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# A Gift to the Earth

Parks Canada, Proud Recipient of the WWF International Award



Parks Canada    Parcs Canada

Canada



## Parks Canada Receives the **Gift to the Earth Award**

A Gift to the Earth award is WWF-International's highest accolade for conservation work of outstanding global merit. It is a recognition of inspiring leadership and conservation achievement that contributes to protecting the living planet.

On behalf of all Canadians, Parks Canada is honoured to receive this award in recognition of efforts to create new protected areas and to reintroduce species at risk into their natural habitat. In protecting new areas and through our species recovery efforts, we are also facilitating new and exciting opportunities for Canadians to enjoy, appreciate and connect with their natural heritage. This work could not have been successful without our collaboration with Aboriginal peoples and our many partners, and the remarkable support of Canadians across the country.

This booklet tells the stories of those special marine and terrestrial areas that have contributed to Canada receiving the WWF Gift to the Earth award.

These places are Canada's gift to the world.

## Alan Latourelle

CEO of Parks Canada

On behalf of all Canadians, it is a privilege to accept the Gift to the Earth award from WWF-International.

Canadians can be proud of the outstanding conservation work and species recovery efforts that have earned Parks Canada this prestigious award. This important work protects what is fragile but vital: the unique, unrivalled and irreplaceable places where Canadians can connect to their heritage and the wildlife, landscapes and waters which represent the very essence of Canada.

Inspired by early visionaries, and in working with many partners, Parks Canada has created the finest network of protected areas in the world. The achievements recognized by WWF-International have been over a century in the making – a century of dedication, shared leadership and passion for Canada at its best.

As we are honoured with the Gift to the Earth award, we are reminded of our responsibility to continue our efforts to protect and share Canada's natural treasures with the world, for the benefit of our precious planet.

## James Leape

Director General of WWF-International

Canada is blessed with some of the last, large wild places on Earth – from its forests and tundra, to its lakes, rivers, and oceans.

Nowhere in the world do so few people enjoy such an enormous natural heritage as in Canada. Canadians have a global responsibility to steward it. This legacy was inherited from those who lived on this land for centuries and must be secured for generations to come.

WWF is pleased to recognize Parks Canada for exemplifying this level of stewardship. In its first century, it has done an outstanding job of creating and managing the nation's parks, which are truly Gifts to the Earth. They have also exemplified a high standard of practice and performance for parks agencies everywhere. We look forward to a second century of progress toward completing the parks system – so vital to conserving the wild places that all life depends on to survive and thrive.

## Our Gift to Canadians and the World

The visionaries of Canada in 1885 had a strong belief that the beauty surrounding the newly discovered hot springs in Banff was so profound that no one person should own it and so they created Canada's first national park for the enjoyment and benefit of all. The legacy inspired by these visionaries led to a system of national treasured places, including national parks, marine conservation areas and historic sites, a legacy that is shared by Canadians and the world, generation after generation.

Since the initial protection of 26 km<sup>2</sup> at Banff National Park in 1885 up until today, Parks Canada's system of protected natural areas has grown to over 320,000 km<sup>2</sup> of protected lands and waters. In the past five years alone, the Government of Canada has added 45,000 km<sup>2</sup> to Canada's system of protected areas. And our efforts continue. In collaboration with partners and Aboriginal groups, Parks Canada is currently working to protect an additional 89,000 km<sup>2</sup> of vast boreal forests, clean clear water, rich marine habitats, grasslands and arctic tundra as far as the eye can see.

Our focus continues to be on providing an environment for nature and wildlife, including species at risk, to thrive, survive and recover. At the same time, these places of wonder create opportunities for humankind to discover the stories of our past, understand our world, and connect to the essence of the Earth.

As Parks Canada embraces the beginning of its second century of passionate work, the whole country celebrates the achievements we have made together as Canadians – highlighted by WWF's Gift to the Earth award – as the first and finest, national parks service in the world.

# 320,000 km<sup>2</sup> of protected lands and waters

## Working Together: A Common Vision to Conserve and Share Canada's Greatest Natural Treasures

The path of stewardship that was started in Banff is not one that Parks Canada has walked alone.

Parks Canada could not have succeeded in conserving large natural areas and species' habitat without a common vision shared with others. Aboriginal people, our partners, other governments, regional communities, conservation organizations, volunteers and stakeholders have been, and will continue to be, an integral part of Parks Canada's success. The challenge of protecting our land and marine environments and connecting Canadians to our shared natural heritage continues to increase in our rapidly changing world. The Gift to the Earth recognizes Canada's dedication to creating protected areas for the use and benefit of future generations, despite these challenges.

As we enter our second century of service to Canadians, the efforts of Parks Canada are increasingly focussed on conservation of the diverse marine environments that make up our three immense oceans and the Great Lakes.

