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**Senior Advisor for Boreal
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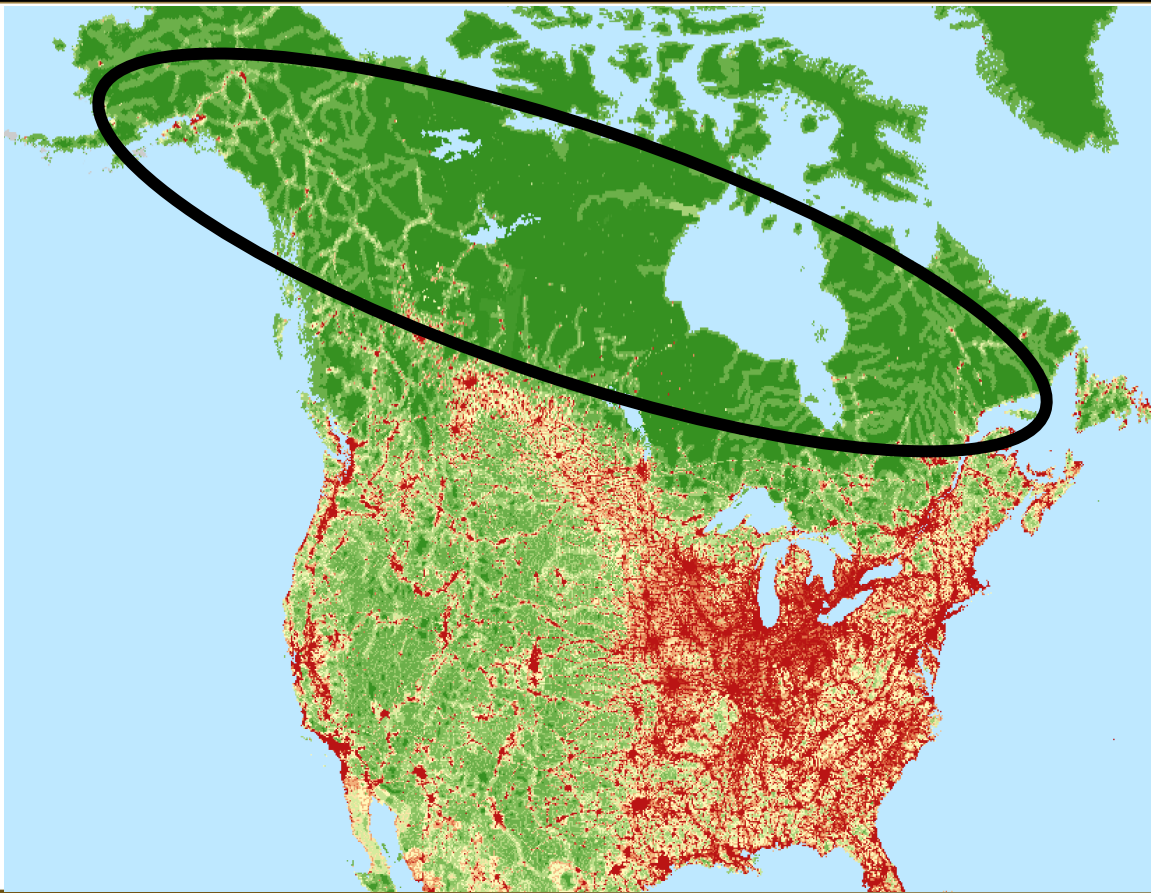


