



# COMMUNICATING CONSERVATION EFFECTIVENESS: BALANCING OPTIMISM, TRADEOFFS AND REALISM IN CONSERVATION SUCCESS NARRATIVES

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## ABSTRACT

Communicating conservation ‘bright spots’ – concrete, demonstrated wins for biodiversity – is vital for inspiring public confidence, mobilising political commitment, and maintaining the long-term financing needed to scale impact, specifically by expanding, replicating and accelerating actions that meaningfully improve biodiversity outcomes. Yet research on how best to frame and share these successes with diverse audiences remains limited. To address this gap, we surveyed 45 Canadian conservation experts on the benefits, challenges and opportunities of communicating positive ecological and social outcomes from protected and conserved area initiatives. Respondents strongly endorsed the value of success stories for demonstrating conservation impact, inspiring action and boosting morale within organisations, particularly in countering conservation grief. Narratives that connect people to landscapes – such as those highlighting Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas – were viewed as especially compelling. However, experts cautioned against oversimplification, which can obscure the complexity and resources required for effective and urgent conservation. Our findings underscore the need for strategic, evidence-based communication approaches that balance optimism with realism, integrate diverse knowledge systems, and resonate across audiences. These insights can inform efforts to advance national and international conservation goals and targets, including Targets 3 (expanding protected and conserved areas) and 21 (knowledge sharing) of the CBD Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

**Keywords:** biodiversity, success, bright spots, protected and conserved areas, knowledge mobilization, Target 3, Target 21, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

## INTRODUCTION

Despite major progress in biodiversity conservation – such as a 6.2 per cent global increase in terrestrial protected and conserved areas (PCAs) and a 13.3 per cent rise in marine coverage since 1999 (now 8.4 per cent) (UNEP-WCMC & IUCN, 2024) – communicating positive ecological and social outcomes remains challenging (Díaz et al., 2018). Success stories are rare due to shifting baselines, inadequate monitoring, resource constraints, and uncertainty about replicating strategies (Post & Geldmann, 2018; Watts et al., 2020). Biodiversity also struggles to attract public attention compared to climate change, as impacts are either gradual and hard to visualise or sudden and crisis-driven (Legagneux et al., 2018). Consequently, negative

language dominates biodiversity-related discourse; which is often exacerbated by the integration of climate change narratives (McAfee et al., 2019).

Although none of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Aichi Biodiversity Targets were met globally (Díaz et al., 2019), conservation has not ‘failed’ *per se*. Indeed, a landmark study found that two-thirds of conservation interventions improved biodiversity or slowed its decline, with protected areas showing the strongest positive effects – underscoring the need to scale up such interventions (Langhammer et al., 2024). This outcome underscores an implementation gap, rather than a failure of conservation efficacy; individual site-level successes are demonstrably successful, yet their collective



Bison grazing at Elk Island National Park illustrate how protected grassland–forest mosaics can deliver real biodiversity outcomes through sustained stewardship, monitoring, and long-term investment © C. Lemieux

magnitude remains insufficient to counteract global declines. Sharing successes is critical for awareness, programme improvement and financing (Cvitanovic & Hobday, 2018). The CBD's *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (GBF), adopted in 2022, reinforces this through Target 3 ('30x30') and Target 21, which call for expanding PCAs and promoting knowledge sharing to inspire urgent action (CBD, 2022). Yet the intersection of these targets remains largely unexplored (Hoesen & Lemieux, 2025).

Environmental communication – the sharing of information to influence relationships with nature – is central to biodiversity mainstreaming and transformation more broadly (Young et al., 2014). It draws on education, outreach and behavioural science to raise awareness and encourage pro-environmental behaviour. Nevertheless, empirical links between biodiversity and communication strategies remain limited (Kidd, Bekessy et al., 2019a). Highlighting positive outcomes can inspire global action, but message framing matters: negative frames capture attention, while optimism sustains engagement when paired with realistic solutions (Doubleday and Connell, 2020; Kusmanoff et al., 2020; McAfee et al., 2019). Emotional states also influence receptivity – optimism fosters openness, whereas fear narrows focus (Coelho et al., 2017). Interdisciplinary approaches are essential to align messaging with values and emotions.

The concept of 'bright spots' highlights cases where conservation outcomes exceed expectations, often due to

community involvement, inclusive governance, and Indigenous leadership (Bennett et al., 2016; Cinner et al., 2016; Hoesen & Lemieux, 2025). These examples counter dominant narratives of decline by showing that ecological recovery is possible when social, cultural and ecological benefits align (Hoesen & Lemieux, 2025). Yet brightspot analyses remain limited in the context of PCAs, including in Canada, despite its extensive and expanding network.

Canada's *2030 Nature Strategy* positions communication and knowledgesharing across Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (ECCC, 2024). PCA organisations similarly embed education, research, outreach and storytelling in their mandates, to build ecological literacy and highlight conservation successes. However, little research examines how these efforts shape public perceptions, trust or understanding of positive biodiversity outcomes. Discussions of conservation knowledge systems are often framed as a binary between 'Western science' and 'Indigenous knowledge', yet this distinction can be misleading. Both encompass considerable internal diversity, including different disciplinary traditions, epistemologies and ways of evaluating evidence and outcomes. Moving beyond a binary framing allows for a more nuanced understanding of how conservation successes are identified, interpreted and communicated from multiple perspectives. Significant opportunities remain to understand and strengthen the role of PCAs as hubs for learning, knowledge exchange and public engagement.