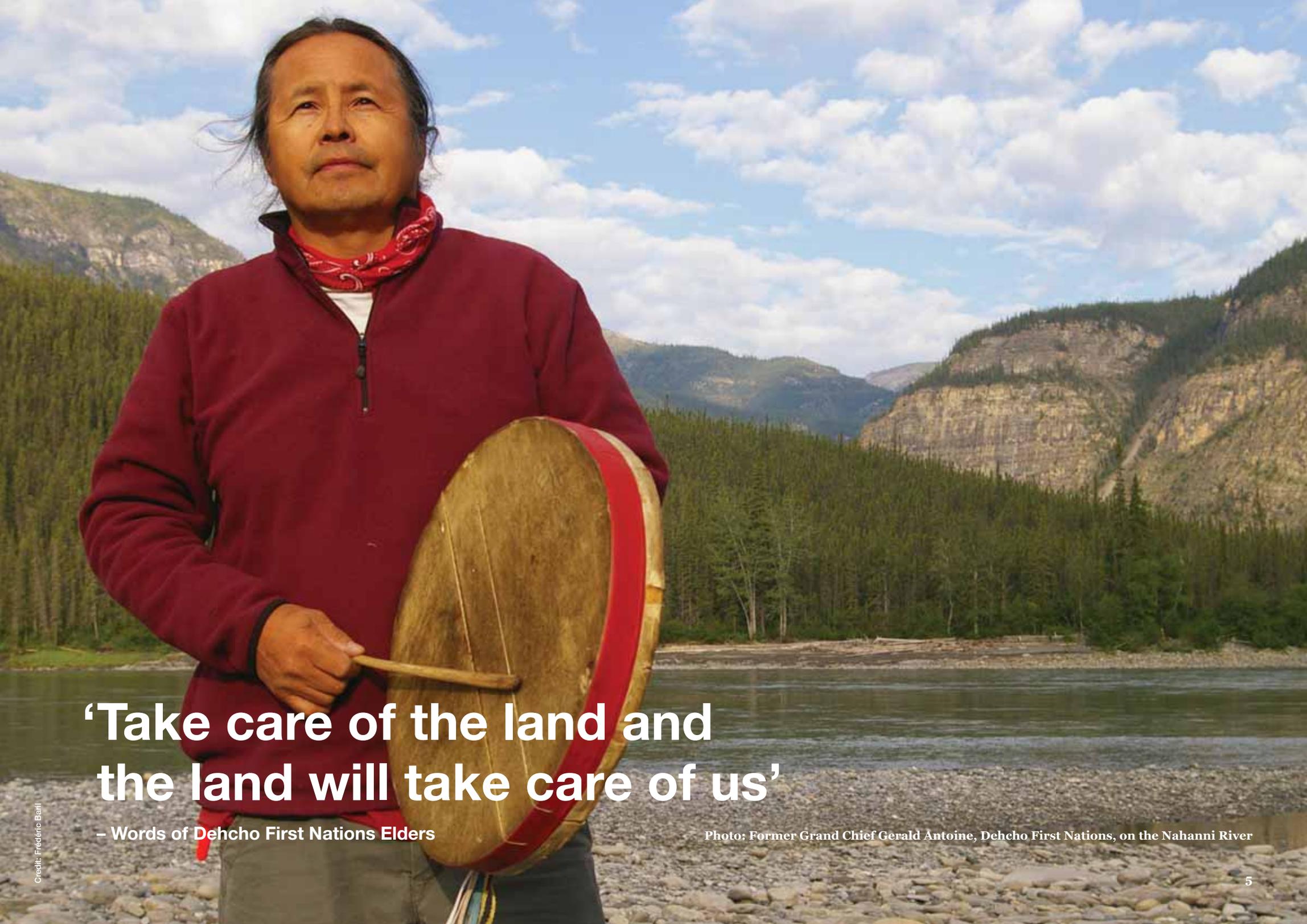
Canada is being recognized by WWF-International for its gifts of conservation but by far the greatest gifts we receive are the ones given to us by the Earth itself—clean water, fresh air, food, clothing, shelter, and beauty and inspiration. Human beings are bound to the Earth in an endless cycle of receiving and giving.

Aboriginal people have always understood this concept. They honour the land and live in respect of it.