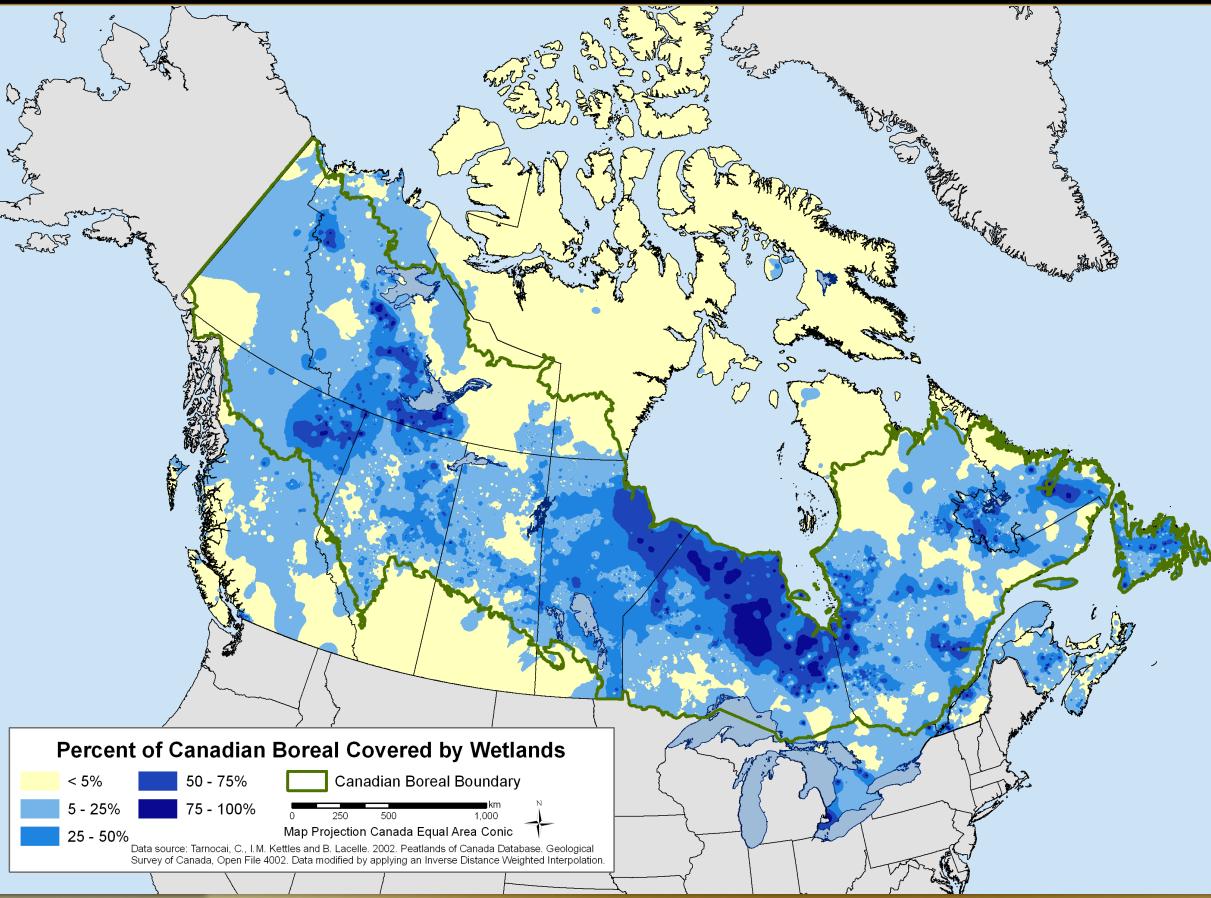


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CANADA'S BOREAL FOREST



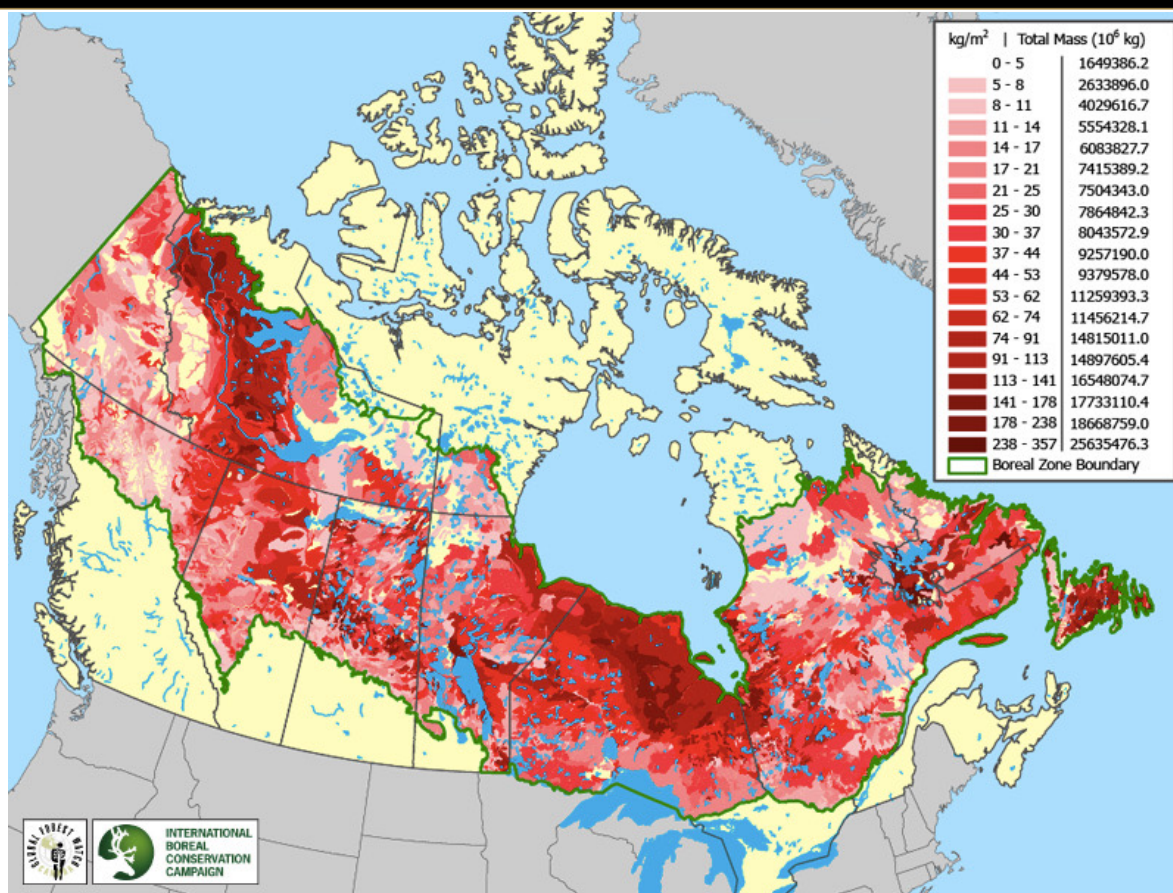


