



# A Strategic Evaluation of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Boreal Forest Conservation Initiative: Leveraging Learning for Program Iteration & Impact

FINAL REPORT—APRIL 2018

---

## I. INTRODUCTION: EVALUATION CONTEXT, FRAME & APPROACH

For nearly 20 years, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation has been supporting grantees working with First Nations to conserve and ensure the sustainable development of Canada's critical forest ecosystems, for their cultural, ecological, and economic benefits. The boreal is one of the world's largest intact forest ecosystems, providing critical habitat for 85 mammal species including wood bison, woodland caribou, grizzly bears, and wolves. Nearly half of the birds in North America rely on the boreal forest for some portion of their lifecycle and estimated three billion birds breed in the boreal forest each year—representing more than 300 different species. The boreal is the largest wetland ecosystem on the planet and is the Earth's largest terrestrial carbon sink. The rich region is also vital to Canada's economy and to hundreds of rural, resource-dependent communities that dot the landscape. A large percentage of Indigenous People in Canada have lived in the boreal for millennia. Their deep relationships with these vital ecosystems fulfill subsistence needs and support cultural and economic well-being.

In coming years, as the Canadian federal government and territorial and provincial governments partner with First Nations to achieve Canada's commitments to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD)—and more specifically the Aichi Biodiversity Targets—increased emphasis will be placed on the boreal to realize stated conservation goals. Through what it refers to as the "Pathway to Target 1," Canada is working to ensure that at least 17 percent of its terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems are conserved and sustainably managed through networks of protected

areas. This conservation vision has been linked by policy-makers to the country's Truth and Reconciliation Process, which aims to right past wrongs against First Nations and ensure conservation outcomes are just and advance the rights of Indigenous People.

To learn how the Hewlett Foundation's grantmaking can best support Canadians—and First Nations especially—to achieve these social justice and conservation goals in the boreal, Hewlett commissioned an evaluation of recent work by grantees and partners. Additional goals of the evaluation were to capture learning that could help pinpoint opportunities for iteration and evolution in program strategy, and to identify possibilities for deepening existing strategic partnerships and/or developing new collaborations.

The TERRAMAR consulting group's Strategic Evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's Boreal Forest Conservation Initiative (Boreal Initiative) focused on capturing learning about programmatic success, as well as identifying challenges, gaps and emergent strategic opportunities. Evaluative findings fed into the refresh of Hewlett's Western Conservation Strategy and informed the design of future grantmaking strategies in Canada. The evaluation methodologies were co-created with Hewlett program staff and shaped by a set of goals, objectives, and expected outcomes established for the evaluation.

The following integrated objectives were identified to guide the evaluative process:

1. Evaluate the current Boreal Initiative's context and strategy: history, critical change pathways, progress and outcomes, opportunities and challenges, gaps, etc.
2. Determine the assumptions and accuracy of the field's broader theory of change.
3. Capture perceptions of the Boreal Initiative by internal stakeholders (Hewlett program staff, grantees, and partners) and external stakeholders (First Nation leaders and organizations, conservation organizations, members of the philanthropic community, and other influencers and thought leaders).
4. Establish the effectiveness of grantees and their partners in meeting strategic goals and milestones, advancing successful policies to conserve Canada's boreal forests, building relationships and strategic partnerships, designing collaborative systems, sharing capacity and capturing and integrating learning.
5. Identify grantee successes and challenges in four core areas: policy gains; constituency building, political dynamics/landscape and communication strategy.
6. Develop recommendations for evolving, growing, leveraging, and increasing the future impact of boreal grantmaking.

The inquiry, along with programmatic recommendations and generated outputs, were focused on the following audiences:

1. Hewlett Foundation Leadership & Staff: Principally, Western Conservation program staff and Environment program staff.
2. Hewlett Foundation Partners (current & potential): First Nation leaders, organizations, and where relevant and appropriate, First Nation governments; U.S. and Canadian foundations; and identified decision-makers and policy-makers.
3. Grantees: Current grantees, as well as potential grantees identified through the evaluation process.

For this evaluation, TERRAMAR relied on expert interviews and the firsthand observations and stories of participants as the primary sources of information. Our experience suggests that to capture meaningful learning and surface “truth,” one needs to listen to disparate and diverse voices and be willing to set aside all assumptions and preconceived notions.

