

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# The Business Case for a National First Nations Guardians Network

A Model for Implementing Reconciliation, Nation-to-Nation,  
*UNDRIP*, and Ecological Conservation & Stewardship Responsibilities

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**INDIGENOUS  
LEADERSHIP  
INITIATIVE**

## Table of Contents

<b>ACRONYMS &amp; ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>KEY DEFINITIONS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>VISION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH</b>	<b>7</b>
FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES –SELF-DETERMINATION, NATION-TO-NATION, & GIFT OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES	7
REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT & INTERVIEW PROCESS	8
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS STEWARDSHIP IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS</b>	<b>10</b>
THE WORKING ON COUNTRY INDIGENOUS RANGERS PROGRAM IN AUSTRALIA	10
LEGISLATION IN <i>AOTEAROA</i> / NEW ZEALAND	11
<b>ROLE OF GUARDIANS IN LAND- &amp; MARINE-USE PLANNING &amp; CO-MANAGEMENT / CO-GOVERNANCE</b>	<b>11</b>
GUARDIANS IN FIRST NATIONS LAND-USE PLANNING & IN CO-MANAGEMENT / CO-GOVERNANCE	11
Guardians & Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas	12
GUARDIANS IN FIRST NATIONS MARINE-USE PLANNING & IN CO-MANAGEMENT / CO-GOVERNANCE	13
<b>GROWING CALLS FOR A NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS GUARDIANS NETWORK</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>CORE ELEMENTS OF THE NETWORK-PROGRAM</b>	<b>15</b>
EXPANSION OF FIRST NATIONS GUARDIANS PROGRAMS FROM COAST TO COAST TO COAST	15
NETWORK	16
Network Secretariat & First Nations-Federal Joint Working Group on Guardians	16
Program Start-Up Investments	17
Training & Capacity Development	17
Network Council	17
<b>BENEFITS, VALUE, &amp; RETURN ON FIRST NATIONS GUARDIANS PROGRAMS</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>WHY A NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS GUARDIANS NETWORK?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>STRUCTURE &amp; GOVERNANCE OF THE NETWORK</b>	<b>19</b>
NETWORK COUNCIL	20
NETWORK SECRETARIAT & FIRST NATIONS-FEDERAL JOINT WORKING GROUP ON GUARDIANS	20
<b>CONTRIBUTION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA’S STRATEGIC AGENDA</b>	<b>21</b>
ENVIRONMENTAL	21
ECONOMIC	21
NATION-TO-NATION RELATIONS AND IMPLEMENTING <i>UNDRIP</i>	21
<b>BUDGET &amp; FUNDING REQUEST</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>EVALUATING SUCCESS OF THE NETWORK-PROGRAM</b>	<b>22</b>

## Acronyms & Abbreviations

Short Form	Longer Form
<b>AFN</b>	Assembly of First Nations
<b>AHF</b>	Aboriginal Healing Foundation
<b>AUD</b>	Australian Dollars
<b>BC</b>	British Columbia
<b><i>CBD</i></b>	<i>Convention on Biological Diversity</i>
<b>CFN</b>	Coastal First Nations
<b>CGW</b>	Coastal Guardian Watchmen
<b>CSN</b>	Coastal Stewardship Network
<b>DFO</b>	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
<b>ECCC</b>	Environment and Climate Change Canada
<b>ED</b>	Executive Director
<b>EPI</b>	EcoPlan International Inc.
<b>FPIC</b>	Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (per <i>UNDRIP</i> )
<b>FNHA</b>	First Nations Health Authority
<b>FNHC</b>	First Nations Health Council
<b>FNHDA</b>	First Nations Health Directors Association
<b>FNHIB</b>	Health Canada First Nations and Inuit Health Branch
<b>FTE</b>	Full-Time Equivalent
<b>GBI</b>	Great Bear Initiative
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse Gas
<b>GWSJ</b>	Gathering Wisdom for a Shared Journey Forum
<b>HGMC</b>	Haida Gwaii Management Council
<b>HGW</b>	Haida Gwaii Watchmen
<b><i>IAA</i></b>	<i>Impact Assessment Act</i>
<b>INEG</b>	Innu Nation Environmental Guardians
<b>ILI</b>	Indigenous Leadership Initiative
<b>ILMB</b>	Integrated Land Management Bureau
<b>IPA</b>	Indigenous Protected Area
<b>IPCA</b>	Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area
<b>JWG</b>	First Nations-Federal Pilot Joint Working Group on Guardians
<b>LUP</b>	Land Use Plan
<b><i>Mabo</i></b>	<i>Mabo v Queensland</i> (landmark native title case in Australia, 1992)
<b>MMIWG</b>	National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
<b>MoH</b>	BC Ministry of Health
<b>NCIED</b>	National Consortium on Indigenous Economic Development
<b>Network</b>	National First Nations Guardians Network
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>NIRO</b>	National Indigenous Representative Organizations
<b>NWT</b>	Northwest Territories
<b>NZ</b>	New Zealand
<b>OCAP®</b>	First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession of First Nations data collection processes and use

Short Form	Longer Form
<b>Pilot Program</b>	Indigenous Guardians Pilot Program
<b>RCAP</b>	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
<b>RMA</b>	<i>Resource Management Act</i>
<b>RMP</b>	<i>Resource Management Plan</i>
<b>RMS</b>	Regional Monitoring System
<b>SAS</b>	<i>Sámi Arctic Strategy</i>
<b>SDGs</b>	UN Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SROI</b>	Social Return on Investment
<b>STTP</b>	Stewardship Technicians Training Program
<b>SVA</b>	Social Ventures Australia
<b>TCFNH</b>	Tripartite Committee on First Nations Health
<b>TFA</b>	<i>Tripartite Framework Agreement on First Nations Health Governance</i>
<b>TRC</b>	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
<b>UNDRIP</b>	<i>United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples</i>
<b>UNGA</b>	United Nations General Assembly
<b>UVic</b>	University of Victoria
<b>VIU</b>	Vancouver Island University
<b>Wik</b>	<i>Wik Peoples v Queensland</i> (major Australian native title case, 1996)
<b>WoC</b>	Working on Country (former program name in Australia)
<b>WWF</b>	World Wildlife Fund

## Key Definitions

**Network** – refers to the entity created, from the ground up, by First Nations Guardians programs to connect Guardians and Guardians programs within regions and across the country. It has two parts: a governance arm (Network Council) and an operations arm (Network Secretariat).

**Network Council** – refers to the governance arm of the Network.

**Network-program** – refers to the sum of the components that this proposal is seeking funding to create/support. The term can be used interchangeably with “National First Nations Guardians Network.”