FOREST OF BLUE

THE WORLD'S
LARGEST COMPLEX
OF WETLANDS,
LAKES AND RIVERS

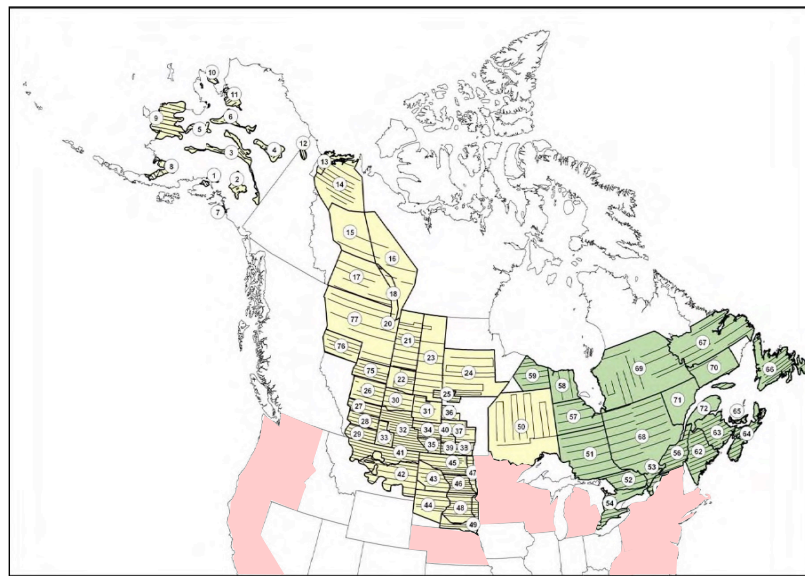
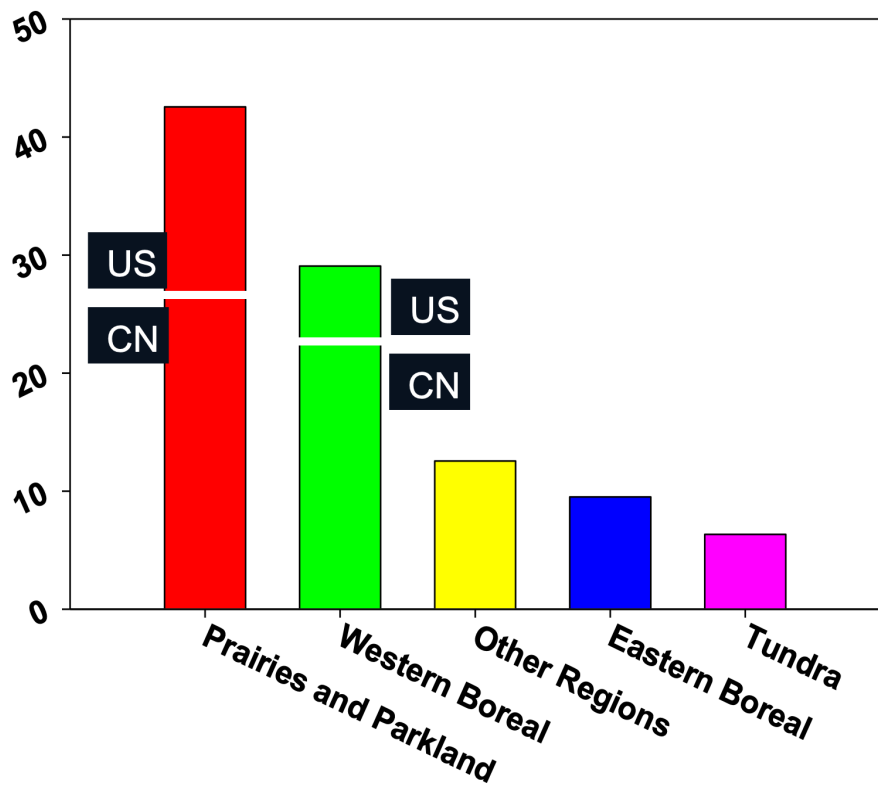