*“Even when we don't walk on the land, our spirit is walking the land. This work has taken many years, many people working with passion and dedication. We must always remember the words of our Elders: **Take care of the land and the land will take care of us.**”*

Jonas Antoine, Dehcho First Nations Elder, Nahanni Expansion Working Group

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A photograph of a man, identified as Former Grand Chief Gerald Antoine of the Dehcho First Nations, standing on a rocky riverbank. He is wearing a maroon zip-up jacket and a red patterned scarf. He is holding a large, round, wooden drum with a red band around its edge. The background features a wide river, a dense forest of evergreen trees, and rugged mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

**‘Take care of the land and  
the land will take care of us’**

– Words of Dehcho First Nations Elders

Photo: Former Grand Chief Gerald Antoine, Dehcho First Nations, on the Nahanni River

# Continuing the Work of Conservation: Protected Areas for Today and Tomorrow

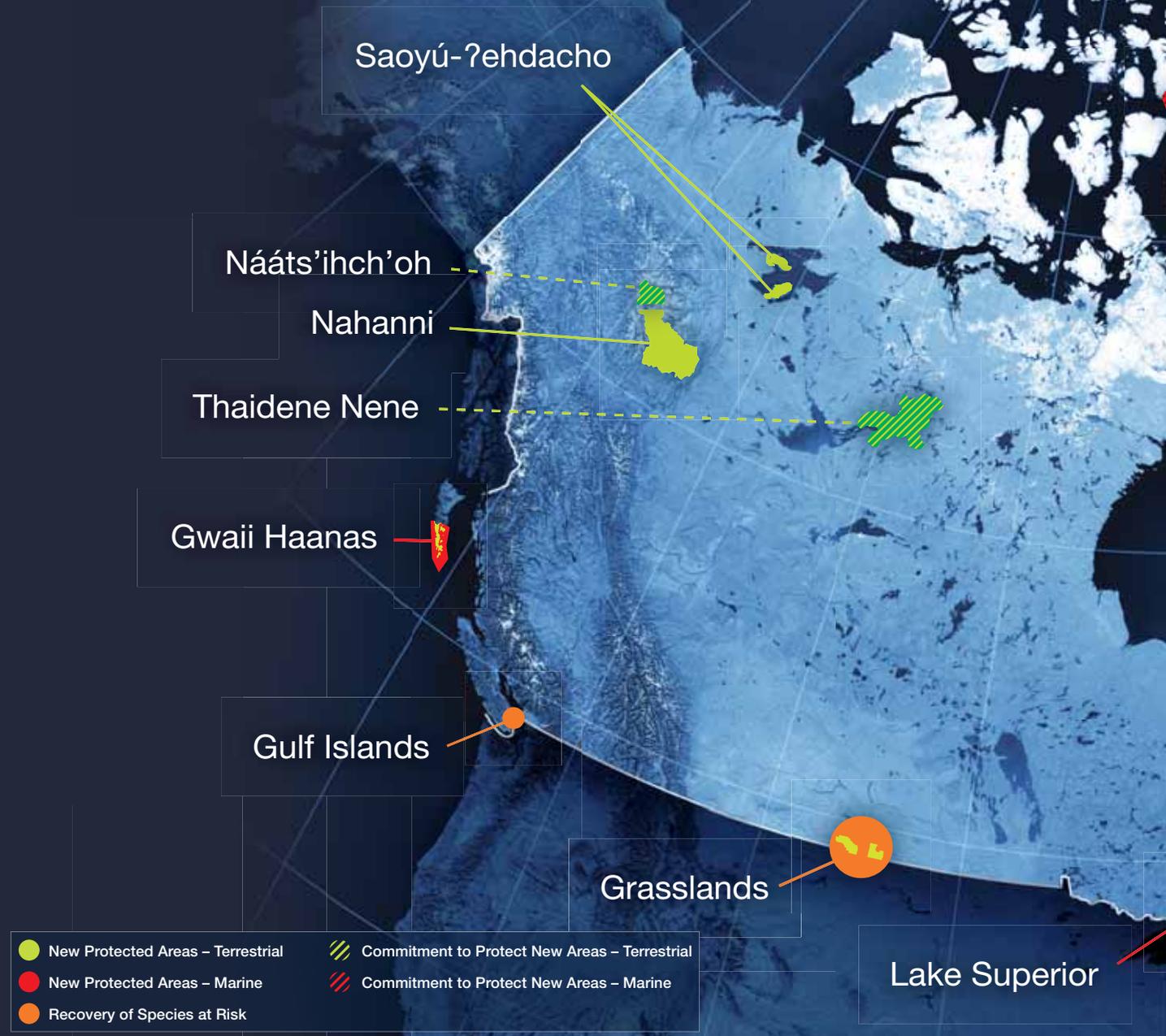
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Lancaster Sound

Mealy Mountains

Sable Island

Kejimikujik

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**where the land, sea and people  
have always been inseparable**

## Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site

in British Columbia

Protected from Mountaintop to the Depth of the Ocean

A First for Canada – A First for the World!

The protection in 2010 of 3,500 km<sup>2</sup> of Pacific marine waters through the creation of Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site is not only a remarkable conservation action but also a demonstration of international leadership by Canada. For the first time anywhere in the world, an area extending from the mountain summit to the deep ocean floor beyond the continental shelf has been protected.