**Network Secretariat** – refers to the operations arm of the Network.

**Programs** – refers to Guardians programs / initiatives created and run by First Nations in their territories.

## Purpose

The Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) has engaged Miles Richardson, OC, Director of the National Consortium for Indigenous Economic Development (NCIED) at the University of Victoria (UVic) to develop and conduct the regional engagement process and research supporting the production of this business case on the need for federal funding for a comprehensive National First Nations Guardians Network (Network-program). This document describes the elements of this Network-program,<sup>1</sup> its rationale and the engagement process and research supporting this rationale. The anticipated benefits, value and return from this Network-program, associated budget and funding requested to create it and a proposed process for evaluating the Network-program to ensure its ongoing success are detailed.

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<sup>1</sup> This term is used to describe all of the components that are part of the program for which funding is being requested in this proposal, including investment in First Nations Guardians programs from coast to coast to coast, Network operations, training and capacity development, and Network governance.

## Executive Summary

### Summary

First Nations have been strong stewards of our homelands, refining and adapting our stewardship knowledge and processes – caring for our land and waters, people, and fellow species – since time immemorial. With the arrival of settlers and creation of the country of Canada, however, our evolving knowledge, stewardship processes, and authority within our homelands have been sidelined. Yet recent research has shown that the areas managed or co-managed by Indigenous Peoples have the highest levels of biodiversity, even when adjusted for numerous other variables, confirming that our traditional ecological knowledge and stewardship practices are the key for sustaining biodiversity and ecological and human health. Significant investment in a coast to coast to coast network of First Nations Guardians programs is an effective way, today, for Canada and First Nations to practice a truly inter-national form of conservation, ensuring the health of the land and waters and the people and species who depend on it.

*Guardians* are the contemporary expression of First Nations' ancestral responsibility to care for and ensure the well-being of our lands and waters. Employed as the “moccasins- and mukluks-on-the-ground,” Guardians are the “eyes-and-ears” of First Nations. They use both science and our traditional knowledge to maintain, restore and protect ecosystems through programs that are as diverse as the territories they cover.

*Guardians programs* build and expand capacity for addressing pressing environmental concerns across the country and offer a pathway to restored respect for First Nations' stewardship knowledge, practices, and authority.

The benefits of First Nations Guardians programs, once established, compound quickly and are felt on many levels, by the individual Guardian, the Nation, and country-wide. Essential to rebuilding First Nations' self-governance capacities and processes, Guardians programs set in motion effective First Nations land- and marine-use planning and management. While supporting revitalization of ancestral knowledge, languages, and customs, Guardians programs bring economic opportunity and engage a new generation in stewardship of their homelands.

A National First Nations Guardians Network (the Network-program) is key to expanding and supporting First Nations Guardians programs across the country. It will connect Guardians programs across the country so Guardians can do more together than they can now on their own. Its creation will enable a Nation-based model of self-determination and a truly inter-national model of stewardship and conservation from coast to coast to coast.

This inter-national model of stewardship has the notion of Nation-to-Nation relationships at its core: a National First Nations Guardians Network would serve as a continuous forum for First Nations to share stewardship challenges and approaches with each other enabling greater insight and coordination than would otherwise be possible; and would serve as a body, through its national and regional elements, facilitating engagement and coordination between the Network of Nation-based Guardians programs and Canada, the provinces, and the territories.

What is particularly unique and valuable about the Network-program is the centrality enabling First Nations to come together, share observations, and collaborate in Nation-to-Nation relationships amongst First Nations. *The synergies and insights that will come from this collaboration cannot be achieved without support to create and sustain a First Nations-run body to facilitate this form of Nation-to-Nation relationship.* Effectively bringing First Nations together

in this coordinated forum will also enhance the ability of Canada, the provinces, and the territories to engage in collaborative stewardship with First Nations on a scale that otherwise would not be possible. The vision of this proposal is for a truly inter-national model of stewardship made possible by significant investment in a National First Nations Guardians Network.

The Network will increase the number of Guardians programs in First Nations from over 90 today,<sup>2</sup> to approximately 400 within five years. This will take place in a tiered approach, with 60 new programs added in Year 2, an additional 120 in Year 3, and 140 in Year 4. Nearly two-thirds of First Nations will host a Guardians program of their own by Year 5. In total, the Network will create nearly 2,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) Guardians and Guardians Program Coordinator positions.

The Network Secretariat (the Network's operational branch) will provide support to programs by providing administrative and technical support to programs, and by facilitating opportunities to network and share best practices with other Guardians and programs across the country, as will a consistent and stable funding structure. Guardians will no longer work in relative isolation, relying on short-term funding solutions.

A key component of Network operations will be to provide access to ongoing professional development, matching Guardians with a level of training and accreditation suited to the requirements of their program, location, and ability to travel. The Network will launch a robust training program, including a National Guardians Curriculum, both to train new Guardians and to offer skills development training opportunities to experienced Guardians. Training will be offered in partnership with satellite "bush campuses" throughout the country and in partnership with existing institutions currently offering land-based stewardship programs.

The development of a comprehensive National First Nations Guardians Network requires an investment from the federal government of \$831.5 million over five years, with funding ramping up as the operational capacity of the Network-program is established.

After that, annual financial support of approximately \$260 million will fund both Guardians programs and network operations once the Network-program attains its target of 400 First Nations Guardians programs active within five years. When fully developed, Guardians programs are expected to create seven FTE positions on average, resulting in a total employment impact of approximately 2,500 jobs across the country by Year 5. A detailed rationale for the proposed budget can be found in Section 5.2: *Proposed Budget*.

A substantial investment in a First Nations Guardians Network-program fits well within federal mandates to address climate change, to implement *UNDRIP* and the new impact assessment system, and to forge renewed, Nation-to-Nation relationships with First Nations. And Guardians will play a critical role in meeting Canada's target of protecting 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

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<sup>2</sup> This number is drawn from our research compiled in Appendix A: *Environmental Scan of Existing Guardians Programs in Canada*, based on the best available information on the public record.

## Vision

Momentum has been growing behind calls for a National First Nations Guardians Network. Since time immemorial, First Nations have honed our knowledge of the best way to care for our lands, waters, resources, and people. Today, there is increasing recognition of the role our knowledge can play in ensuring the best stewardship. Guardians act as the moccasins and mukluks on the ground and the eyes and ears of our Nations within our territories.

Guardians programs are created and run by Nations and strengthen Nations' decision-making and self-governance capacity to engage with all land users and stakeholders, including industry and government. A Network of strong, financially stable, and well-supported First Nations Guardians programs across the country will play a vital role in the strength and well-being of our Nations, through supporting the health of the lands, waters, and species in our territories; maintaining and revitalizing our evolving ancestral knowledges, languages, cultures, laws, and governance systems; enabling meaningful economic opportunities and career paths for our people in our homelands; and facilitating to Nation-to-Nation relationships among First Nations and between First Nations and Canada as we build a truly inter-national conservation and stewardship model from coast to coast to coast.