Approximately 53 experts, representing 33 organizations and institutions, were interviewed between September and December 2017 as part of the evaluation. The bulk of the findings were distilled from these conversations and, where necessary, were augmented by background desktop research and information provided by a range of interviewees, which included academics, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs), philanthropic organizations, and First Nation leaders and First Nation-led organizations.

Most notable among grantee accomplishments was support for Indigenous-led land-use planning, which resulted in significant acres being identified for both conservation and sustainable development and the launch of the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI). ILI’s primary goal is to enable First Nation communities across Canada to actively manage, monitor, and fulfill their cultural responsibility to their lands and territories through on-the-ground stewardship.

## II. The Value Proposition: Why Conservation in Canada Matters

**The Biocultural Opportunity**—Canada’s boreal forests represent a conservation opportunity of global significance for the mutual benefit of both people and nature. The value proposition grows exponentially if one enlarges the conservation frame to consider Northern and Western Canada and the fluid ecological, political, and cultural boundaries that this vital region embody. This geography abounds with unparalleled ecological values that are critical on the planetary scale and vitally important to human communities and cultures as well:

- \* About 80% of the Indigenous People in Canada live in the boreal and their history, and cultural and economic well-being is inextricably linked to the wildlife, and terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems found there.

- \* An estimated 14% of Canada’s population is scattered across hundreds of boreal communities that draw their livelihoods from the region’s rich resources.
- \* The boreal represents the largest intact forest and wetland ecosystems on Earth.
- \* There is more surface freshwater in the boreal than anywhere else on the planet, and more free-flowing rivers than the rest of North America combined.
- \* The boreal drives global weather patterns and controls marine productivity levels.
- \* Boreal forest and wetland ecosystems represent the largest terrestrial carbon sink—11% of the world’s total.
- \* More than 300 bird species are found in the boreal and rely on it for essential life-cycle stages.
- \* The region supports one of the world’s last examples of large-scale mammal migrations, e.g. caribou.
- \* The planet’s most important climate refugia are found here due to the boreal’s potential to accommodate species forced north due to climate change.

\*

The Policy-Making Opportunity—Canada’s commitment to the UNCBD’s Aichi Biodiversity Targets is reflected in its “Pathway to Canada’s Target 1.” Target 1 commits to: “By 2020, Canada’s lands and waters are planned and managed using an ecosystem approach to support biodiversity conservation outcomes at local, regional and national scales. Target 1, more specifically, establishes the goal that by 2020, at least 17 percent of terrestrial areas and inland water and 10 percent of coastal and marine areas are conserved through networks of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.”

In designing the Pathway to Canada’s Target 1, the federal government explicitly linked conservation goals to “calls to action” emerging from the Truth and Reconciliation



Commission of Canada.<sup>1</sup> The Commission’s purpose was to document the legacy of Canada’s Indian Residential School system and bring to light the harms and injustices perpetrated, along with the lasting impacts on Indigenous People and their communities. The Commission’s findings included 94 action items whose goals were to advance reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. All Target 1 conservation goals are therefore intended to “respect the rights, responsibilities, and priorities of Indigenous peoples” and a key aspect of how the Canadian government intends to action Target 1 in right relationship is through the establishment of the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE). ICE, is an advisory body, tasked with developing a strategy for how Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) can be realized in Canada and “contribute toward achieving Canada Target 1 in the spirit and practice of reconciliation.”

**The Funding & Capacity Gap**—Canada’s philanthropic landscape is lean, especially in the conservation and Indigenous rights space. This is particularly striking given the accomplishments and impact of the Canadian philanthropic and advocacy community on a range of social and environmental issues. Hewlett’s ongoing investment in Canada supports core capacities (strategic engagement, communications and land-use planning, etc.) and has the potential to attract new partners to the conservation conversation. In encouraging Hewlett to deepen and expand its grantmaking frame to look ‘Beyond Boreal’ and consider other critical geographies in Northern Canada, it is important to note that several larger philanthropic players are transitioning out of the region to pursue other priorities. The potential effect of new resources on the funding and capacity gap amongst Canadian nonprofit organizations and First Nations and First nation-led organizations shouldn’t be underestimated. In most instances, it would be pivotal to increased and more enduring impact.