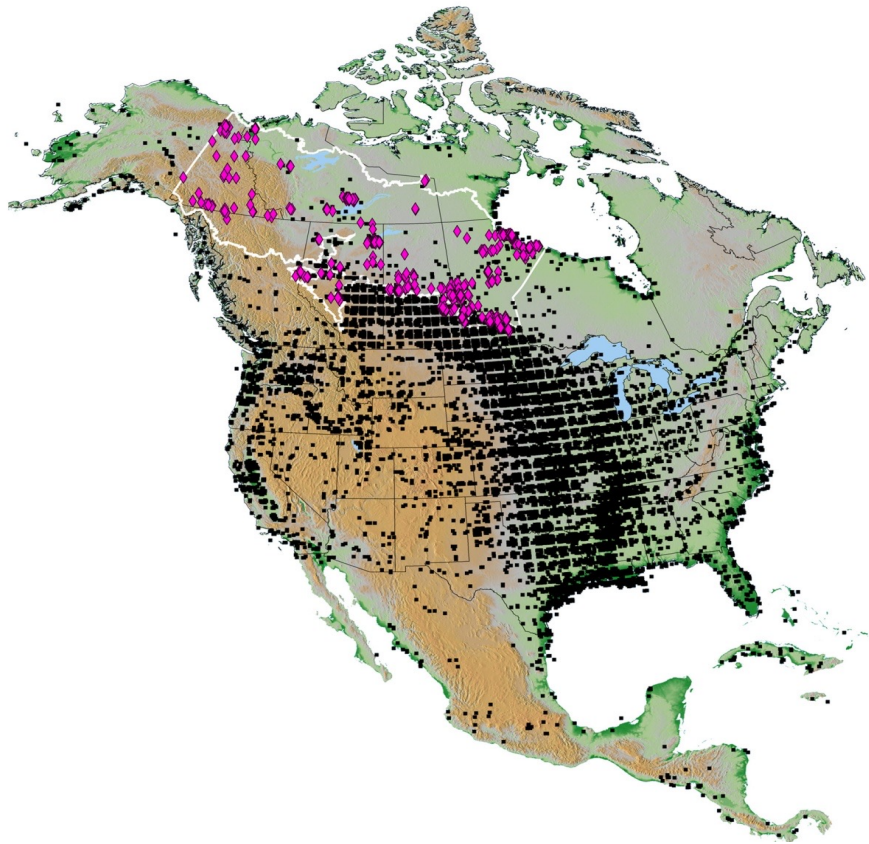
SOIL ORGANIC CARBON





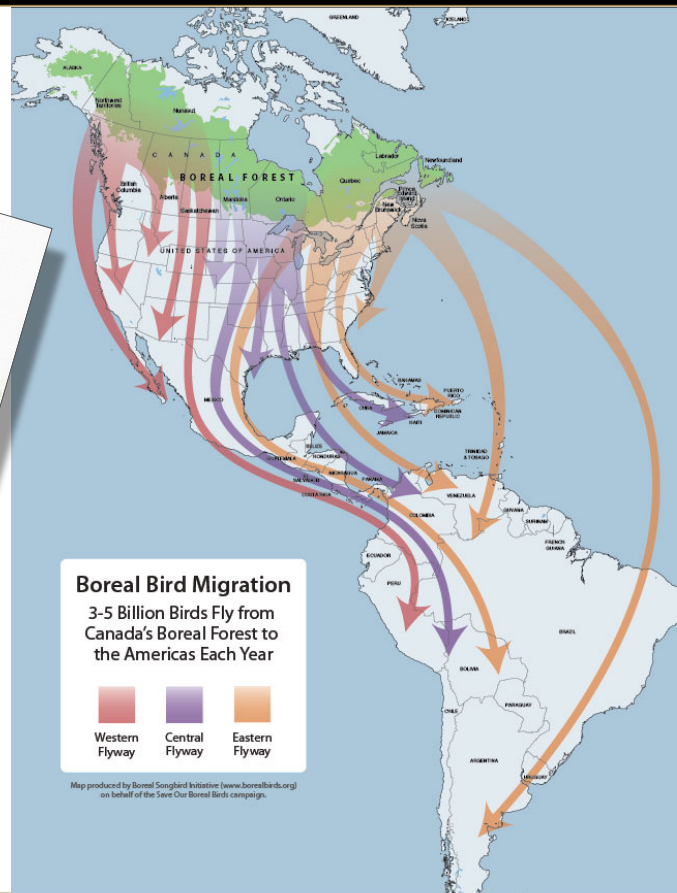
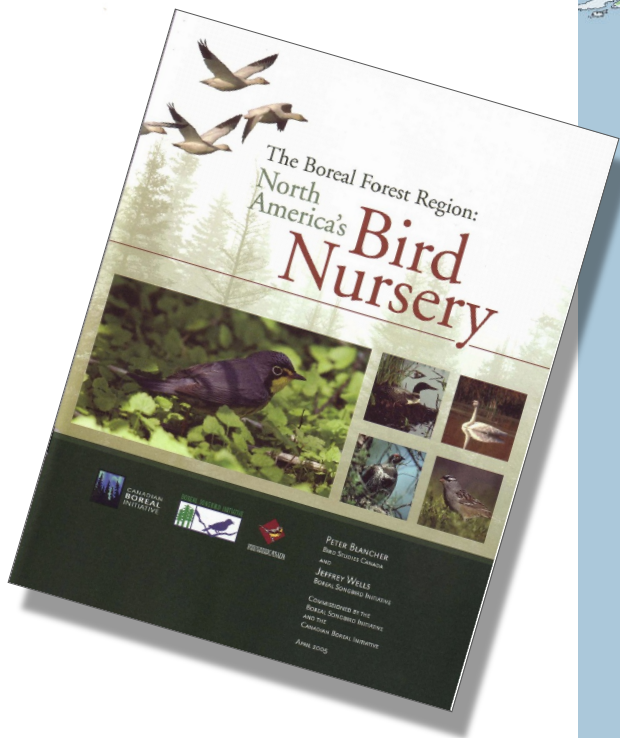
Percent of Total BPOP
(43.4 million)