## Methodological Approach

*Foundational Principles –Self-Determination, Nation-to-Nation, & Gift of Multiple Perspectives*  
Investing in the creation of a National First Nations Guardians Network is an immediate and effective way for the federal government to honour its commitment to renewed Nation-to-Nation relationships with First Nations by supporting:

- Revitalization of Nations' ancestral relationships with and knowledge of our territories, and accordingly with our own Nationhood, cultures, and languages.
- Nation-created and -run programs, strengthening governance capacity within Nations.
- A support and governance Network composed of and driven by Nations, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and stewardship strategies, as well as collaborating for economies of scale, among Nations.

This proposal takes a distinctions-based approach, seeking funding for a National First Nations Guardians Network, and is centred around fostering the rights of self-determination First Nations have as Indigenous Peoples. Over the last 100 or so years, there has been a growing recognition in international law that Peoples, as distinct from states, have a right of self-determination. Peoples, or Nations, are not mere minorities or subpopulations within states and carry different rights internationally and domestically.

*UNDRIP*, which Canada now supports without qualification, recognizes the right of self-determination of Indigenous Peoples. Section 1.2.1.1: *The Right of Self Determination of Peoples* discusses this in more detail. Section 4: *Contribution to the Government of Canada's Strategic Agenda* outlines the myriad of ways in which investing in the creation of the Network-program will enable Canada to meet a vast number of its obligations under *UNDRIP*.

Maintenance and revitalization of First Nations' unique ways of knowing is a key element of the right of self-determination called for in *UNDRIP*. Guardians programs and a National network of such programs is a key way for Canada to meet this and other obligations under *UNDRIP*.

*Etuaptmumk* or Two-Eyed Seeing - also known as the Gift of Multiple Perspectives - refers to the idea that learning to see with the strengths of both Indigenous and scientific ways of

knowing will be for the benefit of all and involves consideration of how different Peoples can relate to one another. Other Indigenous approaches to understanding across ways of knowing include the *Gä•sweñta'* or Two-Row Wampum and the Dish with One Spoon. The Dish with One Spoon, for example, is a framework for cognitive and other relationships between two Indigenous Nations, the Haudenosaunne and Anishinaabe Nations.<sup>3</sup> A National First Nations Guardians Network likewise provides a framework for relations, shared insights, and collaboration amongst the diverse knowledge systems of First Nations from coast to coast to coast.

This understanding is critical to the purpose and design of the Network: a key purpose and function of the Network is to bring First Nations together across the country, to share knowledge and stewardship approaches derived from the unique ways of knowing of their Peoples and to collaborate together on strategies relating to neighbouring territories and species that migrate or span multiple territories.

Through continual participation in / collaboration with the First Nations-Federal Joint Working Group on Guardians (JWG), the Network is uniquely positioned to facilitate inter-national ecological stewardship and relations from coast to coast to coast.

#### Regional Engagement & Interview Process

Between October 2020 and January 2021, nine regional engagement sessions were held, bringing together program managers of First Nations Guardians programs funded through the Indigenous Guardians Pilot Program (Pilot Program). Individual interviews were conducted to complement these sessions. The purpose of these regional engagement sessions and interviews was to gain feedback on the need for a Network and on how that Network should be governed, and to develop support among those critical to the Network's success.

Regional engagement sessions and interviews were coordinated by the consultant team and led by Miles Richardson, OC, former President of the Council of the Haida Nation, who has actively been involved in the Haida Gwaii Watchmen program and Coastal Guardian Watchmen Network, and Guardians and Indigenous Nationhood initiatives across the country over the course of several decades.

Regional engagement and interview questions solicited feedback on two primary themes: Network operations and Network governance. The operations-related questions sought feedback and advice on the types of supports Guardians programs would need or want from a National First Nations Guardians Network and its secretariat or administrative support structure. The governance-related questions sought feedback / advice relating to Nationhood and Nation-to-Nation objectives of the Network, representative structure / composition, guiding values and principles, and decision-making processes. A literature review was also conducted to provide additional context and information to support this proposal.

#### Background

Guardians are a contemporary expression of First Nations ancestral responsibilities to manage and monitor our lands and waters. First Nations Guardians programs, which may be described by other names, including Watchmen and Rangers, undertake stewardship activities including:

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<sup>3</sup> Read more about the *Gä•sweñta'* and Dish with One Spoon approaches in Section 3.4.3: *Role of the Network in Implementing Nation-to-Nation Relationships* & UNDRIP.



- Monitoring the activities of resource users (e.g., logging, mining, oil and gas, fishing, hunting).
- Ensuring compliance with and enforcement of relevant Crown and Indigenous laws.
- Enabling effective First Nations land- and marine-use planning and management.
- Working with Crown governments through management agreements to ensure coordinated and rigorous monitoring and enforcement throughout territories.
- Gathering data on the ecological health and well-being of our ancestral territories.
- Gathering and sharing data to inform decision making about our ancestral territories.
- Providing outreach and education to resource users, tourists, and communities about the protection of cultural and natural resources.

Guardians programs share common features but each is unique, determined by the priorities of the First Nation that has created it, within its own particular ecological, political-legal, and socio-economic context.

The First Nations-led stewardship program now seen as a forerunner of Guardians programs throughout the country was the Haida Gwaii Watchmen (HGW), established in 1973 and formalized by the Council of the Haida Nation in British Columbia (BC) in 1981. Its purpose – to protect the land, waters, and species of Haida Gwaii in accordance with Haida law and stewardship responsibility – arose in direct response to intensive resource extraction. With the signing of the Gwaii Haanas Agreement, the HGW took on primary environmental and cultural stewardship responsibility over the *Gwaii Haanas* Haida Heritage Site, National Park Reserve, and National Marine Conservation Area, and over their wider ancestral territories of Haida Gwaii.

Since then, numerous other First Nations-led, land-based conservation programs have been formed from coast to coast to coast, including the Innu Nation Environmental Guardians (INEG) program. Begun as a fisheries monitoring program in 1992, it has since expanded to oversee forestry, caribou and wildlife monitoring, mining, industrial development, conservation, and Innu Nation environmental research. As the scope of responsibility for the INEG increased, the Innu Nation recognized the need for a comprehensive training program in environmental monitoring and management to build Guardians' capacity and support their broadened scope of responsibility. The Innu Nation Guardian Program was created at Saint Mary's University in 2001, offering a combination of classroom-based coursework and immersive field training at active Innu co-management, monitoring, and environmental research sites bringing together Innu traditional knowledge and Western scientific and technical disciplines for environmental and resource management.

As the number of First Nations Guardians programs has grown, some have begun to form cooperative stewardship alliances, such as the Coastal Stewardship Network (CSN) in BC. The CSN has also worked with postsecondary institutions, such as Northwest Community College and UVic to provide training and produce training materials for their Guardians. The advantages of networked relationships among such groups include the ability to pool resources, information and know-how, to have more influence and be more effective, and to collaborate on regional conservation initiatives.