### III. The International Boreal Conservation Campaign: Evaluative Findings

In 2013, the Hewlett Foundation’s Board of Directors made the decision to fund a special, five-year \$15M Boreal Forest Conservation Initiative (Boreal Initiative), which is the focus of this evaluation<sup>2</sup>. Numerous interviews were carried out with grantee and partner organization staff directly. The goal in these interviews was to surface granular details of field-level progress and outcomes over the timeframe of the Boreal Initiative (2013-2018), along with strengths, weaknesses, and guidance for future strategic and grantmaking directions. High-level findings include:

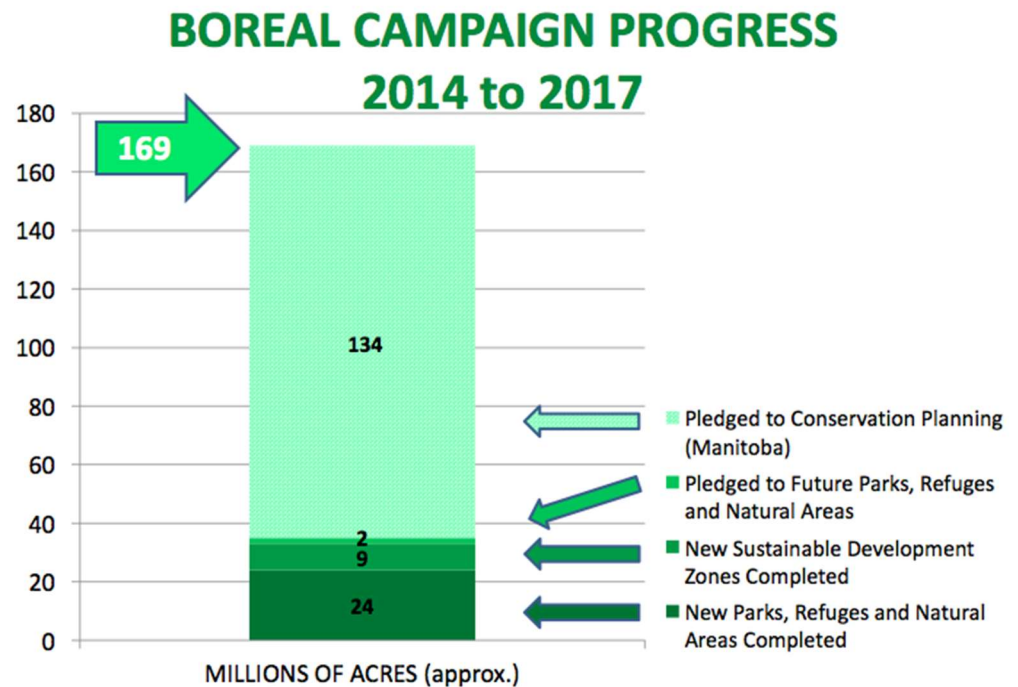
---

<sup>1</sup> The mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been framed as follows: “There is an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future. The truth telling and reconciliation process as part of an overall holistic and comprehensive response to the Indian Residential School legacy is a sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing. This is a profound commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in mutual recognition and respect that will forge a brighter future. The truth of our common experiences will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation.”

<sup>2</sup> Although some of the grantee work described in this report may reflect the passage of legislation, the Hewlett Foundation does not lobby or earmark its funds for prohibited lobbying activities, as defined in the federal tax laws. The foundation’s funding for policy work is limited to permissible forms of support only, such as general operating support grants that grantees can allocate at their discretion and project support grants for nonlobbying activities (e.g., public education and nonpartisan research).

1. The Theory of Change is Appropriately Driven by Indigenous Leadership & Authentic Partnership. The primary theory of change arguably builds on best practices established through the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) Campaign: a recognition that the role of ENGOs is to support, elevate, and enable First Nations to develop and lead their own conservation strategies. Grantees and partner organizations have embraced this theory and have demonstrated its conservation power by securing hundreds of millions of conservation and sustainable development acres via First Nation-led land-use planning processes in the boreal. Land-use planning, an integrative and collaborative process that brings diverse interests together to shape how natural resources are used and managed, has proven itself to be a key pathway to Indigenous-led conservation. But it is important to note that these processes are just the first step in grounding this theory of change and in and of themselves do not guarantee conservation returns, let alone ensure the durability of conservation outcomes and impact.