A Marine Wilderness on the Edge

On the very edge of the Pacific continental shelf, the lands and waters of Gwaii Haanas have long been celebrated for their stunning beauty and remarkable biodiversity. From its temperate rainforests to the surrounding marine waters, the archipelago is a place of great cultural and ecological significance, and a sacred place where the land, sea and people have always been inseparable.

Managed in Partnership

A vision was formed of a contiguous land and marine protected area back in the 1980s when over 1,500 km<sup>2</sup> of temperate rainforest wilderness were protected as a national park reserve, in partnership with the Haida Nation. Today this vision has been realized with the creation of the national marine conservation area reserve. Both the land and the marine waters are cooperatively managed, and the Haida Nation and Canada are working together to provide opportunities for others to connect with this remarkable place.

*“This is a changing of the tides, as we come to appreciate the fragile and precious nature of our marine areas, we will begin to give the necessary attention to look after and restore our oceans.”*

Guujaaw, President of the Haida Nation

## Six-fold Expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve

in the Northwest Territories

### Protecting a Major Portion of the Nahanni Watershed

In 2009, the iconic Nahanni National Park Reserve was expanded to six times its former size, making it Canada's third largest national park. This achievement has been called the greatest conservation gain in a generation.

Among the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Nahanni National Park Reserve has long been considered a jewel of Canada's system of national parks. It is renowned for its wild white-water river and spectacular canyons, but until recently it encompassed only the lower reaches of the South Nahanni River, not its broader watershed or the river's upper reaches. In 2009, this massive expansion increased the park reserve so that today over 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> of spectacular mountain terrain, unique geological landforms and critical wildlife habitat are protected within its boundaries – almost the size of Vancouver Island.

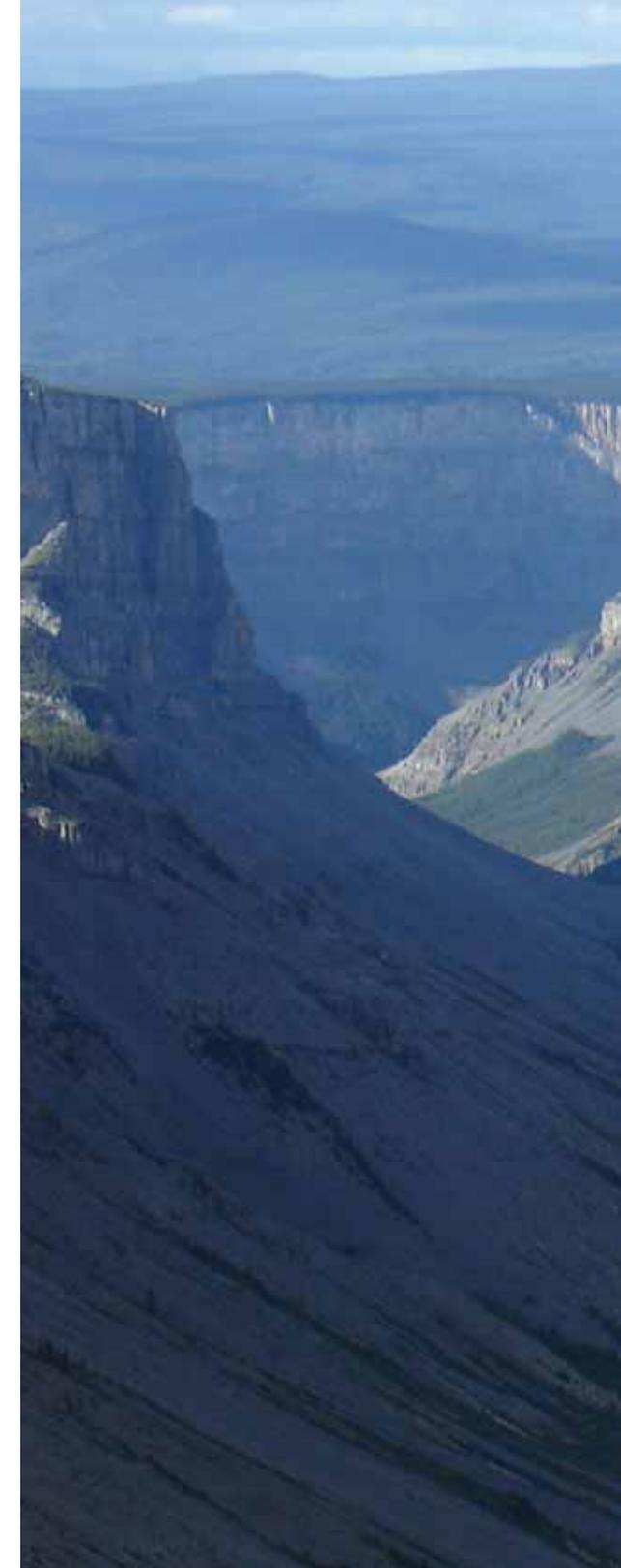
### Leadership of the Dehcho First Nations

This tremendous growth could not have happened without the strong vision and leadership of the Dehcho First Nations

and their steadfast desire to protect this area of enormous significance. Together with Parks Canada, the Dehcho people have worked tirelessly to ensure that a major portion of the watershed has been conserved and managed collaboratively in ways that honour and conserve the traditional Dehcho knowledge and culture, for today and for the future.