In recent years, Guardians have played an increasingly important role in marine-use planning and monitoring in various places around the country. Three such initiatives are the First Nations-British Columbia co-led Marine Plan Partnership (MaPP), the federal Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area, and the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission, established

under the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement between the James Bay Cree of Québec, and the Governments of Canada and Nunavut. Marine Guardianship is likely to be an area of substantial growth in the near future as many First Nations consider ourselves to be Peoples of the waters that are such core parts of our homelands. There is still much work to be done under the federal Oceans Action Plan and the Government of Canada's new commitment to protect 30 percent of marine territory by 2030.

### Support for Indigenous Stewardship in Other Jurisdictions

#### The Working on Country Indigenous Rangers Program in Australia

The Working on Country (WoC) Indigenous Rangers program in Australia is the most comprehensive Indigenous on-the-land stewardship program supported by a nation-state in the world today. It supports Indigenous Rangers to combine the traditional knowledge of their Peoples with conservation training to protect and manage their lands, waters and cultures.

In 2020, 127 Indigenous Ranger groups employed a total of nearly 900 full-time equivalent positions (with a mix of full-time, part-time and casual positions). Between 2007 and 2021, the Australian government invested approximately AUD \$870 million in WoC, bolstered by an eight-year funding extension of AUD \$102 million (approx. CAD \$100 million) per year announced by the Australian government in March 2020.

Indigenous Peoples and the Australian government had been negotiating joint management of parks going back to the 1980s. Created in 2007, in part to support skilled Indigenous capacity to manage Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) in Australia, the WoC Indigenous Rangers program emerged, arguably, out of a form of recognition of the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia by the Government of Australia.

The landmark court rulings of *Mabo* and *Wik* in 1992 and 1996, respectively, recognized the continued existence of native title and discredited the doctrine of *terra nullius* – the idea that Indigenous Peoples had no laws governing the lands they inhabited, that the land was ungoverned and thus available for colonial purposes.

Shortly after these rulings, in 1997, the IPA program was created as an Australian approach to recognizing Indigenous Peoples' interests in, authority over, and skilled stewardship practices in relation to their lands in Australia. The Indigenous Rangers program provides resources to support capacity in this work.

Supporting Indigenous Rangers in stewarding their homelands has generated a multitude of beneficial returns to the Rangers, their communities, and the Australian government. Studies analyzing the Social Return on Investment (SROI) yielded from investment in WoC found returns ranging from 1.5:1 to 3.4:1. Such a high rate of SROI shows that these programs can make a strong contribution to closing stark socio-economic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. Some of the most significant benefits included:

- Increased labour productivity through improved Indigenous health and reduced alcohol consumption.
- Greater workforce participation leading to increased economic output.
- Cost savings to governments through lower expenditures on public health, policing, corrective services, public housing and welfare.
- Economic returns generated by new Indigenous business ventures, including the associated tax component of this revenue received by government.

See Section 2.2.1: *Working on Country Indigenous Rangers Program in Australia* for more detail on the wide range of socio-economic benefits that resulted from the Government of Australia's substantial investments in the WoC Indigenous Rangers program.

#### Legislation in *Aotearoa* / New Zealand

In *Aotearoa* / New Zealand, the *Resource Management Act (RMA)*, passed in 1991, requires those acting under its authority legislation to engage with both *iwis* (tribes or Nations) and *tangata whenua* (their local communities) in decision making that affects Māori territories, legislating Nation-to-Nation relationships into the country's stewardship decision-making framework and a strong grounding for respectful relations and protocols of engagement with Māori authorities, processes, and ways of knowing. The *RMA* calls for planning processes by *iwi* authorities to be part of planning and policy and decision making under the Act.

#### Role of Guardians in Land- & Marine-Use Planning & Co-Management / Co-Governance

Land- and marine-use planning are key processes for First Nations to exercise our responsibility for and authority over their homelands and core areas of work for Guardians. These planning processes aim to balance contemporary and future land and marine uses, yielding the best ecological, economic, intersocietal, and intergenerational outcomes.

These planning processes are undertaken by our Nations on our own, supporting our governance of our homelands, and through co-management and co-governance agreements between First Nations and provincial, territorial, and federal governments. Investment in the Network-program will build capacity for such inter-national stewardship and conservation from coast to coast to coast.

#### Guardians in First Nations Land-Use Planning & in Co-Management / Co-Governance

Land-use planning draws out and draws on knowledge that has been held by First Nations over generations, and formally integrates its application into contemporary land use priorities and pressures in the form of a Land Use Plan (LUP). It enables First Nations, as stewards of our lands, to communicate with others who are interested in conducting land uses in our territories, while ensuring our cultural values are respected and that we are asserting our authority within our territories.

Land-use planning has led many First Nations to realize benefits beyond our initial planning intentions, including:

- Increased connection to and understanding of our resources.
- Renewed relationships with other governments, neighbours and businesses.
- Strengthened capacity and technical skills.
- Reinforced cultural importance and identity among Nations' members.
- A sense of ownership of and engagement in future development.

A foundational example of how Guardians assisting in land- and marine-use planning can lead to the strengthening of First Nations governance over our territories can be seen in the Haida Nation authorization of a land- and marine-use plan for its territory in the first piece of legislation under its modern *Constitution* in 1981. This was a core part of the process of reasserting its authority over land and marine use in its territories, along with the creation of the Haida Gwaii Watchmen in the same time period.

This contemporary governance development work enabled the Haida Nation to negotiate strong agreements with the federal and provincial governments to co-manage key land and marine uses on Haida Gwaii through the 1993 *Gwaii Haanas Agreement* with Canada, the 2007 *Haida Gwaii Strategic Land Use Agreement* – which established the Haida Gwaii Management Council, to co-manage high-level resource management decisions on Haida Gwaii – and the 2009 *Kunst’aa Guu — Kunst’aayah Reconciliation Protocol* with BC – which symbolizes a new era of shared decision making, or co-governance, between the two governments and acknowledges the Haida Nation’s authority to ensure sustainable use of their territory of Haida Gwaii for the benefit of their people and to protect its sensitive ecosystems for generations to come. These developments have led to 70 percent of all forests on Haida Gwaii being co-managed by the Haida Nation and BC.

In 2006, BC’s Integrated Land Management Bureau announced a policy for its planning program that was “flexible and responsive to current and emerging government goals and priorities, including its commitment to a New Relationship with First Nations.” In 2018, BC announced that it would be “modernizing land-use planning” in BC, informed by BC’s commitment to implement *UNDRIP* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) *Calls to Action*, and to build on its commitment to a New Relationship with First Nations, carrying out land-use planning in partnership between BC and Indigenous governments.