**Each state benefits
from this breeding
biome, with the
Mississippi and Pacific
Flyways sharing rich
flight corridors.**

Nearly half of
North American
waterfowl and
songbirds breed
in the Boreal
Forest.





USA TODAY • THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2005 • 15A

The Forum

Where conservation and development coexist

By Nick Jans

I sit staring from the plane window down at a seemingly endless, unpopulated expanse of lakes, rivers and forest. Even from a height of 25,000 feet, the landscape spills over the rim of the horizon. As an Alaskan, I'm used to thinking large, but this place stuns me, its vastness as incomprehensible as the distances between stars. What I'm looking down on is a mere fragment of western Canada's Mackenzie River basin, an area more than twice the size of Texas. Even the Mackenzie itself is all but swallowed by the scale of things.

There's far more than wild country here. Though off the average American's radar, the largest oil pool outside of Saudi Arabia lies in the Mackenzie basin — the vast tar sands deposits in Alberta — along with untold trillions of cubic feet of natural gas there and farther north, on the river's great arctic delta.

The upward spiral of energy prices, together with promising new technologies, have made large-scale development of these fields economically viable. In fact, an 800-mile, 57 billion natural gas pipeline from the delta south through this pristine wilderness is in its planning stages; some of this gas would be used to produce the huge amounts of heat needed to extract the oil from these sands in Alberta.

We all know where this is headed. It's the same old story: Big energy companies come in, and Nature is pushed to the name of progress. But what's remarkable so far about the Mackenzie drainage development is the manner that's being chosen by an unlikely coalition of environmentalists, Indian tribes, and big industry: conservation first.

The unlikely alliance

A sharply focused organization known as the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI) has emerged as a top-level player in shaping the future of the Mackenzie basin and the course of development across Canada's boreal region — a 1.4 billion-acre stretching across the northern bow of the continent, one of the largest contiguous forestlands in the world. Working closely with all the various interests, led by respected conservationists and scientists and backed by the Pew Charitable Trusts (a major U.S. public charity that promotes environmental conservation), the CBI has fostered a plan as wide as the boreal landscape itself.

Called the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework, this charter calls for preserving at least 50% of the region's boreal in its natural, unaltered, ecologically sound, and ecologically sustaining condition. It also calls for conservationists and developers working on a level of open-ended dialogue to resolve any differences and deficits, the traditional opponents are cooperating as environmental stewards in conjunction with local and national government agencies. The Mackenzie basin, leveraged on the edge of massive change, is a key testing ground that the CBI hopes will supply a workable vision for development across Canada.

The framework's signers agree that Canada's boreal is far more than a convenient, big-bon store of raw ma-



By Greg DeGroot/Canadian Press

terials. In fact, the boreal's primary value might well be environmental. It's one of the largest carbon sinks in the world, in essence a massive air filter that pulls billions of tons of climate-warming carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and locks it into the peaty soil. And, no matter the point more concrete that Canadians and Americans share that same air and have a highly vested interest in that fact, consider that more than 325 American bird species, as many as 1 billion birds in all, migrate to the boreal to feed and raise their young each spring. Up to 17% of the birds at backyard feeders in the lower 48 states and 38% of mallards are equally Canadian. Without the boreal, they wouldn't exist.

Creating a balance

The obvious issue is somehow balancing necessary development with equally vital conservation. Clearly, the United States has a huge economic stake beyond our northern horizon, which encompasses far more

than oil and gas. A third of our softwood lumber and huge quantities of other raw materials come from Canada and wildlife.

Despite its almost unimaginable vastness, and despite the efforts of the CBI and its adherents, the boreal is shrinking at an alarming rate. Wood product demand gobble up 2 acres every minute, and about a third of it has already been allotted to timber developers. Small surprise that some land species are in sharp decline.

And with massive new projects such as the Mackenzie gas pipeline and accelerating oil development on the immediate horizon, and the world's growing appetite for ever-dividing resources, the boreal's future is far from secure.

Ironically, the very imagination-defying scale that defines it seems an impediment to focusing public concern. There is no single, sexy image or sound bite. Nevertheless, this might be one of those rare times when we get to have our cake and eat it, too. Enough of

the boreal remains intact to provide a window — albeit a time-sensitive, narrowing one — of opportunity.

