



FOLIO 1:

Indigenous-Led Protected Areas

Short-billed Dowitchers. Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) established the goal of effectively conserving and managing 30 percent of lands, waters, and seas by 2030 (“30x30”, or [Target 3](#)). This series of Audubon briefs features practical, action-oriented options for reaching the 30x30 target through a variety of approaches that deliver benefits for biodiversity, communities, and the climate.

Indigenous Conservation Leadership

Indigenous Peoples manage vast areas of lands, waters, and seas—an estimated 22 percent of the world’s land area, and 11 percent of global forests. Indigenous lands are critical not only for culture, livelihoods, and human wellbeing, but for their incomparable value in conserving biodiversity, protecting ecosystems, and combatting climate change. Indigenous lands hold an estimated 80 percent of Earth’s biodiversity, including the habitat of countless bird species. Studies show that deforestation rates in forests managed by Indigenous Peoples are lower than in comparable areas on average, while carbon sequestration rates are higher.

Opportunity: Indigenous-Led Protected Areas

Recognizing and supporting Indigenous-led protected areas represents an important tool for

reaching 30x30 targets for many countries, while also contributing to complementary national goals such as NDC targets or migratory species protection pledges. The specific form this recognition may take will vary by country. In some cases, Indigenous Territories or Reservations are officially recognized, with biodiversity conservation integrated into conservation and management plans. In others an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas may be created, with biodiversity conservation as one objective. In still other cases an area may be co-managed by Indigenous and a national and/or subnational government, again with biodiversity conservation as a clear objective. Financing mechanisms also vary, and may include dedicated trust funds or budgetary resources, revenue generated through tourism or sustainable resource use, crediting, and grants among other options.

Case Studies

MANITOBA, CANADA

Seal River Watershed

The Seal River Watershed encompasses an area of 5 million ha (12 million acres)—nearly the size of Costa Rica. It is one of the largest ecologically-intact watersheds in the world, with pristine forests, lakes, and rivers that shelter at least 30 at-risk species including polar bears, wolverines, beluga whales—and millions of birds. The area is home to the Sayisi Dene First Nation, and also encompasses the traditional territories of the as Northlands Dene Nation, Barren Lands First Nation, and O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation. These four Nations, collectively known as the Seal River Watershed Alliance, joined the governments of Canada and Manitoba to release a joint proposal to designate the Seal River Watershed as an Indigenous

Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA). The proposal includes two additional layers of protection, establishing a national park and a provincial park, and identifies dedicated funding for the area. The co-management of this area, which stretches from vast inland forests to the Hudson Bay, not only represents a significant contribution to Canada’s 30x30 target, but safeguards a critical carbon sink, conserves the habitat of dozens of threatened and endangered species, and protects the lands of the First Nations who have long stewarded this area.



The Seal River Watershed. Photo: Jordan Melograna



The Loma Santa protected area in the Bolivian Amazon.
Photo: Daniel Alarcón Arias

BOLIVIA

Loma Santa Indigenous Conservation Area

Loma Santa, in the Bolivian Amazon, is located within the Multiethnic Indigenous Territory (TIM, for its acronym in Spanish). Loma Santa is home to five Peoples (Mojeño-trinitario, Mojeño-ignaciano, T’simane, Yuracaré y Movima) in 28 communities stretching across 200,000 ha (494,200 acres) of wetlands, alluvial grasslands, and forests. This area—the size of Cape Verde—is home to more than 279 species of birds, as well as numerous other species. In 2025, based on a law championed by the TIM, Loma Santa was recognized by the Bolivian government as the first Indigenous Protected Area in the country’s Amazon region. Supported by the

ConservaAves program, the Loma Santa communities are now implementing a management plan and developing a financial sustainability plan, including proposals for dedicated long-term financing. The recognition of this conservation area not only supports Bolivia’s achievement of its 30x30 goal, but also contributes to the conservation of numerous hundreds of species, provides an important brake to fires that have ravaged the region, and strengthens the recognition of land rights of the five Peoples who will continue to manage and protect this land.

For more information, or to request future policy briefs, please contact Christine.dragisic@audubon.org

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