Interest in and the practice of land-use planning has been growing among First Nations across the country. Guardians can help level the playing field for First Nations in land-use planning discussions with other governments, by providing their Nations with the information they need to plan as well as the capacity to ensure that plans are implemented, respected, and working.

Investment in a national Network of First Nations Guardians programs will help build capacity to meet the primary challenges faced by First Nations in land- and marine-use planning to date: the ability to conduct technical assessments; capacity for implementation of monitoring and enforcement; and, attaining the stable funding required to accomplish these things. One of the most challenging aspects of land-use planning for First Nations was finding, gathering, and organizing the data needed for technical assessments. Adequate resources and capacity were often lacking, making planning impossible.

To engage meaningfully in these processes requires funding and resources to support Nations being “able to dedicate a team of people” to this work. Investment in the Network-program would build such capacity.

For a more detailed discussion of land-use planning, its role in strengthened First Nations self-determination / Nationhood, and the role Guardians play in supporting their Nations to engage effectively in these processes, see Section 2.3.2.1: *The Role of Guardians in Land-Use Planning for their Nations*.

#### *Guardians & Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas*

Land- and marine-use planning can identify particular areas as a high priority for protection and conservation, including in the form of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), and important form of changing the relationships between Peoples with respect to the conservation of natural spaces from one in which First Nations have been excluded from decision making, displaced from accessing territory and continuing traditional harvesting and cultural territories in the processes of implementing a colonial vision for national, provincial, territorial and municipal parks.

A 2019 University of British Columbia study found that in Canada, Brazil, and Australia, the areas managed or co-managed by Indigenous people had the highest levels of biodiversity of all, even when adjusted for other variables such as size, suggesting that it is the land-management practices of Indigenous communities that are keeping biodiversity high.

A foundational example of an IPCA is the Gwaii Haanas Haida Heritage Site and National Park Reserve, first identified by the Haida as a priority area for protection in their land-use planning. This supported their discussions and negotiations with the federal government, ultimately leading to its protection from development in perpetuity.

Just as the Haida Gwaii Watchmen play a key role in stewarding Gwaii Haanas, Indigenous Rangers (an analogue to Guardians) in Australia are funded to help steward Indigenous Protected Areas in that country.

IPCAs play an increasingly important role in supporting Canada's ability to meet its international land and marine conservation commitments. IPCAs and marine protected areas (MPAs) are an effective way of enabling co-management and co-governance by First Nations and provincial, territorial, and federal governments of those protected areas, with Guardians playing a critical role in those stewardship processes. A national network of trained Guardians across the country will ensure strong stewardship within IPCAs and MPAs, enabling Canada to meet these obligations.

For a more detailed discussion of the role of IPCAs in meeting Canada's domestic and international conservation priorities, building better relationships between First Nations and Canada, and how Guardians play a critical role in achieving these objectives, see Section 2.3.2.1.3: *Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas*.

#### [Guardians in First Nations Marine-Use Planning & in Co-Management / Co-Governance](#)

In a country with three major coastlines, it is unsurprising that many First Nations consider ourselves to be marine Peoples, or Peoples of the water. As Nations have been rebuilding our authority for and over our territories, this has increasingly come to include planning and management processes to ensure our marine territories are well cared for, balancing the variety of marine uses and priorities, including with respect to generations yet to come.

Collaborative marine use plans have been developed on the north and central Pacific coasts between 17 First Nations and the Province of BC, through MaPP, formalized in 2011. Each plan is based on an ecosystem-based management (EBM) framework, focusing on human well-being, ecological integrity, and governance, informed by local and traditional knowledge as well as by input and advice from scientists and stakeholder advisory committees.

Guardians play an essential role in implementing these plans, drawing on their intimate knowledge of their territories, and the resources and user groups of those territories. They enable assessment of what is working with MaPP and what is not, allowing the parties to recalibrate as needed.

In 2017, building on the success of MaPP, the federal government launched the Pacific North Coast Integrated Management Area (PNCIMA) Initiative, a collaborative process led through an oceans governance agreement between the federal, BC, and First Nation governments. It covers the same area as MaPP and is complementary to it. It recognizes the importance of First

Nations in the governance, stewardship, and use of ocean resources, acknowledging First Nations' laws, customs, traditions, and knowledge for the protection, management, and stewardship of marine areas within PNCIMA. PNCIMA is one of five national Large Ocean Management Areas identified in Canada's 2005 *Oceans Action Plan*.

A prominent example of an Indigenous co-managed marine planning body outside of BC is the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission, formed in 2013 through an agreement between the James Bay Cree of Québec, the Government of Canada, and the Government of Nunavut. Covering the islands and resources within eastern James Bay and portions of southeastern Hudson Bay, its mandate is to develop planning policies, priorities and objectives for the Eeyou Marine Region, including the development and implementation of a land use plan. Other examples are in development elsewhere in the country.

For a more detailed discussion of the role of Guardians in enabling their Nations to engage effectively in marine-use planning and management and in ensuring strong marine conservation on all of our coasts, see Section 2.3.2.2: *The Growth of Marine Guardianship*.

Investment in a national Network of First Nations Guardians programs will build capacity from coast to coast to coast for Guardians to enable their Nations to engage effectively in land- and marine-use planning, both on their own, in collaboration with neighbouring Nations, and in partnership / co-management / co-governance with federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

This is another way in which investment in the Network-program would enable Canada to meet UNDRIP obligations, providing capacity support for First Nations to engage meaningfully in decision making affecting our homelands through comprehensive planning and the ability to look at the scope of existing and prospective land and marine uses in context and in reference to Nations' priorities. In this way, the Network-program would be an effective mechanism to achieve truly inter-national conservation and stewardship from coast to coast to coast.

Now more than ever First Nations are in need of trained professionals knowledgeable in marine planning and with the capacity to implement those plans through monitoring and compliance enforcement. This momentum for the establishment of MPAs, MUPs, and marine Guardianship will only continue to grow, and these mechanisms will serve as essential vehicles for co-management and co-governance of critical ecological and resource rich territory as the need to protect vital ecosystems and plan for multiple uses and priorities becomes clearer and clearer in our immediate future.

### Growing Calls for a National First Nations Guardians Network

The growing number of Guardians programs in Canada and the success of the Australian WoC Indigenous Rangers program have bolstered calls for a similarly significant investment by Canada in a National First Nations Guardians Network. First Nations initiated this momentum, bolstered soon after by other sectors within Canada, including Indigenous organizations, and individuals within Crown governments, civil society, and the private sector.

The movement that had begun to grow among First Nations was then supported by the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) – in the form of convening Guardians Gatherings, which assembled hundreds of Guardians on multiple occasions, and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) – in the form of resolutions calling on the federal government to support investment in a National Indigenous Guardians Network. Parliamentary backing came in the form of \$25 million



in funding for the Pilot Program, while provincial / territorial support has taken the form of co-management agreements between governments and Guardians organizations. Civil society and the private sector expressed their support by investing in shared environmental projects and voicing their appreciation for the socio-economic, environmental, and health benefits that come with the programs.

