

Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas



Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), including recommendations for Indigenous Peoples' role in stewardship and conservation in Canada, were presented in detail in a 2018 report by the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE). An IPCA is a First Nation's vision and plan for lands and waters in its traditional territory. IPCAs are defined by the First Nation and outline its stewardship approach, so each IPCA may look different and include different priorities.

Similar land stewardship initiatives exist elsewhere in the world and may be referred to as Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs), Indigenous-Led Area-Based Conservation (ILABC), and Tribal Parks, among others. Common aspects are:

- They are Indigenous-led and are defined by the Indigenous community.
- An IPCA reflects the multi-generational perspective of a First Nation and is an expression of that community's stewardship and conservation vision for an area.

How does the British Columbia government recognize an IPCA?

Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) and B.C.'s enactment of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (the Declaration Act),

First Nations' rights include the right to make statements of stewardship intent for area(s) within their traditional territories, including the declaration of IPCAs. Such declarations can be considered an expression of their right to self-determination.

The B.C. government recognizes IPCA declarations as opportunities to engage with First Nations and determine shared goals for land and water stewardship.

What happens when an IPCA is recognized?

The declaration of an IPCA or other type of Indigenous-led stewardship initiative (e.g., Tribal Park, Indigenous Interest Area, etc.), is the decision of that Indigenous government exercising its self-determination. Such a declaration does not mean that the B.C. government can or will enact legal tools to ensure the conditions outlined in the declaration are enforced.

The land use vision expressed by First Nations in an IPCA can help identify shared goals for land and water stewardship, which helps set priorities for government-to-government dialogue. The B.C. government and the First Nation may choose to enter a government-to-government process where there is an interest in enacting shared objectives of the IPCA under both sets of laws (provincial and Indigenous) and where such a partnership can meet both governments' needs.

What if an IPCA is declared in an area that I currently access?

The declaration of an IPCA does not immediately or necessarily mean there will be changes to the existing land uses of an area. It is important to note that any declaration that expresses an alternative use or management approach does not remove or change the legal requirements and existing direction for management of the land within that area.

The B.C. government is working to address land management objectives expressed in IPCAs through existing processes and the use of existing legislation. Where a government-to-government approach to explore shared goals for land stewardship will result in a new land use direction, the B.C. government is obligated to engage with tenure holders, communities, and the public.

How will the interests of the public and my interests be reflected if the B.C. government does advance planning or proposes specific land use designations in a given IPCA?

The role of the B.C. government is to ensure that the rights and interests of the First Nation will be respected and upheld within a process that also upholds the rights and interests of affected third parties and local communities.

The B.C. government will seek the most efficient and appropriate path to address First Nations' IPCA interests and values. It will also prioritize opportunities that can use existing processes and initiatives such as Land Use Planning and Species at Risk Management, which require public engagement and consultation.

In some cases, operational stewardship and management options may be considered to address identified issues. In other cases, there are aspects of IPCAs that may need resolution through comprehensive land use planning, which involves new land use direction for conservation goals, the economy, and reconciliation. The public, local governments and stakeholders will be engaged whenever B.C. commits to a process with First Nations to identify or change legal objectives for land stewardship.

Are IPCAs the First Nation equivalent of parks or protected areas?

No. Indigenous-led stewardship and IPCAs are diverse in content and scope. They often reflect Indigenous peoples' multi-generational, holistic perspective on resource stewardship, including economic, conservation, and cultural interests. The vision expressed will often reflect First Nations community and Indigenous Knowledge, culture, laws and governance, and may be adapted over time as community priorities change.

How will IPCAs affect my land use tenure and my use of the land within an IPCA area?

The declaration of an IPCA does not remove or change the legal requirements and existing direction for management of the land within that area. The expression of First Nations' stewardship intentions provides important information to help build a positive relationship with the Nation and inform future engagement with that Nation.

Contact Information:

For general inquiries about stewardship and conservation in B.C., please contact us at: Stewardship.Strategies@gov.bc.ca