As audacious and pie-in-the-sky as it seems, CBI's vision seems to be catching on. Oil giant Suncor, which owns rights to the Alberta tar sands, and paper giant Domtar are among the framework's signatories. In the Mackenzie valley, where that enormous natural gas project will one day carve its path across the land, the Decho Indian tribe has already withdrawn 52% of its vast holding as conservation areas. The Decho are attempting to hammer out financial agreements with the framework's signers, as they work toward settling land claims and treaty issues with the Canadian government.

A model?

Though progress has been marked by outbursts of contention and litigation, what happens in the Mackenzie might yet provide a template for applying the framework's principles elsewhere in Canada. While the synergy of contrasting factors is arguably unique — outstanding Indian tribe's land claims, huge areas of yet-wilderness and a relatively small, environmentally conscious population — the working world is being offered a working model for cooperative, conservation-oriented, sustainable development on a large scale.

Why, how could we afford not to? The economic and environmental stakes are all of an order, and reverberations of the outcome will flow across the globe, alive with wild wilds.

Conservation first — what a concept. Maybe, just maybe, we might learn something from Canada.

Nick Jans lives in Alaska and is a member of USA TODAY's board of contributors.

By the numbers

► No. 1: Canada's ranking among all nations, as a U.S. trading partner.

► No. 1: Canada's ranking among all nations, in oil reported to the USA (Montreal's second-Saudi Arabia third).

► 176 billion barrels: Proven oil reserves in the oil sands of the boreal's Mackenzie River basin.

► 15%: Percentage of the world's reserves in the boreal's Mackenzie River basin.

► 25%: Percentage of the world's remaining, untapped oil reserves, located in Canada's boreal realm.

► 60%: Percentage of the world's former producer nations that come to U.S. markets.

► 325: Number of American bird species that migrate to the boreal to feed and raise their young each spring.

► 17%: Percentage of the birds at backyard feeders in the lower 48 states and 38% of mallards are equally Canadian.

► 1.4 billion acres: The size of the Mackenzie basin.

► 57 billion cubic feet: Natural gas reserves in the Mackenzie basin.

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INDIGENOUS VISION AND LEADERSHIP

E. S. Curtis "Muskrat Hunter" NAC pa039774



INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION EFFORTS SEEN FROM SPACE