As the number of First Nations Guardians programs has grown, they have continued to struggle with capacity issues, including the need for common training and shared services, and consistent funding. First Nations and their Guardians programs have envisioned that a national Network could play a critical role in providing such support to Guardians programs, both to enable them to grow and get their feet on-the-ground, so to speak, as they get started and to enable them to focus on their on-the-land and on-the-water work in their territories, turning to a common resource, grounded in their work, worldviews, and ways of being, for other support and capacity building services.

See Section 2.4: *Growing Momentum for a National First Nations Guardians Network* for more about on the broad support for the creation of a Network, including from prominent individuals who recognize that such an investment is optimally timed in terms of recovery and rebuilding. As the Honourable Ethel Blondin-Andrew, PC, the first Indigenous woman to serve as a federal cabinet minister, and AFN-Yukon Regional Chief Kluane Adamek note:

Investing in First Nations' stewardship can help the country heal — from the pandemic, from the threat of climate change, from the loss of biodiversity and from the scars of colonialism. ... It begins with supporting Indigenous leadership on the land. ... We can help make the next several months a time of healing, hope and connection, leading us into the next seasons of change.<sup>4</sup>

### Core Elements of the Network-Program

The term 'Network-program' is used to describe all of the components that are part of the program for which funding is being requested in this proposal, including: investment in First Nations Guardians programs from coast to coast to coast; Network operations, training and capacity development; and, Network governance.

### Expansion of First Nations Guardians Programs from Coast to Coast to Coast

The fact that there are currently over 90 First Nations Guardians programs across the country,<sup>5</sup> signals a substantial appetite by First Nations to create Guardians programs to renew our stewardship governance over our territories.

Yet there remain many First Nations who have not yet been able to create programs and who would require significant investment by the federal government in order to do so. Significant gaps remain all across the country – in environmental monitoring, cultural and ecological stewardship, and in the benefits of employment on-the-land / water and in-one's-home-territory from coast to coast to coast.

These gaps leave the Guardians and Guardians programs that do exist without a sufficient level of collegial and professional connection and knowledge exchange. A critical element of this

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<sup>4</sup> Ethel Blondin-Andrew and Kluane Adamek, "Healing on the land for our people and our economy" (23 August 2020), online: *The Star*, <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2020/08/23/healing-on-the-land-for-our-people-and-our-economy.html>.

<sup>5</sup> This number is drawn from our research compiled in Appendix A: *Environmental Scan of Existing Guardians Programs in Canada*, based on the best available information on the public record.

funding request is for support to expand significantly the number and spread of First Nations Guardians programs across the country to close these gaps and bring a wide range of beneficial results and value to First Nations and Canada.

In addition to predictable and accessible multi-year funding, Guardians programs of all sizes rely on other inputs to make an impact in their territories. Access to technical equipment (like mapping software, safety equipment, radio equipment, and satellite phones) is required for on-the-land monitoring projects. Indigenous-owned and controlled maps and databases are also critical in helping Nations make informed management decisions, while ongoing skills training enables Guardians to take on new projects safely and effectively. For small teams, the ability to network regionally with other Guardians and to share best practices and resources is critical. Lastly, community outreach and engagement require access to basic communication tools like computers, internet access, and printers.

### Network

Federal investment in the Network is investment in a truly inter-national conservation and stewardship model that will facilitate Nation-to-Nation relationships from coast to coast to coast. It provides a forum for First Nations to share knowledge and insights and collaborate with each other and provides a mechanism to enable such sharing and collaboration with the federal government and other partners.

#### *Network Secretariat & First Nations-Federal Joint Working Group on Guardians*

A modest central and regionalized Secretariat of administrative and research personnel and technical and information resources would provide shared economy-of-scale services to support Guardians programs from coast to coast to coast, supporting capacity development within programs and Nations across the country and minimizing costs across the system. More detail on the specific nature of shared services desired by existing Guardians programs is provided in Section 3.4.1: *Role of the Network in Sustaining Robust Guardians Programs*, as well as in the *Structure & Governance of the Network* section of this Executive Summary below.

The Secretariat would participate in / collaborate with the First Nations-Federal JWG on Guardians, which was created by ILI and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) in September 2018 to support the success of the Pilot Program. The JWG would continue to provide its expertise and advice, building on the foundation of the Pilot Program, in support of the Network as it develops and assumes its leadership role as a networked entity uniquely positioned to facilitate inter-national ecological stewardship and relations from coast to coast to coast and as the approach to Indigenous Guardians shifts from that of a federal program to a First Nations-led Network leading this inter-national stewardship.

The Network Secretariat would also provide technical and administrative support to the Network governance body, or Network Council, to enable it to function effectively with the best state of current knowledge and communication tools in its representative and accountability functions, including:

- Research and preparation of backgrounders, reports, and presentations to support representatives having the best of current knowledge pertaining to their area of decision making.



- Research and drafting to support preparation of reports and presentations from the Network governance body and/or particular representatives to their constituents – Nations and Guardians programs – and to other audiences, such as when engaging in advocacy on behalf of Guardians programs.
- Support with scheduling and correspondence.
- Support with travel arrangements.
- Financial administration.

### Program Start-Up Investments

Guardians need access to equipment and other resources to carry out their work effectively, depending on the nature of the program, the size and types of terrain and ecology within which they operate, and the conservation and monitoring priorities of their Nations. These include office space; vehicles; navigation, safety, communication, and monitoring equipment; cabins; tools; information technology; and so on.

### Training & Capacity Development

The Network Secretariat would play a critical role in assembling a First Nations Guardians training committee to develop a core curriculum framework with institutions that have already started offering Guardians-related training. This curriculum framework would ensure core competencies are addressed and offer a level of standardization, while Nations would determine how this curriculum is applied based on our needs and priorities and ecological and regional contexts. The Network Secretariat would also play a key role in providing start-up training and capacity building for new programs or programs undergoing significant turnover and in need of such services.

University-accredited training for Guardians Program Coordinators will ensure that they have the unique mix of land and marine management, community and program leadership, and hands-on skills that will prepare them to design and implement effective community programs. As the training ramps up across the country, a network of Guardians Program Coordinators will be created.

We anticipate a mix of regional and local training for First Nations Guardians beginning as soon as they are hired. Initial training includes basic skills to ensure job readiness from both a technical and Indigenous perspective. Another component of First Nations Guardians training is learning exchanges, where Guardians can share their experiences and applied knowledge from their work on the ground and build connections with each other and among Nations.