### Northern Wilderness Landscape

The huge and pristine northern landscape of the expanded park area includes a major portion of the South Nahanni River watershed as well as the Nahanni North Karst, a limestone area of global significance that includes spectacular canyons, caves, disappearing lakes and rock towers. Nahanni National Park Reserve today is home to more than 500 grizzly bears, herds of woodland caribou, Dall's sheep, mountain goats, peregrine falcons and trumpeter swans. This spectacular protected area offers world class experiences for canoeists, kayakers, climbers and hikers from around the world to connect with a jewel of the Earth.





**‘Even when we don’t walk on the land,  
our spirit is walking on the land’**

**– Dehcho First Nations**



## Creation of Saoyú-?ehdacho National Historic Site

in the Northwest Territories

In 2009, two peninsulas bordering on Great Bear Lake, an area of 5,565 km<sup>2</sup> (or approximately the size of Prince Edward Island) were permanently protected as Saoyú-?ehdacho National Historic Site. This site protects a cultural landscape of great importance to the people of Great Bear Lake (Sahtu). Saoyú-?ehdacho is the first northern cultural landscape protected as a national historic site and co-operatively managed by Parks Canada and an Aboriginal group.

The Elders' vision for Saoyú-?ehdacho is one of continued teaching and healing, a place that forever helps to sustain the culture and well-being of the people.

*“Saoyú-?ehdacho is an important cultural and spiritual area and the land is alive with the stories of our people. Without the land, the stories die. Full protection of this land ensures that these stories can forever enrich our people and be shared with all Canadians.”*

Chief Raymond Tutcho, Déline First Nation

## Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area

in Ontario

In 2007, the governments of Canada and Ontario announced the creation of a national marine conservation area in the northwestern part of Lake Superior. Spanning about 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>, Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area is the largest freshwater protected area in the world. First Nations, other government partners, communities and stakeholders have all contributed to this achievement.

Lake Superior has been home to First Nations for thousands of years and it continues to be culturally and spiritually significant to Aboriginal people in the region. This area of great beauty provides opportunities to connect with nature through incredible experiences, such as kayaking its untamed waters or trying out recreational fishing with the whole family.

Hérons, peregrine falcons and bald eagles soar overhead, and white-tailed deer, moose and caribou can occasionally be seen along the shores. Some 70 species of fish live in Lake Superior and the marine conservation area includes the spawning grounds of whitefish, lake herring, walleye, coaster brook and lake trout. Numerous shipwrecks found in the cold, clear waters are a legacy to the great lake's maritime history and its ferocious storms.



some 70 species of fish live  
in Lake Superior



The Gift to the Earth award honours a demonstrable commitment to conservation. Parks Canada has taken significant actions over the past five years to bring six inspiring and magnificent projects closer to establishment.

## Proposed Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve

in the Northwest Territories

The creation of Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve is being negotiated in collaboration with the Sahtu Dene and Métis people. When completed, it will protect the headwaters of the South Nahanni River and include important habitat for grizzly bear and caribou. With about 7600 km<sup>2</sup> under consideration, and located adjacent to the Nahanni National Park Reserve, it will enhance the protection of the South Nahanni watershed.

*“Water is important to life and it is important to us to save our water. The South Nahanni River watershed will be well protected through Nááts'ihch'oh and that will be a very good inheritance to leave for future generations.”*

Chief Frank Andrew, member of Tulita Nááts'ihch'oh Working Group.