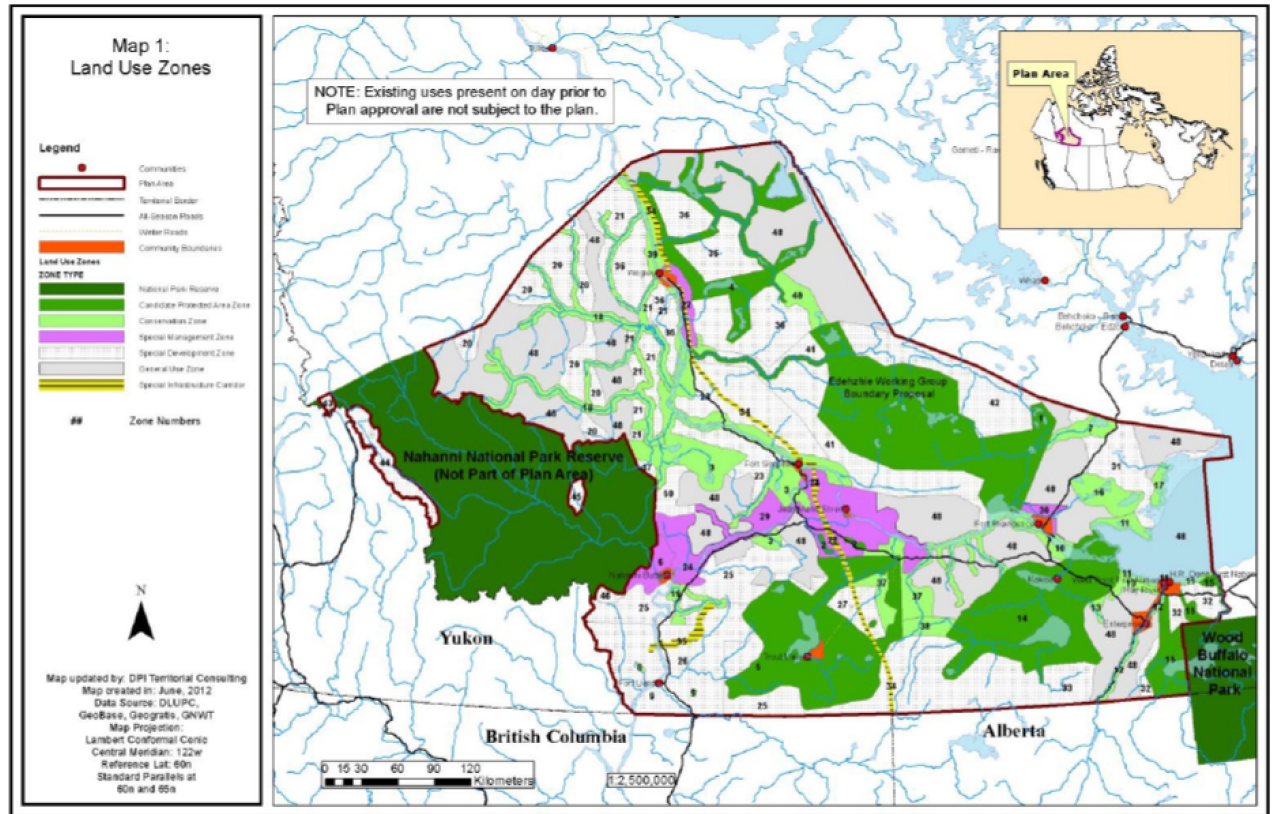




**Chief Steven Nitah
of the Aikacho peoples**

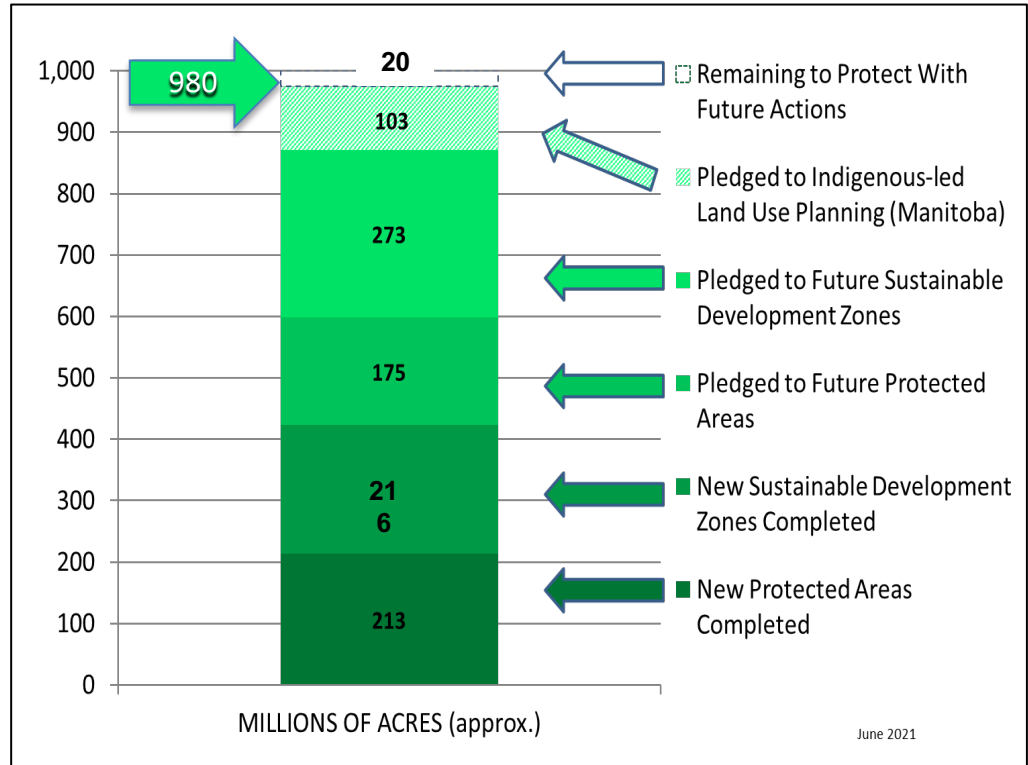


DEHCHO LAND USE PLANNING

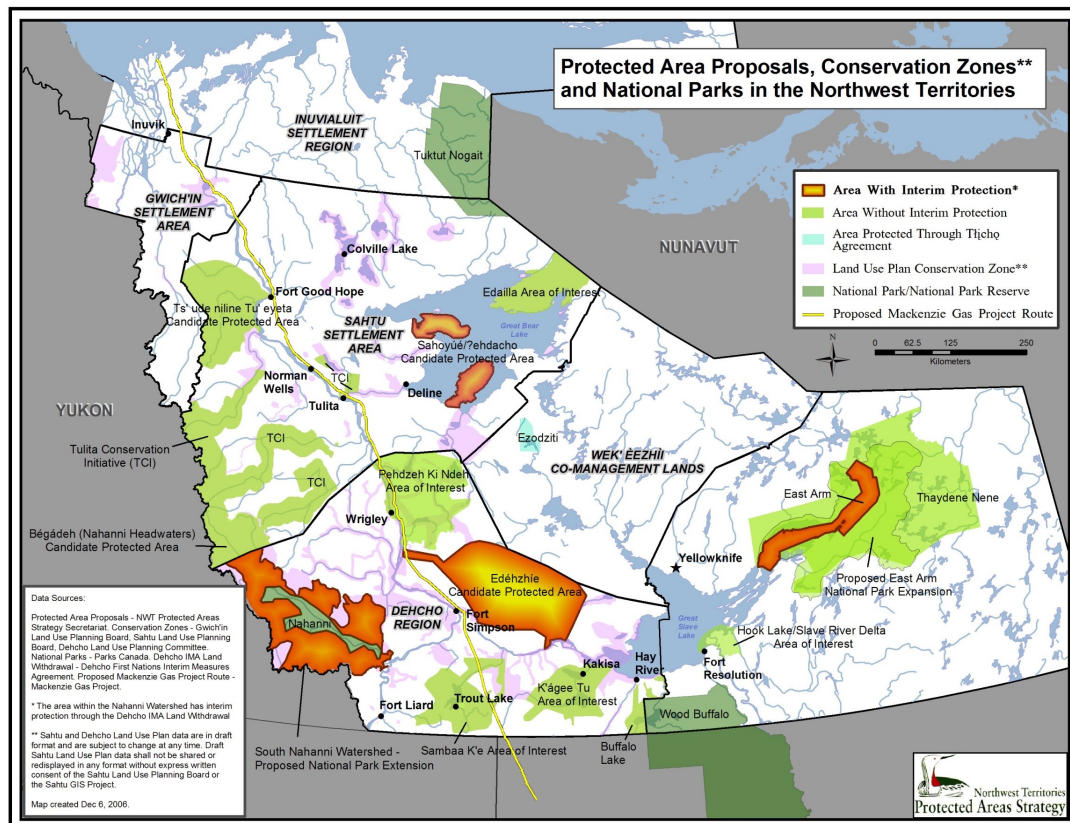


BOREAL CAMPAIGN PROGRESS TOWARDS BILLION ACRE GOAL

January 2000 – April 2023

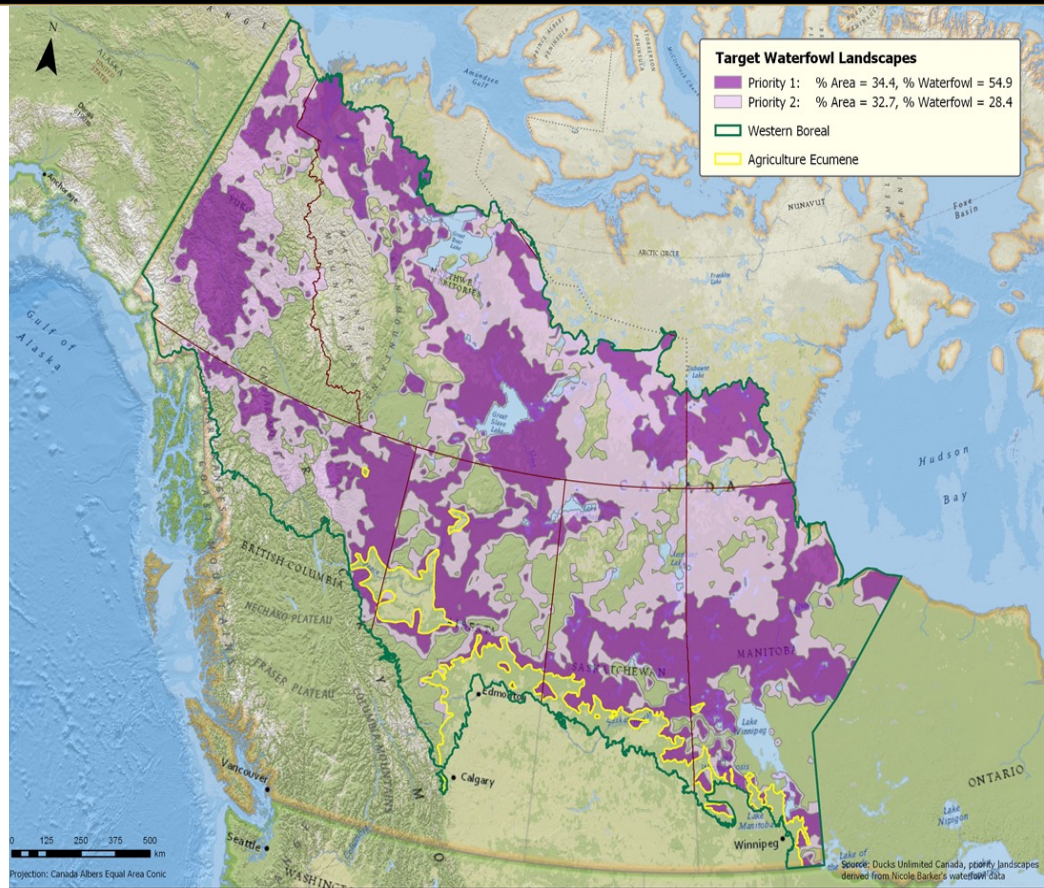


NORTHWEST TERRITORIES PROTECT AREAS STRATEGY



SPATIAL TARGETING OF WATERFOWL PRIORITY AREAS

Targeting based on
a predicted waterfowl
abundance model





[@Michaelfurtman.com](https://www.instagram.com/Michaelfurtman.com)



Indigenous peoples of the North will help chart land use and conservation.

DU is poised to be an important partner and leader in this effort.



THANK YOU, FRITZ!

