

Indigenous-led Conservation and Carbon Storage

The aligning of Indigenous-led conservation and Indigenous-led carbon storage has the potential to unlock many opportunities and benefits for Indigenous Peoples and the environment. Here are the key challenges and opportunities identified in the (2020) *Nature-Based Solutions: Indigenous-led Conservation and Carbon Storage in Canada* report.

Indigenous-led Conservation



Indigenous-led conservation re-centres Indigenous governance, knowledge, and legal systems in conservation practice. “Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas” (IPCAs) include Tribal Parks, Indigenous Cultural Landscapes, and Indigenous Community Conserved Areas. Crown governments are increasingly supportive of IPCAs because they count towards Canada’s conservation targets and can be processes of reconciliation.

Indigenous-led Carbon Storage



Carbon in the atmosphere is naturally captured and stored in ecosystems like forests, wetlands and peatlands often located within Indigenous territories. These “carbon sinks” reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and can be commodified into “carbon offsets” in the emerging carbon economy. Reforestation of degraded landscapes, conservation of ecosystems, and improved forest management practices are examples of projects that could generate carbon offsets for Indigenous Nations and communities in Canada.

Challenges



Governance



Jurisdiction

Crown recognition of Indigenous Peoples’ jurisdiction over their territories is limited and “carbon rights” have not yet been defined.

Carbon and Atmospheric Benefit Sharing Agreements
Negotiating agreements with government partners can be time-consuming, slow, and few precedents exist in Canada.

Political Instability
Disagreements between provinces and the federal government about carbon pricing and climate policy creates confusion about carbon opportunities.

Inter-tribal Politics
Carbon and conservation projects can create tensions among Indigenous Nations with overlapping, or shared territories.

Operational



Lack of Clarity

Policies and financial instruments for developing carbon markets are lacking. Clear protocols outlining potential opportunities are needed.

Achieving “Additionality”
Well-stewarded Indigenous lands may not meet the additionality requirement for a carbon offset project. Activities don’t ‘count’ unless the carbon storage would not have occurred in a business-as-usual scenario.

Financial Constraints
Capital is required to purchase privately owned land to create IPCAs and to complete feasibility and verification of a carbon project.

Technical Challenges
Measuring how much carbon is stored in an ecosystem can be challenging and is required for developing carbon offsets.

Social



Capacity Issues

Developing carbon offsets require significant resources and time. The rigid rules and regulations related to carbon offset projects add to this challenge.

Competing Economic Interests
Carbon and conservation related activities (e.g. restoration and protection) may prevent the pursuit of other non-aligned economic ventures (e.g. logging, mining).

Community Buy-in
Carbon opportunities can be perceived as risky, complicated and can lead to fears of dispossession. Few examples of Indigenous-led carbon offsets exist.

Ethical and Philosophical Issues
Carbon markets can be perceived as “greenwashing.” The commodification of nature (i.e. carbon) can be perceived as a threat to the inherent value of intact, healthy ecosystems.

Lack of Trust
A lack of trust can make partnership building with Crown governments or among Indigenous communities a challenge.

Opportunities



Alignment Between Indigenous-led Conservation and Carbon Storage

Carbon markets can be more complimentary to territorial stewardship and protection than extractive industries.

Self-determination

IPCAs and carbon projects established and managed according to Indigenous legal, knowledge, and governance systems are an expression of Indigenous nationhood.

Economic Diversification

Carbon markets can contribute to economic diversification. Developing new local markets can create direct and indirect jobs and spin-off benefits.

Restoration and Protection

Restoring degraded landscapes can increase the net carbon storage of the ecosystem, which can meet the “additionality” requirement.

Conservation Economy

Carbon markets and offsets—paired with protection—can generate employment and funds to seed social enterprises and new businesses with a conservation/sustainability focus.

Indigenous Guardians

Guardians could monitor the climate, measure carbon, and deliver on carbon projects. Carbon offsets could generate capital to support Guardians programs.

Cultural Revitalization

Indigenous-led conservation is linked to cultural maintenance and revitalization.

Find the (2020) *Nature-Based Solutions: Indigenous-led Conservation and Carbon Storage in Canada* report at <https://conservation-reconciliation.ca/resources>