### Network Council

Driven from the bottom up, the Network will be constituted by and accountable to First Nations Guardians programs. Its governance arm, the Network Council, will be selected by its constituent First Nations and allocate funding to existing and new programs across the country. Participants in regional engagement sessions and interviews identified the following core themes on why the Network Council would be best placed to allocate funds to programs:

- A streamlined process and reduced bureaucracy.
- Collaborative communication between Network and programs.
- First Nations-led priorities and knowledge.
- Timing and allocation of funds better suited to realities of Guardians programs.

- Transparency of process and basis in Nationhood and Nation-to-Nation relationships.

More detail on the core reasons that the Network Council is best placed to determine allocation of funding to First Nations Guardians programs is provided in Section 3.4.2: *Benefits of First Nations Leadership in Program Funds Allocation & Administration*. Section 3.4.2.1: *Guiding Principles for Network Funding Allocation to Programs* outlines the principles that the regional engagement session and interview participants felt should be used by the Network Council in allocating funding to programs.

### Benefits, Value, & Return on First Nations Guardians Programs

Investment in First Nations Guardians programs across the country will generate a wide array of benefits, value and returns, such as:

- Ecological returns, including the protection of biodiversity and species at risk, implementation of nature-based climate solutions, and reduction of gaps in environmental monitoring.
- Increased well-being of First Nations Peoples, including through strengthening connections with the land, intergenerational transfer of knowledge, revitalization of language and culture, and new economic and employment opportunities.
- Connecting and supporting Guardians, including through the formation of regional collaborations and collective problem-solving.
- Nation-to-Nation relations, advancing reconciliation between Canada and First Nations, Nationhood / self-determination by First Nations, and a framework for operationalizing the *UNDRIP* principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) within First Nations' territories (Article 32).
- First Nations governance, by strengthening our capacity and authority, including with respect to land- and marine-use planning and management.

The benefits and SROI of existing Guardians programs, and of the Australian Government's Indigenous Rangers program (established in 2007) have been well-documented. SROI studies have estimated conservatively that for every dollar invested in Guardians or Rangers programs, an average of three dollars in economic, social and other benefits are realized. More holistic evaluation frameworks have estimated return ratios of 10:1 or higher. Read more about the observed and expected outcomes of First Nations Guardians programs in Section 3.3: *Benefits, Value & Return on First Nations Guardians Programs*.

### Why a National First Nations Guardians Network?

A National First Nations Guardians Network would support and facilitate the work of Guardians on the ground, reducing the need for individual, capacity-constrained programs to operate in silos, struggle alone, or reinvent the wheel. These include: shared services, such as technical and administrative support, training curricula and accreditation; facilitating collaboration among Guardians, Guardians programs, and First Nations; streamlining bureaucratic processes, such as program funding applications and reporting; and, improving the consistency and timing of funding flows. The Network has a critical role to play as a catalyst, accelerating the spread and development of Guardians programs across the country, through central and regional teams of knowledgeable staff offering assistance to First Nations ready to start their own programs on a stable foundation.

As identified by regional engagement session participants from, the Network will also allow participating programs to link First Nations-owned database(s) and information systems, enabling Nations to share insights, identify patterns and changes within regions and across the country, and develop collaborative strategies from coast to coast to coast. Information systems that meet OCAP® standards will facilitate the utilization of data not otherwise available in systematic conservation and stewardship efforts. The development of such systems can only emerge under conditions where First Nations Guardians programs are networked together, from the ground up, respecting the diversity of Nations and each Nation's ownership of, access to, and possession of its own data or information.

Confidently in control of their own data, Nations can more easily collaborate with each other and other researchers to create a more complete, comprehensive understanding of ecosystem and species health than ever before. See Section 3.4.1.1: *Network-Provided Support / Resource Needs Identified by Guardians Programs* for more detail on the supports or resources (in addition to funding) First Nations Guardians programs would like to see from a national Network.

Finally, a deep investment in the Network-program would have system-wide benefits across the Canadian economy, providing alternate ways to address concerns or grievances. The Network-program would enable First Nations across the country to engage meaningfully in consultation processes under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and enable conditions for free, prior, and informed consent (*UNDRIP*, Article 32) to be achieved. The prevention and/or resolution of flashpoints that might result in blockades and confrontations would benefit the Canadian economy and reduce other system costs. Ending the strain on First Nations energy and resources from fighting these battles for our rights and what we hold sacred, enables these resources – financial, human and otherwise – to flow toward other important priorities in our Nations. Much of the significant taxpayer funds spent on legal battles with First Nations could be re-invested into a cleaner, more sustainable economy.

A National First Nations Guardians Network will be a benefit to the health and wellness of First Nations and all Canadians and be a powerful tool in supporting First Nations' self-determination and ability to make informed governance decisions with respect to our territories. Investment in the Network-program will change the fundamental relationship between First Nations and Canada, through a Nation-based model of self-determination and a Nation-to-Nation-based model of reconciliation and partnership for the best possible land and marine stewardship.

### Structure & Governance of the Network

The Network would be composed of two parts: the Network Council and the Network Secretariat. The Network Council is the body constituted by and accountable to First Nations to govern the Network-program. The Network Secretariat is the operational arm of the Network, which provides support, shared services and expertise, and training to Guardians and Guardians programs and which provides administrative, coordinating, and research support to the Network Council.

The Secretariat would participate in / collaborate with the First Nations-Federal JWG on Guardians. The JWG would continue to provide its expertise and advice in support of the Network as it develops and assumes its leadership role as a networked entity uniquely positioned to facilitate inter-national ecological stewardship and relations from coast to coast to coast and as the approach to Indigenous Guardians shifts from that of a federal program to a First Nations-led Network leading this inter-national stewardship.

## Network Council

Guardians programs are owned and created by their Nations. Guardians programs participate in the Network on behalf of their Nations. A national Network of First Nations Guardians programs will be informed by the needs of participating Nations as part of a transparent and horizontal, rather than vertical, decision-making model. Participants in the regional engagement sessions and interview process emphasized that governance of the Network must be “From the bottom up, not the top down.”

Guidance and lessons learned can be drawn from effective governance models of organizations of a comparable scale and function, like those outlined in Section 3.5: *Structure & Governance of a National First Nations Guardians Network*, when determining the leadership structure of the Network-program. To this end, this proposal draws from the governance structures of the Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative, the former Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and the First Nations health governance structure in BC.

Based on feedback from the regional engagement sessions and interviews and other governance models considered, the Network Council should be composed in a way that ensures Youth and Elder representation, gender balance, and regional representation but the manner in which regions are construed need not follow colonial provincial / territorial lines. Members of the Council should be elected for defined terms, and report annually on its decisions.

