Executive Summary for Decision-Makers

Conserving nature, cultivating prosperity:

The socioeconomic benefits of private land conservation in Québec

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August 2026

Natural area conservation is often viewed primarily as an environmental expenditure. The findings presented in this report suggest otherwise: conservation is a productive investment that generates economic activity, strengthens climate resilience, protects strategic natural capital, and delivers benefits whose value greatly exceeds the costs incurred.

Public investment in conservation should therefore be considered as a part of a climate risk management strategy. By protecting natural capital and the ecosystem services it provides, conserved natural areas contribute to the prosperity and resilience of Québec and Canada.

A FULL-FLEDGED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The member organizations of the Regroupement des organismes de conservation du Québec (ROCQ) working in the field of nature conservation, generate significant economic benefits. Their activities and operating expenditures support **640 jobs in Québec** and generate more than **$48 million in value added to the Quebec economy.**

Every dollar of value added created directly by conservation organizations, in addition to preserving natural capital, generates an additional **$0.92 amongst suppliers and consumers.** Conservation is therefore a sector with a strong potential to stimulate an economic activity, **with a value-added multiplier effect comparable to those of other economic sectors.** The sector's capacity to stimulate economic activity is greater than that of the oil and gas sector, as well as the mining sector.

PROTECTING ESSENTIAL NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Conserved natural areas are productive assets that support the functioning of the economy. They provide valuable ecosystem services such as flood regulation, pollutant treatment, and habitat preservation for biodiversity. **Replacing these services through human-made interventions would be extremely costly** and, in some cases, impossible. The degradation would consequently impose significant economic and social costs for governments, businesses, and communities.

Conservation is therefore an investment that protects natural infrastructure that supports long-term prosperity and resilience.

The natural areas conserved by ROCQ member organizations provide ecosystem services with **an estimated economic value of $678.3 million every year,** for as long as these ecosystems continue to exist. These natural areas estimated capitalized value is **$22.6 billion**. In addition, the carbon stored within these ecosystems is worth several billion dollars.

Natural capital provides essential services in the same way as public infrastructure. However, no human-built infrastructure can deliver the same services with the same efficiency, and at the same cost. Conservation preserves access to a supply of services for which there are no effective substitutes, making it essential to the resilience of communities.

A PROFITABLE INVESTMENT

Investments dedicated to conservation generate **substantial social returns,** beyond what can be captured through monetary valuation alone.

The value of the services provided by conserved natural areas **far exceeds the acquisition cost of the lands** on which those ecosystems are located. Furthermore, many ecosystem services are not accounted for in the monetary estimates, including benefits related to health, culture, identity, and quality of life.

The monetary values presented in this report should therefore be interpreted as minimum estimates. While the analysis demonstrates that conservation generates value that substantially exceeds the initial investment it requires, the figures presented only capture a portion of the full socioeconomic value of conserved ecosystems.

Conservation therefore appears to be one of the most effective public investments for simultaneously supporting economic prosperity, strengthening climate resilience, and enhancing collective well-being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

These findings point to several directions for public policy that would be advantageous for Canada on economic, social, and environmental fronts.

First, expenditures in conservation should be recognized as productive investments in natural capital and in the broader economy.

Second, the economic value of ecosystem services should be integrated more systematically into public decision-making, while recognizing the irreplaceable nature of many natural assets.

Third, conservation organizations should be regarded as effective and strategic partners in advancing climate resilience, biodiversity conservation, and socio-economic objectives.

Finally, investments in conservation should be recognized as levers of economic, climate, and social benefits simultaneously, making them high-return public investments.

In summary, nature conservation appears to be one of the most effective ways to preserve natural infrastructure that provides essential ecosystem services at relatively low cost. Moreover, the sector also generates measurable economic benefits. When the value of ecosystem services and the avoided costs associated with their degradation are taken into account, conservation emerges as a strategic investment in long-term prosperity and resilience. **At a time when economic and climate resilience are becoming increasingly important, Canada cannot afford to overlook this opportunity for profitable investment.**