## Proposed Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve

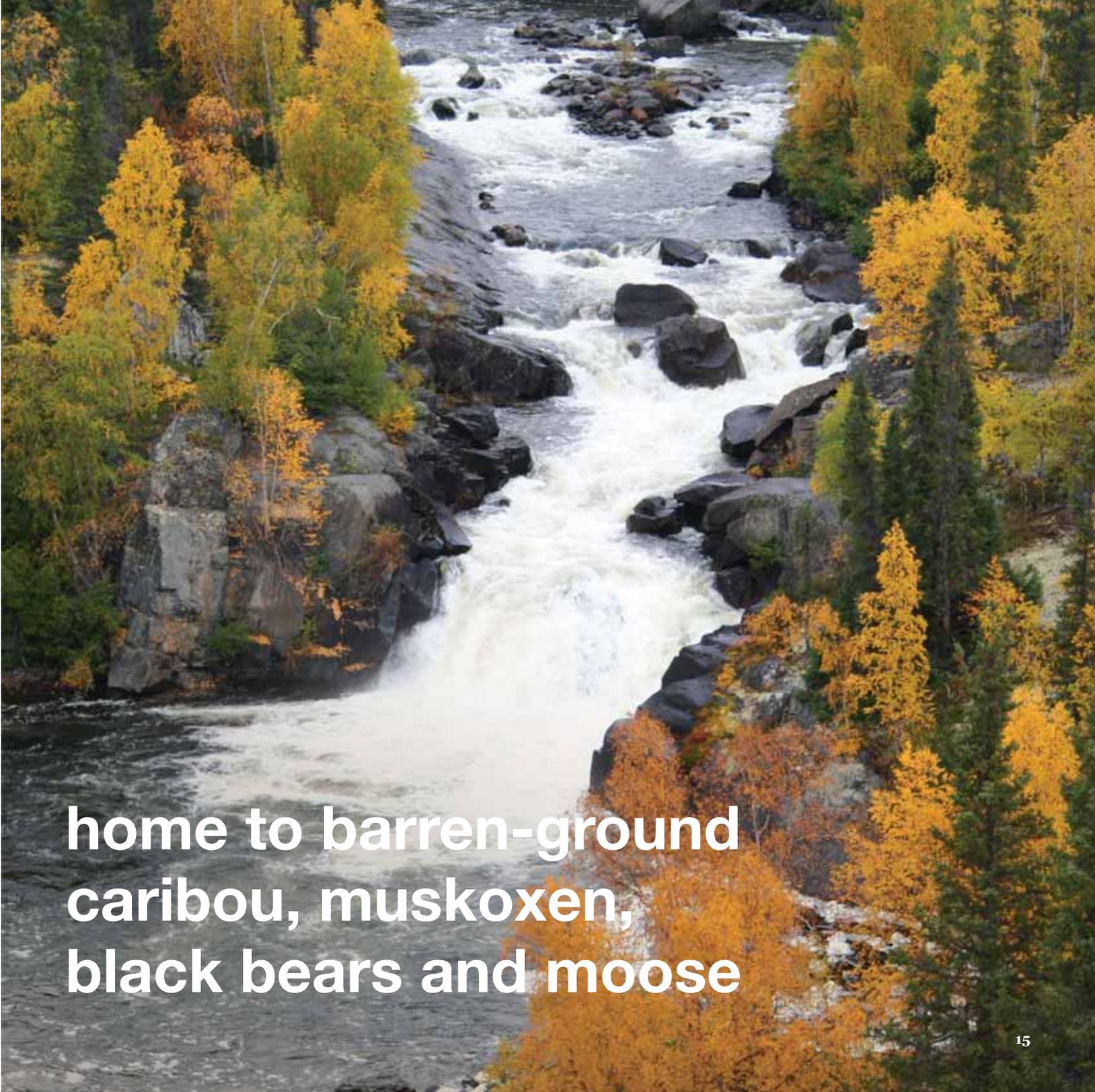
in the Northwest Territories

In 2010, Canada and the Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation committed to negotiate a park agreement for the establishment of Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve at the eastern end of Great Slave Lake. Parks Canada is also working with the Northwest Territory Métis Nation. An area of great cultural and historical importance, the park study area of over 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> includes the dramatic cliffs and islands of the East Arm of Great Slave Lake, with the deepest freshwater in North America, the Lockhart River's canyons, and Tyrrell Falls. This rugged and scenic wilderness spans an abrupt transition from boreal forest to tundra environment, and is home to barren-ground caribou and muskoxen as well as forest dwellers such as black bears and moose.

"Thaidene Nene" means "land of our ancestors" in Chipewyan, one of the languages of the people of the North.

*"Thaidene Nene is part of our homeland where our ancestors laid down the foundations of our way of life."*

Former Chief Nitah, Łutsel K'e Dene First Nation



home to barren-ground  
caribou, muskoxen,  
black bears and moose



## Proposed National Park Reserve in the Mealy Mountains

in Newfoundland and Labrador

In 2008, Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced a commitment to establish a 10,700 km<sup>2</sup> national park reserve in the wilderness area of the Mealy Mountains in Labrador. Once agreements are reached with the province and Aboriginal groups, this national park will be the largest protected area in Atlantic Canada. It will protect a stunning array of boreal ecosystems and their wildlife such as the threatened Mealy Mountains caribou herd and landscapes of great cultural significance, and provide amazing opportunities for Canadians to experience the east coast boreal forest wilderness.



## Proposed Sable Island National Park

of Nova Scotia

Off the coast of Nova Scotia lies a 42 km long sand spit located on the edge of the continental shelf. Its unique island sand dune ecosystems are home to important wildlife populations including numerous migratory birds, some species at risk such as the Ipswich sparrow and the wild horses of Sable Island run free here. Negotiations are underway to ensure the permanent protection of this remarkable place through the establishment of a national park.