## Network Secretariat & First Nations-Federal Joint Working Group on Guardians

In the design of the Network Secretariat, we consider the types of supports (aside from funding) that First Nations Guardians programs have said they would like to see from the Network and the governance models and structures of organizations of a comparable scale and function including the Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative, the former Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and the First Nations health governance structure in BC. Core functions of the Network Secretariat would be to:

- Provide technical and administrative support to the Network Council to enable it to perform its roles and responsibilities competently and effectively.
- Provide shared services and resources to Guardians and Guardians programs including:
  - Shared regional and national support staff providing direct program development, administrative (including funding proposal development support) and technical, specialist scientific, and complex data analysis support;
  - Serving as a clearinghouse for tools and information sharing for Guardians programs, including shared, secure First Nations-owned databases;
  - Professional development, including standardized First Nations Guardians training and accreditation;
  - Networking and collaboration opportunities; and
  - Communications and outreach support.

The Secretariat would participate in / collaborate with the First Nations-Federal Joint Working Group on Guardians (JWG), which was created by ILI and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) in September 2018 to support the success of the Pilot Program. The JWG would continue to provide its expertise and advice, building on the foundation of the Pilot Program, in support of the Network as it develops and assumes its leadership role as a

networked entity uniquely positioned to facilitate inter-national ecological stewardship and relations from coast to coast to coast and as the approach to Indigenous Guardians shifts from that of a federal program to a First Nations-led Network leading this inter-national stewardship.

### Contribution to the Government of Canada's Strategic Agenda

A National First Nations Guardians Network closely aligns with and significantly contributes to multiple overlapping strategic objectives and international stewardship commitments of the Government of Canada, including environmental, economic, and honouring Nation-to-Nation relationships with First Nations and implementing obligations under *UNDRIP*.

### Environmental

As Canada takes on the twin challenges of halting biodiversity loss and fighting climate change – recently committing to protect 30 percent of Canada's land and waters by 2030 and to employ nature-based solutions in the fight against climate change – the emergence of the Guardians movement and its readiness to scale up across the country presents an immense and rare opportunity to build a truly inter-national model of conservation and stewardship from coast to coast to coast.

Canada has expressed the will to rise to these challenges within the next decade and Guardians are showing how it can be done. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how better to meet Canada's ambitious targets than with a large-scale mobilization of First Nations peoples on our territories through a National First Nations Guardians Network.

By supporting the Network and Guardians programs from coast to coast to coast, Canada and First Nations will become important partners in conservation over our vast territories. This alliance will enable Canada to emerge as a global leader as it delivers on important international commitments under the Convention on Biodiversity, the Paris Agreement, and The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, among others. Read more in Section 3.3.4: *Role of Guardians in Meeting International Stewardship Objectives & Obligations*, and in Appendix B: *Role of Guardians in Meeting International Commitments*.

### Economic

A National First Nations Guardians Network will create thousands of good jobs and training opportunities - as well as local economic development opportunities within a conservation economy - in First Nations communities across the country where such opportunities are needed most acutely. Just as importantly, the Network will be key to the success of the new impact assessment system, which aims to create greater certainty for proposed developments by building deeper and more proactive First Nations participation into the assessment process. As the moccasins on the ground of host Nations, Guardians play a key role in enabling First Nations to exercise their jurisdiction effectively and gather the information they need to make good decisions with long-term implications. By supporting the roll-out of Guardians programs in most First Nations within five years, a National Guardians Network will rapidly foster this capacity in First Nations and support their full participation in the impact assessment system.

### Nation-to-Nation Relations and Implementing *UNDRIP*

Federal support for a National First Nations Guardians Network will make a significant contribution to the Government of Canada's objectives of advancing reconciliation, renewing Nation-to-Nation relationships, and implementing *UNDRIP*. Guardians programs support First Nations' self-determination by increasing our capacity to manage our lands, waters, and

resources, safeguard our Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, and collaborate in regional conservation and stewardship at the same time as they respond to TRC *Calls to Action* on addressing employment, educational, and health gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and the revitalization of Indigenous legal orders. Canada's support for the Network-program would serve as an important pillar of state support for the implementation of *UNDRIP* and Nation-to-Nation relationships between First Nations and the Crown.

Please see Section 4: *Contribution to the Government of Canada's Strategic Agenda* for more details on the many ways in which a National First Nations Guardians Network contributes to the Government of Canada's strategic objectives.

### Budget & Funding Request

As outlined in Section 5: *Funding Request*, expenditures will ramp up over five years, beginning with an investment of approximately \$46 million in Year 1. In that year, the Network will focus on supporting existing Guardians programs while it establishes itself and begins training the next cohort of Guardians who will go on to start new programs in Year 2. Expenditures increase as new Guardians programs come on stream across the country. We are seeking a total commitment of \$831.5 million over five years in order to grow a network of 400 Guardians programs across Canada.

The greatest challenge facing existing and emerging programs is lack of core funding. Investments will be primarily focused on core employment and training costs, thereby addressing this challenge and closing a critical gap that no other government or charitable sector funding source currently fills. The scale of the program will enable it to support a critical mass of First Nations across the country, thereby creating a truly national impact and clearly positioning Canada as a global leader in ensuring healthy ecosystems and communities.

### Evaluating Success of the Network-Program

The success of investment in the Network-program will be evaluated with the foundational principles of the self-determination of First Nations, Nation-to-Nation relationships amongst First Nations and between First Nations and Canada, using the Gift of Multiple Perspectives at the core of the evaluative approach and will draw on the evaluation models of the Pilot Program, First Nations health governance structure in BC, BC First Nations Data Governance Initiative, and SROI.

Accordingly, evaluation of the success of the Network-program would be guided assessment in key areas, such as:

- Effectiveness of the program theory – namely that investing in the Network-program will significantly improve conservation outcomes; close the socio-economic gap between First Nations and other Canadians; reduce federal, First Nations, and Canadian economic costs of the status quo; and improve relationships between First Nations and Canada.
- Integration with other land stewardship efforts.
- Continuous feedback and improvement processes.
- Suitability of funding application and assessment processes.
- Relationships with partners (e.g., quality of communication, sharing of resources, strategic alignment, and shared decision-making, etc.).



It would have utilization-focused approach, which judges a program on its usefulness to the primary intended users: Guardians, their programs, and the Nations that have created those programs. An evaluation should be conducted every five years, contributing to a cycle of continual learning and transformation. At the same time, part of the role of the Network Secretariat would be to conduct ongoing monitoring and assessment of its success in meeting the needs of Guardians programs and the Network Council, to enable learning and adaptation as needed between evaluations.

Building on the model of the Research, Knowledge Exchange, and Evaluation department of the First Nations Health Authority, the Network Secretariat could also assist Guardians programs in accessing relevant data and information held by other parties, including Crown departments, universities, and other researchers and organizations, and can help ensure that research agendas, strategies, and collaborations with other partners are aligned with First Nations interests and priorities and meet the ethical expectations of First Nations, including the OCAP® standard.