toward achieving the official protection of this rich marine environment.

The announcement was made in the community of Kashechewan, Ontario, by Grand Chief Leo Friday of Mushkegowuk Council and Adam van Koeverden, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, on behalf of the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada.

The area has been home to the Omushkego people for millennia, and to a wealth of biodiversity. It contains one of the largest beluga populations in Canada, and a threatened population of polar bears. It is also a global hotspot for breeding and migrating water birds.

Protection of this marine ecosystem helps to conserve biodiversity and assist with climate change mitigation and helps the continuity of the cultures and traditions of Omushkego Cree communities who have long been stewards of these lands and waters. The proposed NMCA would provide for Omushkego people to exercise their rights to decision-making for the future of the area through shared governance with Parks Canada.

Parks Canada and other federal government departments will collaborate to implement interim protection for the proposed NMCA. Parks Canada and the Omushkego people will strive to ensure the proposed national marine conservation area fully supports community members in maintaining and enhancing connections to lands, waters, and ice for the continuity of inherent rights including harvesting.

Engagement and consultation will continue with Indigenous and local communities, other relevant jurisdictions and federal departments, stakeholders, and the public during the next stages toward establishment. The new national marine conservation area, once protected, would also contribute 1.5 per cent to the Government of Canada's target of protecting 30 per cent of lands and waters in Canada by 2030.

National marine conservation areas are established and managed to protect representative examples of marine regions in Canada for the benefit, education and enjoyment of people living in Canada and around the world. By working in close collaboration with partners, like Mushkegowuk Council, the Government of Canada is committed to halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030 and achieving a full recovery for nature by 2050 so it can be enjoyed by all, for generations to come.

Quotes

"We hunt, trap, and fish for survival. We signed a treaty that we were told would allow us to continue to be stewards of our traditional lands and waters. This is a welcome step toward fulfilling that promise."

Leo Friday

Grand Chief, Mushkegowuk Council



Parks Canada Parcs Canada



“Today marks a major step forward for the Mushkegowuk Council, the Omushkego Cree people, and the Government of Canada. Together, we are moving closer to achieving the official protection of this incredible area, helping species at risk recover, and working to further mitigate the effects of climate change. Congratulations to Mushkegowuk Council, Parks Canada, and everyone involved in reaching this important milestone.”

*The Honourable Steven Guilbeault
Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada*

“The successful completion of the feasibility assessment for the proposed national marine conservation area in western James Bay and southwestern Hudson Bay is fantastic news. Protecting the environment and investing in conservation together, like Mushkegowuk Council and Parks Canada are doing here today, is the only way to ensure these incredible resources persist through time so that future generations can enjoy and benefit from them as well.”

*Adam van Koeverden
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change*

“Completing this feasibility assessment toward the establishment of a new national marine conservation area in the western James Bay and southwestern Hudson Bay regions is an incredible achievement. I am confident that Mushkegowuk Council and Parks Canada will continue to work together, in the spirit of reconciliation and nation-to-nation, to consult the communities, partners, and stakeholders to soon establish another beautiful national marine conservation area in Canada.”

*The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard*

“Mushkegowuk Council and Parks Canada are clearly demonstrating that when different nations come together and collaborate to reach common goals, success is possible. The completion of this feasibility assessment is proof that together, we can achieve great things for the environment and future generations. I look forward to following this project as it advances through the next phases toward the formal establishment of a new national marine conservation area on the western and southwestern coasts of James Bay and Hudson Bay. This announcement is particularly significant to me, as I worked with Mushkegowuk Council to initiate the NMCA process during my visit to Moose Factory in August 2021.”

*The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources*

“I am proud of the work Parks Canada has accomplished in building solid, honest, and respectful working relationships with Indigenous communities across Canada. The work we have accomplished together is nothing short or remarkable, and this national marine conservation area initiative is a perfect example of what we can accomplish when we strive together toward a common goal. Congratulations to everyone involved in completing this major step for conservation.”

*Ron Hallman
President and Chief Executive Officer, Parks Canada*

Quick Facts

- The Omushkego have lived in western Weeneebeg (James Bay) and southwestern Washaybeyoh (Hudson Bay) since time immemorial and their traditional territories cover a large portion of the Hudson-James Bay Lowlands as well as extending beyond the coast into the marine region and its islands.
- A steering committee was established to help guide the feasibility assessment for the proposed NMCA in western James Bay. It includes representatives from both Parks Canada and Mushkegowuk Council which represents seven First Nations (Attawapiskat, Kashechewan, Fort Albany, Moose Cree, Chapleau Cree, Taykwa Tagamou, and Missanabie Cree) as well as Weenusk and Fort Severn First Nations.
- The Government of Canada is committed to reconciliation and renewed relationships with Indigenous peoples, based on a recognition of rights, respect, collaboration, and partnership.



Parks Canada Parcs Canada



- Grounded in Indigenous knowledge, local perspectives, and science, the Government of Canada is committed to conserving 25 per cent of marine and coastal areas by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030, while advancing reconciliation with Indigenous people.

Related Links

- [Parks Canada](#)
- [Mushkegowuk Council](#)
- [Mushkegowuk Marine Conservation Project](#)
- [Proposed national marine conservation area in western James Bay and southern Hudson Bay](#)
- [Rights-free multimedia of event](#)

- 30 -

Contacts

Kaitlin Power
Press Secretary
Office of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change
819-230-1557
kaitlin.power@ec.gc.ca

Media Relations
Parks Canada
855-862-1812
pc.media@pc.gc.ca

Clive Tesar
Media Relations
Mushkegowuk Council
613-914-8774
tes.mac@sympatico.ca