2. Land-Use Planning Is a Key Driver in Securing Commitments to Conservation & Sustainable Development. During the bulk of the Boreal Initiative period, collaborative land-use planning processes resulted in approximately 170M acres pledged or committed to conservation or sustainable development (see graphic). Some of the key elements of this success are worth unpacking. Of the acres where protection was secured (24M), nearly half are in eastern Canada. Of the acres pledged to protection (2M), all are in Quebec. Acres pledged to conservation or land-use planning (134M) are focused in Manitoba. The sustainable development acres (9M) are in the Northwest Territories. These areas are largely outside the geographies funded by the Hewlett Foundation, which has been focused in Western Canada. Finally, it is important to note that these wins required input and collaboration from a variety of stakeholders and experts, including provincial and territorial governments, First Nation governments, industry, and ENGOs, and securing their long-term conservation and protection will undoubtedly require the same level of diverse engagement, collaboration, and partnership.



Revised Dec 2017

3. **Conservation Advocates Need to Employ a Broader Range of Strategies to Create the Conditions for Enduring Conservation.** Conservation advocates in the U.S. and Canada, along with the philanthropy community, can do more to recognize that land-use planning wins are only as strong and secure as the enabling conditions that undergird them. Indigenous leadership development, sound governance and legal systems, communications, community well-being, coalition-building, and long-term stewardship capacity increasingly are recognized as central to the durability of conservation outcomes and require as much, if not more, consideration and investment. Philanthropy and conservation advocates must make greater investments in these critical steps, or as we now call them, the ‘enabling conditions for enduring conservation,’ to secure investments beyond the terms of land-use planning processes.
4. **Philanthropy Should Support Indigenous-Led Programs & Organizations.** Philanthropy should strive to support Indigenous-led conservation efforts broadly for a variety of critical reasons. Indigenous connection and relationship to land and resources is informed by a depth of traditional knowledge and Indigenous science that dates to *Time Immemorial*. The Indigenous Peoples are often in the best position to serve as long-term stewards and have the legal status in Canada to do so. Support for Indigenous developed and led conservation initiatives is also critical to advancing and deepening the vital principles of equity, inclusion, diversity and justice core to enduring conservation practice.

Interviewees noted that multiple strategies for empowering and elevating the Indigenous voice exist in Canada. One is the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI), an Indigenous-led program whose goal is to strengthen Indigenous Nationhood across Canada and highlight the cultural responsibilities of Indigenous People in Canada to advance conservation and a sustainable approach to development. Yet several expert interviews made the case that greater investments in a wide variety of Indigenous-led efforts is needed and appropriate in a landscape as culturally diverse as the boreal.

In thinking about best practices and models for success in partnering with Indigenous communities, it is important to recognize that what has made ILI successful is its governance. ILI is guided by a high-profile team of Senior Advisors, who represents some of the most influential Indigenous voices in Canada. Further, ILI has cultivated a network of 8-10 Indigenous leaders across the country to help advance ILI’s primary conservation policy focus—the design of a community-driven guardian strategy that establishes the foundation for the successful emergence of a National Indigenous Guardians Program. ILI’s sophisticated campaign bore fruit in March 2017, when the Canadian government pledged \$25M to the creation of a National Guardian Program. Organizationally, ILI has matured to the point that it is actively working with grantees to develop a plan for spinning off as an independent organization. An independent ILI holds the potential to generate even greater empowerment of Indigenous leaders and communities to advance their conservation policy priorities, goals, and longer-term vision.

5. **Efforts to Increase Public Awareness About the Conservation Importance of the Boreal Have Had Impact, But Much More Is Still Needed.** When efforts began to elevate national awareness about the global significance of Canada’s boreal forests nearly two decades ago, polling suggested eight percent of Canadians “knew about the boreal” and its global conservation significance. Grantees increased investment in communication efforts in the last several years and more recent polls indicate that 60% of the population now knows the boreal exists and recognizes its conservation value. With that said, much greater public education is still needed, particularly in demonstrating the local and regional benefits

of boreal conservation for First Nations, rural communities, governments, and the range of industries dependent on the sustainable management of the boreal's vital resources for their economic viability.

