

**\*\*NEWS RELEASE\*\***

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**World Environment Day on June 5<sup>th</sup> is an opportunity for territory to plan for a wild future**

- **Yukon can play globally significant role in protecting biodiversity**
- **Region boasts large landscapes with thriving ecosystems with iconic mammals such as grizzly bears, caribou, and wolves**
- **Valley bottoms seen as key to conservation**



Liard River Floodplain cr: Hilary Cooke



Frances Lake Cr: Hilary Cooke

High Res photos available [here](#)

**Whitehorse, Canada (June 5, 2017)**—In celebration of World Environment Day today, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada (WCS Canada) has released, “Securing a Wild Future: Planning for Landscape-scale Conservation of Yukon’s Boreal Mountains,” —a report mapping how best to conserve the globally important wild areas of Yukon’s Boreal Mountain region.

“Yukon is one of the few places remaining on the planet where large wild areas with fully functioning ecosystems and intact predator-prey systems continue to thrive,” said WCS scientist and report author Dr. Hilary Cooke. “We have a tremendous opportunity to get it right when it comes to preserving our planet’s natural wealth.”

The WCS study found that creating a conservation network of large, undisturbed landscapes covering at least 50 percent of the Boreal Mountain region, which spans the southern half of the territory, is the best way to ensure that Yukon's biodiversity and natural areas are kept healthy now and in the future.

"We explored multiple scenarios for conservation networks that combine the most undisturbed watersheds with areas large enough to sustain big natural forces, such as wild fire. From this set of thousands of potential conservation networks, we zeroed in on the best ones for conserving the full extent of natural biodiversity in the region," Dr. Cooke explains.

The WCS Canada study is an important tool for conservation in this region, where mountainous terrain and high-elevation plateaus combine with more northerly latitudes to add a whole new dimension – and many unique ecosystems -- to the boreal forest that stretches across northern Canada.

Unlike much of the rest of the world, the region has also gone relatively undisturbed by human infrastructure and development and therefore still supports healthy populations of our largest mammals, such as caribou, grizzly bears, and wolves, plus over 200 bird species and one of the longest salmon runs in North America.

"We know Yukoners value our natural areas, fish, and wildlife, and want to keep these things healthy for future generations. That's why we have identified and mapped gaps, opportunities, and priorities for conservation in the region," Dr. Cooke explains.

A key finding of the study was the urgent need to prioritize valley bottoms for conservation, because these are where both human development pressure and biological values, such as wildlife habitat, are often highest.

It is expected that the Yukon government, in conjunction with First Nations, will resume regional land use planning in the near future. The WCS Canada study is meant to inform this work by examining different scenarios for a network of large, intact conservation areas.

"We need to be proactive in planning for conservation before important and unique natural areas, like valley bottoms, are eroded by the cumulative impacts of unplanned development," stated Dr. Cooke, adding, "Of course, conservation networks will only work if we also take care to manage our activities on the rest of the landscape in a way that minimizes our ecological impact. We need to carefully manage things like mines, roads, and forestry to ensure that landscapes remain ecologically healthy even outside dedicated conservation areas."

"Canada has a tremendous natural wealth that should be protected for its inherent value, but also for the social, cultural, and spiritual values it provides for Canadians. We have a unique opportunity and responsibility here in Yukon to pro-actively conserve an ecologically unique and globally significant region," Dr. Cooke concludes.

The study, including maps of priority areas for conservation, is available at [wcscanada.org](http://wcscanada.org)

This work was generously supported by The W. Garfield Weston Foundation.

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**Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Canada** was incorporated as a conservation organization in Canada in 2004. The mission of WCS Canada is to conserve wildlife and wild places by understanding the issues, developing science-based solutions, and working with others to carry out conservation actions across Canada. WCS Canada is distinguished from other environmental organizations through our role in generating science through field and applied research, and by using our results to encourage collaboration among scientific communities, organizations and policy makers to achieve conservation results. WCS Canada is independently registered and managed, while retaining a strong collaborative working relationship with sister WCS programs in more than 55 countries. Visit: [www.wcscanada.org](http://www.wcscanada.org)

**The W. Garfield Weston Foundation** is a Canadian charitable trust, established by Garfield and Reta Weston and their nine children in 1958. It was the belief of the founders that since it was the hard work of Canadian employees that made the Foundation possible, that its charitable funding should be directed to the benefit of Canadians. The mandate of The W. Garfield Weston Foundation includes neuroscience, land conservation, education and research in Canada's North.