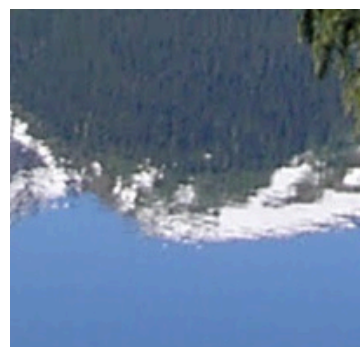
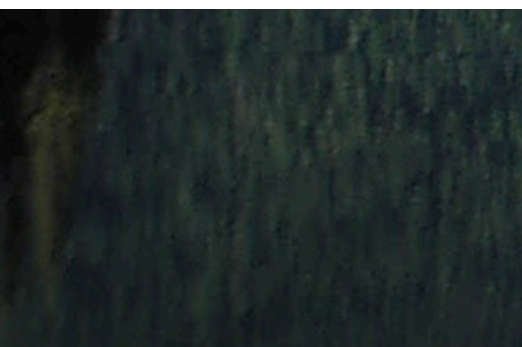
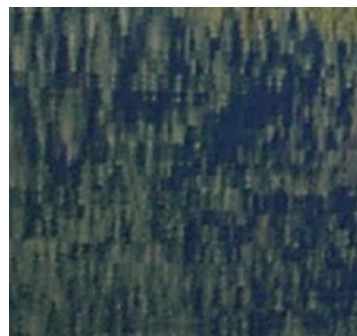
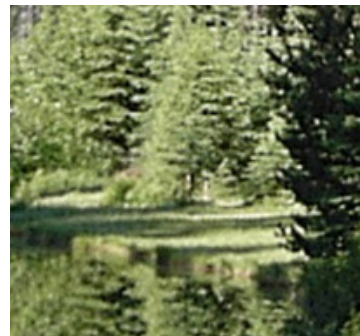
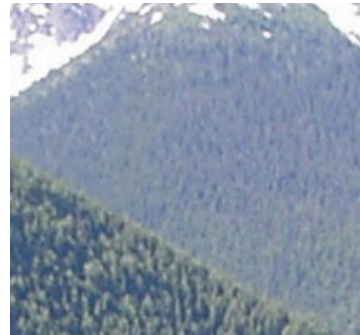




# Investing in Communities through Private Land Conservation



The **Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts (ACLT)** represents and supports 150 local and regional land trusts across Canada. ACLT, its regional alliance partners, and local and regional land trusts protect nature through the stewardship and conservation of private land in Canada's **most vital landscapes**.

Local and regional land trusts have demonstrated capacity to acquire ecologically sensitive private lands and steward the land over the long term, providing access to nature for current and future generations. A total of **150 local and regional land trusts** are led by more than **13,000 staff** and volunteers who manage **5700+ properties** - and conserve over **255,000 hectares** of land - worth more than **\$1.8 billion**.

Federal government support is needed to expand protected areas and help local and regional land trusts steward the land in perpetuity for all Canadians to enjoy. Land trusts' efforts are concentrated in southern Canada, where communities are critical to the success of conservation efforts. The programs proposed herein represent a long-term investment in the development of local and regional organizations with intimate knowledge of their landscapes and a strong grounding in local and regional communities across southern Canada.

## Recommendations

### 1. Renewal of the Natural Heritage Conservation Fund (NHCP)

- Renew the NHCP beyond 2026.
- Designate ACLT as the national representative of regional and local land trusts within the NHCP-Land Trust Conservation Fund (NHCP-LTCF) by including ACLT as a signatory on the Contribution Agreement.

### 2. Redesign of the NHCP-LTCF program and increase the share of funds for local and regional land trusts

- Rename and redesign the NHCP-LTCF into an **NHCP Southern Landscapes Fund (SLF)** and increase funding to **\$25 million per year for five years**, starting in 2026. The NHCP-SLF will be a safe investment of critical funding that will continue to support local and regional land trusts in southern Canada to conserve private land. It would seek to fund projects that address multiple and interconnected **biodiversity priorities**. Regional and local land trusts have the capacity to achieve significantly more under a redesigned program. The SLF will deliver outcomes related to expanding protected areas, restoring degraded landscapes, protecting species at risk, adapting to climate change, improving land management, and mobilizing private resources. At \$25 million per year, this fund will deliver an **additional 15,000 hectares of conserved land per year** across southern Canada.
- The potential to expand and improve the NHCP-LTCF is great. The tables below show that in 2023-24, the NHCP-LTCF supported only 31 of 990, or **3%, of the projects** and only 5,741 of 54,710, or **10%, of the hectares** delivered nationally by local and regional land trusts.

Conservation Achieved 2023 - 2024		
	Area Protected (ha)	Projects
Canada Total	54,710	980
(NHCP) Government Funded	5,741	31
Difference	48,969	949

National Land Trusts Project and Hectare Details		
	Area Protected (ha)	Projects
Fee-simple	20,098	432
Easements	16,871	106
Land conserved and held by others	17,597	433
Nature Reserves (QC)	143	9



### 3. Create a Canada Conservation Investment Fund

- Establish a new **\$150 million** endowment fund that will create a long-term funding stream to strengthen the capacity of local and regional land trusts to care for natural spaces in perpetuity. Federal funding to expand protected areas is **critical to nature conservation**, and to uphold the designation of "permanent" protection, perpetual stewardship is imperative.
- By creating an endowment fund, the Canada Conservation Investment Fund will help ensure the long-term care of Canada's network of privately conserved areas. The Fund will encourage **private investments** in conservation, nurture the growth, diversity, and **capacity of the local and regional** land trust sector, **catalyze job creation and retention**, and contribute to the **expansion of land conservation** programs. The structure of the Fund could be modelled on the successful Canada Cultural Investment Fund and administered by either the Government of Canada or the ACLT.

## The Importance of Southern Landscapes

Canada's southern landscapes are some of the country's most biodiversity-rich areas. At the same time, more than **80% of the population** lives in southern Canada and most economic activity occurs in the south. This overlay of **nature and economic activity** requires a solution that benefits both, as well as the families and communities in these regions. Land trusts can provide a solution where both **nature and humans can thrive**.

Canadians love nature, and we're proud of our **natural heritage**. However, with changing economic realities and societal norms, fewer Canadians have access to nature. Spending time in nature on a regular basis has myriad health benefits, both for **physical and mental well-being**. For this reason, it is imperative that natural spaces are within close geographical proximity to populated areas.

## Background

First launched by the federal government in 2007 as the Natural Areas Conservation Program, the NHCP has protected significant tracts of ecologically sensitive land across the country. The program creates permanent conservation solutions through collaboration between landowners, Indigenous communities, industry, and other levels of government. The NHCP has protected more than **840,000 hectares** of ecologically sensitive lands including grasslands, forests, lakes, and wetlands. The program has a successful legacy, one worth building on while introducing important improvements.

More recently, Canada was instrumental in the creation of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, and has committed to its 23 targets (including the commitment to protect 30% of Canada's land, freshwater, and ocean by 2030). **Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy** was released in June 2024 to advance work on these targets.



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