6. **Grantees Need to Increase and Improve Strategic Collaboration & Deepen Partnerships.** An interest common across the ENGO and foundation interviews was a desire for more collaboration. The desire for better understanding of strategic approaches and increased engagement among groups working in the boreal was prevalent. The interviews suggested the need for greater communication, more sharing of learnings, and increased transparency and collaboration in strategic planning and campaign implementation across the ENGO community working in the boreal. There was also a call for greater transparency around roles and responsibilities and the inherently collective nature of securing conservation gains in Canada. An insistent mandate common across the interviews was that any investments in the lean Canadian ENGO community work to “raise all boats” and build the conservation capacity of the field writ large.
7. **Broader Metrics Are Critical to Enduring Outcomes.** The metrics commonly used to quantify and measure progress towards conservation goals—acres protected and acres in sustainable development—are important, but fail to capture the true arc of conservation in Canada's Indigenous context or its heavily resource-dependent economy. More comprehensive metrics to track and measure progress against social and economic justice goals need to be developed and implemented. As one interviewee explained: *“Advocacy, policy reform, guardian programs all need to be married to sustained, deep engagement and real partnerships on the ground that address the complex and related issues of governance, capacity, livelihoods, and human and cultural well-being.”*

Maybe even more importantly, a simple acres-protected metric fails to address the critical milestones on the path to wins that are built to last. It is worth noting that overreliance on transactional metrics creates blind spots because there is nothing to compel advocates to focus on the transformational elements of social change: relationships, leadership, empowerment, etc. The linear, cause-and-effect nature of the transactional frame tends not to prioritize efforts to identify root causes, test assumptions and address blind spots, or commit to the learning and iteration central to maintaining a relevant, let alone impactful, theory of change.

#### IV. Lessons from the Great Bear Rainforest

In framing the Terms of Reference for the evaluation of Hewlett's Boreal Initiative, Hewlett program staff flagged an important learning question: What lessons can be learned from the highly successful Great Bear Campaign in British Columbia? And what can we learn about best practices? The Great Bear Campaign culminated in a historic agreement in 2006 between environmentalists, logging companies, First Nations communities and the British Columbia government following years of protests, markets campaigns, land-use planning, and negotiations. The Agreement represented a new paradigm in conservation: a model driven by multi-stakeholder tables, based in cutting-edge science to inform government-to-government negotiations and the development of a long-term and durable conservation vision for one of the last intact coastal rainforest ecosystems on Earth. The Agreements were grounded in three core components: 1) A new land management regime to protect nearly five million



acres from logging and establish a set of new lighter-touch logging regulations outside protected areas; 2) Support for conservation-based economies in coastal communities; and 3) Strengthened First Nation involvement in decisions affecting their Traditional Territories.

Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM)—defined as *an adaptive, holistic, scientific approach to land management that integrates ecological, economic and social needs into the creation of long-term, sustainable land-use plans*—served as the strategic framework for the Great Bear conservation model. The model was driven by three pillars or overarching goals: ecological integrity (change in area protected, improved management policy/regulation, ecological indicators/measures, e.g., key habitat/species protected, carbon storage, etc.); human well-being (economic, cultural, and social outcomes); and enabling conditions (the laws, policies, institutions, and networks needed to support and sustain EBM). Clearly, what makes the Great Bear Campaign stand out is its commitment to a systemic approach and vision for truly transformative change. Investments were made by the philanthropic community and provincial government to address the root causes of Great Bear Rainforest destruction and design an integrated conservation model that worked to advance ecologically sound management, viable rural economic development, and Indigenous rights to self-determination.

Interviewees suggested that philanthropic support emerged for conservation of the Great Bear Rainforest because it represented a unique, intact ecosystem, where the enabling conditions for conservation, i.e. solid science, community engagement, effective communications and advocacy; etc., had been established. This work included the following critical milestones: 1) ENGOs were strong and aligned around a well-articulated conservation vision; 2) First Nation leadership was in place and expressed a cohesive vision for the protection of land and waters, livelihoods, and culture; 3) Advocacy and markets-based campaigns had elevated national and international media awareness and drawn public and political attention to the negative impacts of unchecked industrial logging on fragile and threatened coastal ecosystems of global significance; 4) Industry and Government were both interested and willing to come to the table to find common ground; and finally 5) A solid science-based monitoring system was set in place to ensure that protected acres were real and not just paper parks, or a set of aspirational conservation acres conserved.

