

QUÉBEC ADDS OVER 1% OF ITS TERRITORY IN PROTECTED AREAS

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In May 2008, Québec added 23 new regions to its network of protected areas. These new regions cover an area of 18,220 km², equivalent to over 1% of the province of Québec. Protected areas now account for 6% of the total size for Québec, extending a total area more than 100,000 km². Québec is now one of the Canadian provinces with the largest portion of its total size devoted to protected areas.

The new protected regions will bolster Québec's track record in the protection of biodiversity, particularly in the boreal zone, which now has over 4,000 km² in additional areas.

Significant Expansion in Four Natural Provinces

The Central Laurentides Natural Province

Natural provinces are the first ecological divisions of the territory of Québec. In 2008, 7.2% of the central Laurentides natural province is now protected areas, increasing from 0.5% in 1999. Creation of the proposed Montagnes-Blanches biodiversity reserve (959 km²), north of the Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean region, ensures protection for an exceptional biodiversity site. The territory features an irregular topography and its deep valleys generate a variety of microclimates. The region is home to one of the last great pristine forests south of the northern limit of forestry operations. The proposed biodiversity reserve is also an important part of the range of woodland caribou, today designated as a vulnerable species.

Southern Laurentides Natural Province

Québec has made enormous progress in this natural province, which touches on 8 administrative regions. A total of 18 new protected areas have been added within the territory of this natural province, creating over 3,700 km² of protected lands. The percentage of protected area in this natural province now stands at 5.9%, compared to a previous 2.4% in 1999. Two areas that require protection exemplify the diversity of the newly protected natural environments:

- The proposed Rivière Dumoine aquatic reserve protects an approximately 1,500 km² area in Témiscamingue and Outaouais. The aquatic reserve will safeguard one of the last natural rivers in southern Québec. Its shorelines are protected over a 140 km south-north gradient, where an extraordinary variety of stands of maple, white pine, black spruce, cedar and other species thrive.
- The proposed Lac-Némiscachingue biodiversity reserve, covering an area of 253 km² Its largest lake (bearing the same name) is 35 km² and drains a large part of the proposed reserve. The territory protects ecosystems representative of the transition zone between the balsam fir-yellow birch stand domain and balsam fir-white birch stand domain. The reserve also protects cultural sites of importance to the Atikamekw community of Manawan.

The Abitibi and James Bay Lowlands Natural Province

Québec is progressing towards maximum protection within this natural province by adding two proposed biodiversity reserves, namely the Lac-Dana and Tourbières-Boisées-du-Chiwakamu biodiversity reserves. The reserves span an area of 506 km², boosting the proportion of protected areas in this natural province to 7.2%, up from 0.4% in 1999. Both proposed biodiversity reserves preserve rare and pristine ecosystems around Lac Evans. Since the range of woodland caribou is contained within the area, these proposed biodiversity reserves will provide further protection for this vulnerable species in this sector of the boreal forest.

Low Hills of the Grande Rivière Natural Province

The proportion of protected areas in this natural province now stands at 13.8%, increasing from 0% in 1999. Québec is creating a land reserve for purposes of a protected area covering 8,750 km² in the sector of Pointe Louis-XIV, Rivière Roggan and Lac Burton. The special status of this territory will better protect sites of interest, including Pointe Louis XIV, which contains weather, plant and wildlife features unique at this latitude.

Québec is also creating the proposed Paakumshumwaau-Maatuskaau biodiversity reserve, covering an area of 4,259 km². The territory is of enormous ecological and cultural value, particularly to the Cree community of Wemindji. The watersheds that the reserve protects are almost all in a natural state. Archeological excavations have revealed evidence of ongoing occupation of the territory over the last 3,500 years. In fact, an innovative cooperative relationship between the community of Wemindji and McGill University is the reason behind this territory being given proposed biodiversity reserve status. As a result of the cooperative relationship, traditional and scientific knowledge have merged to help safeguard the territory.