Credit: Paul Hisey (www.paulhisey.com)

## Proposed Lancaster Sound National Marine Conservation Area

in Nunavut

Often referred to as the Serengeti of the Arctic, Lancaster Sound is an area of critical ecological importance to marine mammals, such as seals, narwhal, beluga and bowhead whales, walrus and polar bears. It is bordered by some of the most important seabird breeding colonies in the Arctic.

In December 2010, the Government of Canada announced its proposed boundary for a national marine conservation area, encompassing more than 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This is an important step in Canada's commitment to protect Lancaster Sound's marine waters and wildlife, which are a globally significant ecological treasure.

Since the announcement of a feasibility assessment in 2009, the Canadian government has been working collaboratively through a steering committee with the Government of Nunavut, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association, regional Inuit communities, and the public to finalize the boundary and protect this exceptional area.

*"Inuit seek balance and respect for the land, waters, animals and cultural history."*

Okalik Eegeesiak, President, Qikiqtani Inuit Association

A photograph of two walrus resting on a large ice floe in the Arctic ocean. The walrus in the foreground is lying down, showing its large tusks. The second walrus is partially visible behind it. The water is a deep blue, and there are other ice floes in the background under a clear sky.

a 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> area of critical ecological importance to marine mammals

## Grasslands National Park: Exciting New Efforts

in Saskatchewan

### Commitments to Protect New Areas through the Addition of Ranch Lands

The historic Dixon family ranch lands of the Frenchman River Valley are in the process of becoming protected as part of Grasslands National Park in southwest Saskatchewan. Adding more than 110 km<sup>2</sup> of spectacular scenery and native mixed prairie grasslands to the existing park area, these lands include critical habitat for species at risk. Officially proclaimed a national park in 2001, Grasslands National Park together with the surrounding ranch lands, represents one of the finest examples of intact mixed grass prairie in Canada and is home to some of Canada's rarest wildlife species.

The Gift to the Earth award also recognizes our successes in recovering species at risk.

### Reintroducing the Plains Bison and Black-footed Ferret

After a 120-year absence, the majestic and once ubiquitous plains bison – an icon of the prairie – was reintroduced to the park's grasslands in 2006. Seventy-one of these rugged creatures, once at the heart of the culture and economy of the Aboriginal

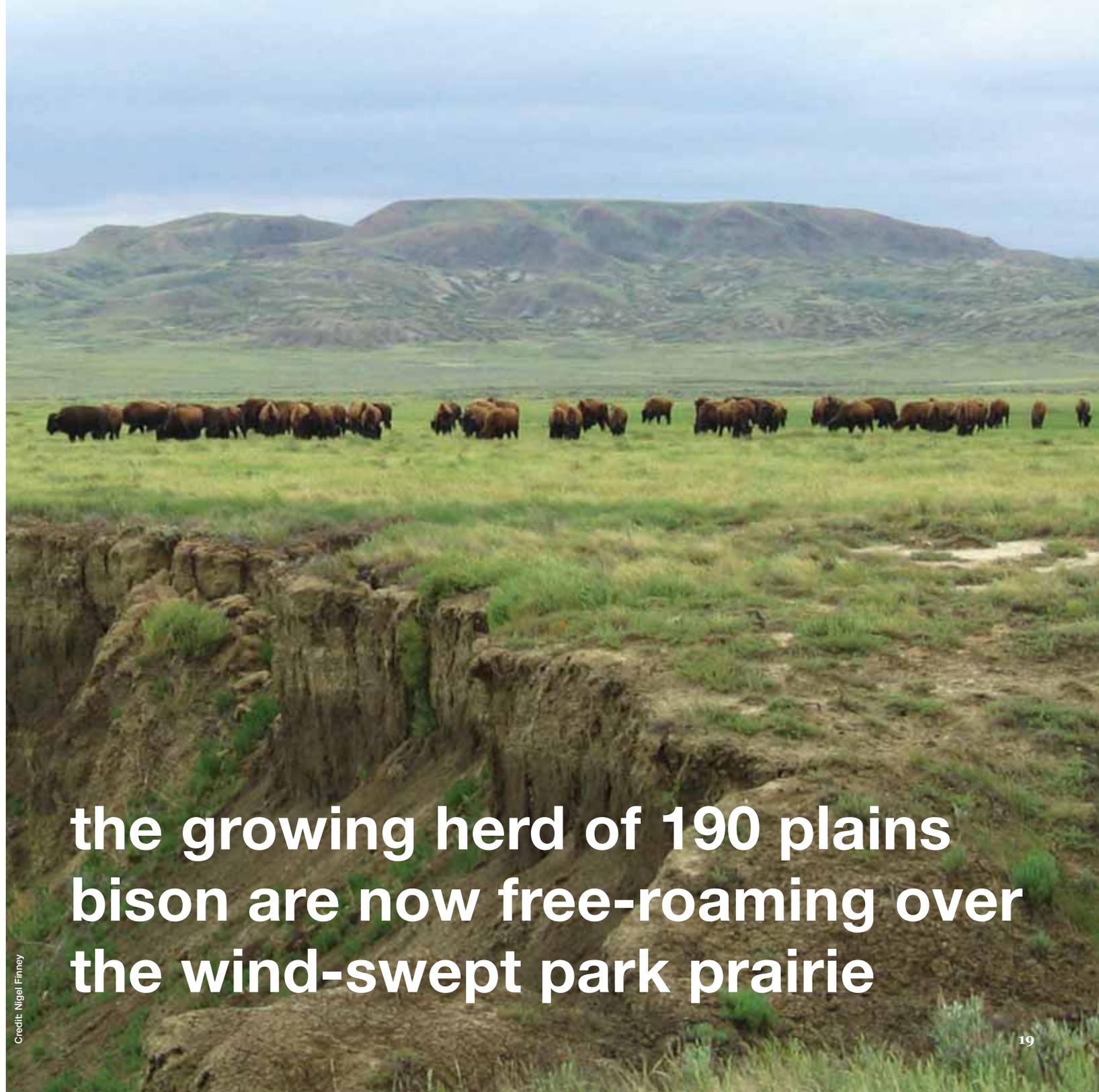
peoples of the Great Plains, were released and the growing herd of 190 are now free-roaming over the wind-swept park prairie. As a result, the grazing process has been restored to this mixed-grass ecosystem and Canadians once again have the opportunity to view these symbols of the wild prairie.