## V. Retrospective & Prospective Recommendations

The TERRAMAR consulting group was tasked with both the evaluation of the Hewlett’s Boreal Initiative as well as the ‘refresh’ of the Foundation’s larger Western Conservation Strategy moving forward. Our recommendations therefore focus on both retrospective elements of the Boreal Initiative as well as prospective ones:

1. **Broaden the Geography of Attention and Investment.** In thinking about place-based priorities in 2018 and beyond, there are ecological, cultural, and strategic reasons for the Hewlett Foundation to support a wider range of community-driven and transboundary efforts in Canada. The diverse transboundary region between Alaska and Canada extends for 1,500 miles and represents ecological and cultural connectivity across a variety of critical ecotypes, ranging from the coastal temperate rainforests of the Tongass to the boreal interior and the Arctic coastal plain. Initial analysis suggests that expansion of Hewlett’s grantmaking portfolio ‘Beyond Boreal’ represents an opportunity to invest more deeply in community-driven conservation efforts that are most often Indigenous-led, and represent a more

holistic and integrated approach to securing conservation outcomes. These efforts tend to be significantly underfunded. Future investments should also support ENGO campaigns and Indigenous Target 1 goals that extend beyond the boreal. Expanding where Hewlett works enables the foundation to expand who it works with and presents opportunities for greater collaboration and strategic partnership with the international philanthropic community, while also leveraging the impact of Hewlett grant dollars to larger effect.

2. **Redefine Metrics of Success, Invest in Organizational Learning, and Increase Public Education.** We recommend partnering with grantees to identify a set of transactional and transformational metrics that allow for iterative learning and adaptive implementation, and a much more systemic approach to social change. Better systems for evaluation and learning are important from the perspective of organizational effectiveness and best practices, let alone strategic impact. Grantees, in collaboration with the philanthropic community, should also develop strategies for public education around the Target 1 opportunity and communications strategies that amplify the global significance of the early conservation wins emerging from these efforts.
3. **Diversify Partnerships and Develop Direct Engagement Strategies.** We recommend Hewlett identify and support a broad, diverse set of locally-led, community-driven ENGO conservation campaigns, particularly those led by and engaged with Indigenous-led organizations, who are linked to their communities and using strategic communications and relationships to increase awareness and engagement of the public and policy-makers, thus building deeper and stronger support for conservation alongside sustainable development.
4. **Develop Philanthropic Partnerships and Catalytic Collaborations.** In addition to support for increased capacity and collaboration for Canada's conservation community, TERRAMAR recommends that Hewlett's Western Conservation program take a deliberate approach in building relationships with Canadian foundations. This will facilitate new philanthropic collaborations at a time when federal, provincial, territorial governments and First Nations are eager and need to attract new investments to realize ambitious visions for Canadian conservation and Reconciliation.
5. **Deepen Indigenous Engagement and Investment in the Enabling Conditions for Durable Conservation.** Hewlett program staff would benefit from taking a closer look at the growing body of knowledge around the best practices for durable conservation in the U.S. and Canada and apply these lessons across the Foundation's grantmaking portfolio. One of the most essential findings emerging from the evaluation is the importance of deep and authentic Indigenous partnership in securing conservation. Our work has made a compelling case that for conservation success to endure and result in transformational change, investments in enabling conditions are requisite. The long view needs to be taken and grantmaking strategies focused on strategic, systemic approaches to realizing social change, rather than short-term, tactical campaigns that capture short-term wins but do not develop and cultivate the deep base of support needed to ensure those wins last. It is vital that strategy and investments support Indigenous leadership, the development of effective governance systems, as well as expanded technical and stewardship capacities. Conservation engagement needs to elevate social well-being and contribute to a viable and just economic future for the Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

6. **Identify a Carbon Strategy.** The conservation significance of a Canadian carbon strategy came through strongly in many of the expert interviews conducted as part of the evaluation. The amount of carbon contained in Canada’s boreal forest and wetland ecosystems is globally significant. The impact that the release of these carbon stores would have on global climate is equally momentous. Strategies that are able keep this carbon in the ground represent a critical opportunity to expand conservation financing opportunities in Canada. Several pilot projects have popped up, where First Nations are drawing on the value of carbon stored in their lands to support and build the capacity for improved conservation and management of their Traditional Territories. There is a need for collaborative investment in research to scale this critical work and identify mechanisms and strategies for carbon mitigation, sequestration, as well as offset opportunities that hold the potential to catalyze the emergence of a larger carbon strategy in Canada.

## VI. Last Words

The conservation opportunity in Canada is of global significance—an opportunity that is as boundless as its geography and as deep and enduring as Indigenous relationships to its lands and waters. In the current context, with high levels of public support for conservation and Canada’s inspirational commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, there is arguably no better time to be supporting First Nations and the Canadian people to achieve their conservation vision in line with their goals for social and economic justice.