

# INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

## ILI Statement on \$6.4 Million Investment in First Nations Guardians Programs

**Ottawa: Wednesday, July 17th, 2019:** The Government of Canada announced that it will invest \$6.4 million in the First Nations stream of the Indigenous Guardians Pilot Program. Twenty-two projects—some existing and some new—will receive funds to support Indigenous-led conservation. The projects were selected by the First Nations Federal Pilot Joint Working Group on Guardians—a decision-making body that includes eight Indigenous experts in land management and four federal representatives.

Valérie Courtois, Director of the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI), made the following statement:

“The Indigenous Leadership Initiative welcomes today’s announcement. Indigenous Guardians programs are proven to be good for the land, good for people and good for local economies. This will be especially true as Indigenous Guardians get set to take a central management role in Indigenous Conserved and Protected Areas across the country. This investment will ensure more Indigenous Nations generate these benefits—and more lands and clean waters are conserved for all Canadians.

“Today’s announcement grows out of an innovative, new approach to collaboration. Rather than the Government of Canada creating and delivering a program to Indigenous Peoples, the Joint Working Group empowers Indigenous and Crown representatives to cooperate as partners. It offers an example of what reconciliation looks like in action. It also prepares us for a fulsome partnership in the long-term with the Government of Canada.”

The Joint Working Group’s process was shaped by deep expertise in Indigenous-led stewardship. The Indigenous members of the group have over 100 years of collective experience launching and managing guardian programs, including representatives from the oldest existing programs. The group also includes leaders who have designed new Guardian programs recently and leaders who work in a variety of rights contexts, from treaty to titled and non-settled lands. The ILI is grateful to the members of the Joint Working Group for their hard work and commitment to this initiative.

The Joint Working Group brought all this knowledge to bear in shaping the First Nations Guardians Pilot Program. It developed a new process for selecting the recipients of the fund—a process aimed at building the case for future investment from the Federal government in existing regional and community-based initiatives as well as new programs.

Investing in Guardian programs delivers results. Analyses of two Indigenous Guardians programs in the Northwest Territories—Lutsel K’e NiHat’ni Dene and the Dehcho K’ehodi—found that every \$1 invested in programs delivered \$2.50 in conservation, social and economic benefits. Sustained funding would increase that return on investment to \$3.70, researchers concluded.

“Investments in Guardian initiatives today will generate benefits into the future on issues that matter to all Canadians: health, education, well-being, clean water and vibrant lands. It will also help strengthen our Nations in meeting their goals for the future,” said Ms. Courtois.