Once considered North America's rarest mammal, in 2009 the black-footed ferret was reintroduced to Canada in Grasslands National Park. In the summer of 2010, for the first time in over 70 years, black-footed ferret pups born in the wild in Canada were observed – a tremendous cause for celebration. Since their reintroduction, this once lost native species has been closely monitored by park staff and dedicated volunteers.

Parks Canada is working closely with conservation partners towards restoring the prairie ecosystem.



Credit: Mike Lockhart



Credit: Nigel Finney

**the growing herd of 190 plains bison are now free-roaming over the wind-swept park prairie**

## Recovering the Blanding's Turtle at Kejimikujik National Park

in Nova Scotia

The Blanding's turtle is a semi-aquatic turtle that is endangered throughout much of its habitat in Nova Scotia. Now, thanks to Parks Canada, First Nations and other partners, the Blanding's turtle population is being successfully expanded in Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site. In 2008, a special celebration marked the release of 34 turtles and saluted the efforts of more than 250 volunteers contributing 10,000 hours to species at risk work in Kejimikujik National Park. During Parks Canada's centennial year, another 100 turtles will be released in the park.

**250 volunteers have  
contributed 10,000 hours**

## Recovering Garry Oak Ecosystems at Gulf Islands National Park Reserve

in British Columbia

At Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, some of the most endangered habitats in Canada are being restored. Garry oak ecosystems are home to more than 100 rare species. First Nations have gained sustenance from these ecosystems for centuries, but now, little of this precious habitat remains in near-natural condition. With First Nations and many others, Parks Canada is doing recovery work. Invasive species are being removed, and native plants including more than 35 species at risk are being re-established.



## Looking Ahead: What's Next

**On behalf of Canadians, Parks Canada has been carrying out an important task, successfully and with great pride, for 100 years – the stewardship of some of the most treasured places on the planet, places well loved by Canadians, and inextricably bound to our identity.**

Many individuals have played a key role over our past hundred years, and especially over the past decade, in protecting and presenting these national treasures. Together, we are building an outstanding network of marine and terrestrial protected areas. Our hope for the future is that our young people will pick up the torch and carry on this important work.

Parks Canada and its many partners demonstrate that working together to achieve common goals ensures that Canada's nation-wide system of national parks and national marine conservation areas will continue to grow and enrich our lives and those of future generations.

As Canadians, we can be proud of this international recognition of our country's leadership in conservation and we hope that it will inspire others to similar efforts.

## A Second Century of Leadership

As Parks Canada enters its second century of service, we will continue to build on the conservation leadership demonstrated by our amazing staff and dedicated support network that includes Aboriginal groups, conservation organizations, local communities, volunteers, youth groups and university partners. The Gift to the Earth recognizes all of you.

We look forward to building on an impressive conservation legacy and continuing to protect and present Canada's world-class network of protected areas for all generations of Canadians.

In this special year – our centennial year – it is with pride and excitement that we welcome Canadians and visitors from around the world to experience these special places!







Credit: Mike Beadell / CPAWS