

Seal River Watershed Alliance

# SEAL RIVER WATERSHED INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREA INITIATIVE



**AT OVER 50,000 SQ KM, THE SEAL RIVER IS  
ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST  
ECOLOGICALLY INTACT WATERSHEDS.**

**Our vision is to ensure our grandchildren's grandchildren have  
the opportunity to engage in traditional practices such as  
hunting, fishing and serving as stewards of the land and  
animals within a healthy watershed.**

For more information visit: [www.SealRiverWatershed.ca](http://www.SealRiverWatershed.ca)

## GOAL

Permanently protect the Seal River Watershed from industrial development as an Indigenous Protected Area.



## INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

In the northernmost reaches of Manitoba there is a pristine expanse of tundra, wetlands and forests as vast as Nova Scotia.

Caribou and polar bears roam beneath massive flocks of birds near an estuary teeming with beluga whales and fish.

It is one of the last great wild places on our planet. There are no permanent roads. No mines. No logging interests. No industrial development of any kind.

Only one community is located in the 50,000 square kilometre watershed: the Sayisi Dene First Nation, which lies on the beautiful shores of Tadoule Lake and has a population of fewer than 400 people.

**Sayisi Dene First Nation** is leading an initiative to protect the entirety of the Seal River watershed from industrial activity in partnership with our Cree, Dene and Inuit neighbours.

Project support and funding provided by three non-profits: the **Manitoba Chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society**, the **Indigenous Leadership Initiative** and **Oceans North**.

Funding provided by: the Government of Canada; the International Boreal Conservation Campaign; and the Metcalf Foundation.

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# RISKS



**The most immediate threat is a lack of habitat protection and formalized stewardship on the landscape.**

## CARIBOU IN DECLINE

The Beverly caribou herd is considered highly vulnerable while the Qamanirjuaq herd has been declining by 2% a year since 2008.

Protecting the wintering grounds of these herds will help to secure the well-being of this magnificent animal that is culturally intertwined with our existence.

## MINING

While no mining claims exist in the region, there is evidence of uranium and gold deposits in the region and we have been approached by mining companies seeking access to our lands.

## HYDRO

Hydrological development would drastically alter the landscape. The most immediate risk is that an existing easement near the Seal River could be used to divert water to boost energy generated by dams along the Nelson River.

## ROAD ACCESS

A proposal to build a road to Nunavut would bring access to the region, making it easier for outsiders to hunt, develop mines or establish large-scale peat harvesting.



# CONSERVATION RELEVANCE

## The Seal River is one of the largest ecologically intact watersheds in the world.

Recognized as the “last truly wild river in Manitoba” the Seal was designated a **Canadian Heritage River** in 1992. It is the only great northern river in Manitoba which has not been dammed or otherwise impacted by hydrological development. It offers outstanding white-water canoeing and kayaking experiences.

Seemingly endless mud and sand flats are formed by the four-meter tides which govern the Seal River’s estuary, which is designated a globally significant **Important Bird Area**. Some 3,000 Beluga whales find refuge in the Seal River estuary to breed, calve and prepare for their winter migration.

There are at least **22 known species at risk** – including wolverines, grizzly bears, killer whales, olive-sided flycatchers and lake sturgeon – and at least **260 identified mammal, aquatic, bird, plant and insect species**.

The watershed also acts as a **massive carbon sink**. A provincial assessment of the proposed Polar Bear Park—which is similar in geography but significantly smaller at 2.9 million hectares—found it stored more than 2.4 billion tonnes of carbon.



**Protecting the Seal River Watershed – which constitutes 8% of Manitoba and 0.5% of Canada's land mass – would help Canada reach its goal of conserving 25% of our lands and fresh waters by 2025.**



# WHAT IS AN INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREA (IPA)?

***An Indigenous Protected Area conserves ecosystems and biodiversity while supporting sustainable and culturally appropriate uses.***

Indigenous governments have the primary decision-making role for managing lands and waters in an Indigenous Protected Area.

The federal government has pledged to support the development of “many” Indigenous Protected Areas as it strives to help Canada advance reconciliation, fight climate change and meet its commitments to protect 17 percent of our lands and fresh waters by 2020.

Conservation standards, management objectives and governance structures of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) can vary significantly. However, the common goal of conserving ecological and cultural values underlies all Indigenous Protected Areas.

Federal and provincial governments can play supporting roles in managing an IPA, including providing funding and capacity building for Indigenous Guardians.

The Indigenous Circle of Experts states that IPAs represent:

- a modern application of traditional values, Indigenous laws and Indigenous knowledge systems
- an exercise in cultural continuity on the land and waters
- a foundation for local Indigenous economies
- opportunities to reconnect to the land and heal both the land and Indigenous Peoples
- an acknowledgement of international law, such as Canada’s Treaties, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other relevant instruments and commitments
- an opportunity for true reconciliation to take place between Indigenous and settler societies, and between broader Canadian society and the land and waters, including relationships in pre-existing parks and protected areas
- an innovative expression of Section 35 (Constitution Act 1982).

# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF AN INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREA?

*The design and management of Indigenous Protected Areas will vary based upon the priorities and objectives of Indigenous governments.*

The Indigenous Circle of Experts states that Indigenous Protected Areas provide the opportunity to:

- promote respect for Indigenous knowledge systems
- respect protocols and ceremony
- support the revitalization of Indigenous languages
- seed conservation economies
- conserve cultural keystone species and protect food security
- adopt integrated, holistic approaches to governance and planning





## HOW WILL THIS BENEFIT OUR REGION?

*Here are just some of the many of ways  
our region and our Nations will benefit  
from protecting the Seal River Watershed.*

- Keep our drinking water clean
- Keep our rivers and lakes full of healthy fish
- Enjoy good health and well-being from pristine lands and waters
- Preserve our lands and way of life for future generations
- Build an economy on eco and cultural tourism, with spin-off benefits from handicraft, art, etc.
- Create jobs and generate pride for our young people
- Revive and promote our history, cultures and languages
- Protect our caribou herds, moose and other wildlife populations
- Foster a sense of unity, well-being and common purpose among Dene, Cree and Inuit as we work together on a project for the good of our people
- Engage in reconciliation and renewal of relationships with federal and provincial governments
- Obtain funds for land stewardship training and monitoring equipment from the Indigenous Guardians Program and other organizations



**SEAL RIVER WATERSHED AND ANCESTRAL LANDS PROTECTED AREA  
COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP  
AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE (AIP)**

**BETWEEN: Sayisi Dene First Nation**

**AND: Northlands Dene Nation**

**AND: Barren Lands First Nation**

**AND: O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation**

**PREAMBLE**

**In this AIP, our Nations are joining together in the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. We are joining together so that we may support each other and work together in our shared vision of protecting part of our respective Nations ancestral lands and resources from all industrial development. These lands have been and always will be within our respective ancestral territories.**

**Our Nations share a common goal of governing and protecting the Seal River watershed and other yet-to-be-determined ancestral lands and our resources. We will work in the spirit of cooperation and collaboration with other Nations, other governments and the larger society.**

**We recognize our respective responsibilities to protect and care for the Seal River watershed and the yet-to-be determined ancestral territories. This is an opportunity to address protected area concerns of our Nations and the larger societies in Manitoba, Canada and internationally. It also represents a unique and internationally significant opportunity to demonstrate the value our collective Indigenous knowledge in protecting and taking care of the land in the spirit of cooperation and harmony with other Nations, other governments and the larger society.**





## Seal River Watershed

Indigenous Protected Area Initiative

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Project support provided by:



INDIGENOUS  
LEADERSHIP  
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This project was undertaken  
with the financial support of  
the Government of Canada