This article addresses that gap by examining how conservation success is communicated, with the dual aims of: (1) identifying the benefits and drawbacks of foregrounding success stories; and (2) assessing the risks and opportunities of leveraging success in programming, outreach and management. Our goal is to examine how success-oriented communication can more effectively engage diverse audiences, normalise constructive and hopeful narratives through 2030, and contribute to the implementation of GBF Targets 3 and 21. By analysing current practices across Canada's protected and conserved areas, this research aims to generate insights into when and how communicating success supports collaboration, builds trust, and sustains public and institutional momentum. These findings are expected to inform practical guidance for conservation agencies and partners seeking to design communication strategies that amplify positive outcomes and enhance support for biodiversity action both within Canada and in comparable contexts globally.

## METHODS

### Survey development and participant recruitment

A mixed methods approach was adopted using a survey questionnaire of quantitative and qualitative questions administered in Qualtrics® (using a 5-point Likert scale) (see Supplementary Online Material 1). The survey was organised into three sections: (1) respondent information (8 questions), (2) 'bright spot' context, relevance and opportunities (5 questions), and (3) communicating conservation successes (6 questions). Respondents considered the advantages and disadvantages of communicating conservation success in relation to PCAs. The survey received ethics clearance for research on human subjects by Wilfrid Laurier University (REB #7247).

Purposive sampling was used to identify experts in PCA management and conservation issues within the Canadian context. Sampling was informed by a review of publications, institutional profiles, staff directories, and through referrals via long-established organisations, including the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (CCEA) and the Collective for Parks, Conservation, Innovation and Leadership (CPCIL). Experts invited to participate in the survey included practitioners (e.g. managers from Canadian government and private PCA agencies) and scholars with expertise in Canadian PCA issues. Individuals from a variety of conservation backgrounds were identified to achieve diverse perspectives, ensuring heterogeneity across areas of expertise (e.g. natural and social sciences). While governments responsible for Indigenous Protected and

Conserved Areas (IPCAs) were not specifically targeted, researchers with strong Indigenous-led conservation backgrounds were invited to participate to incorporate traditional knowledge perspectives.

### Data treatment and analysis

Closed-ended responses were analysed in IBM SPSS version 28, and open-ended responses in NVivo version 12 using Braun and Clarke's Six-Step Thematic Analysis Framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were derived inductively from the data, supported by a hybrid coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Steps 2 and 3 were repeated for consistency, and closely related codes were merged unless rare or irrelevant (Allsop et al., 2022). Codes were refined to capture contextual meaning, especially when responses linked multiple aspects (e.g. biodiversity and social outcomes), which were treated as unified themes. Sub-themes were consolidated into core themes through iterative refinement, ensuring excerpts aligned with question context. Triangulation cross-referenced codes with Likert responses to validate interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

## RESULTS

### Expert (respondent) characteristics

Experts were invited to complete the survey via email; 45 completed responses were received (representing a 37.5 per cent response rate). Academics had a slightly higher participation count (45.0 per cent) compared to practitioners (33.8 per cent). The lower response rate among practitioners may have been influenced by the timing of the survey during the summer months (i.e. field work). The organisations represented in the survey included five federal agencies, 12 provincial/territorial ministries, 17 research institutions (e.g. universities), 10 private and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and one international organisation. On average, respondents were highly educated (87 per cent with a graduate degree) with 17 years of working experience in the PCA sector (ranging from 1 to 50 years). Practitioners reported expertise in research, monitoring and reporting ( $n = 21$ ), legislation and policy development ( $n = 11$ ), protected areas selection, evaluation and design ( $n = 10$ ), and education, interpretation and outreach ( $n = 8$ ). Researchers and academics reported specialised knowledge in conservation social sciences, ecology, and protected areas policy, planning and management, and have collectively worked across every major ecozone in Canada.

### Sharing conservation successes

Most respondents (82 per cent) viewed conservation success as under-discussed, with all respondents (100 per cent) agreeing that sharing success stories brings

tangible benefits to PCAs (Table 1, Supplementary Online Material 2). Additionally, 94 per cent agreed that such stories should be shared more frequently. Nearly all respondents (97 per cent) agreed that promoting conservation success enhances biodiversity education and programming. Effectively communicating these successes poses challenges (Mean = 3.0), and respondents highlighted the need for more resources to support this work (Mean = 4.3). Respondents felt it important that stories balance realism and optimism (Mean = 4.3).

Conservation success statements were compared between practitioners (n = 27) and academics (n = 18) (Table 2, Supplementary Online Material 2). While practitioners and academics generally showed similar levels of agreement or disagreement, only two significant differences (p<0.05) emerged regarding statements 1 and 10. For statement 1, practitioners (Mean = 4.7) expressed stronger agreement that sharing conservation success benefits PCAs, compared to academics (Mean = 4.4). Conversely, for statement 10, which addresses the challenge of identifying successful conservation outcomes to highlight, practitioners were less likely to agree (Mean = 2.7), while academics were more in agreement (Mean = 3.5). These findings are returned to in the discussion below.

### Advantages and disadvantages related to the sharing of success stories

Communicating conservation success in PCAs offers opportunities to scale positive biodiversity outcomes but requires consideration of both benefits and risks (Tables 3 and 4, Supplementary Online Material 2). Overall, participants emphasised that while success stories can inspire replication, attract funding and strengthen engagement, they must be crafted to maintain urgency and avoid oversimplifying complex conservation realities (Figure 1). Balancing advantages and disadvantages is essential for communication strategies that advance conservation goals without creating unintended pressures or misconceptions.

By highlighting effective approaches, experts noted that these narratives can inspire replication, attract funding, and strengthen public and stakeholder engagement, ultimately advancing conservation goals. Five key advantages emerged from the qualitative analysis related to the sharing of success stories:

1. Raising awareness and appreciation;
2. Improving mental health and well-being;
3. Enhancing engagement;
4. Advancing knowledge of conservation solutions; and,
5. Demonstrating the value of conservation efforts.

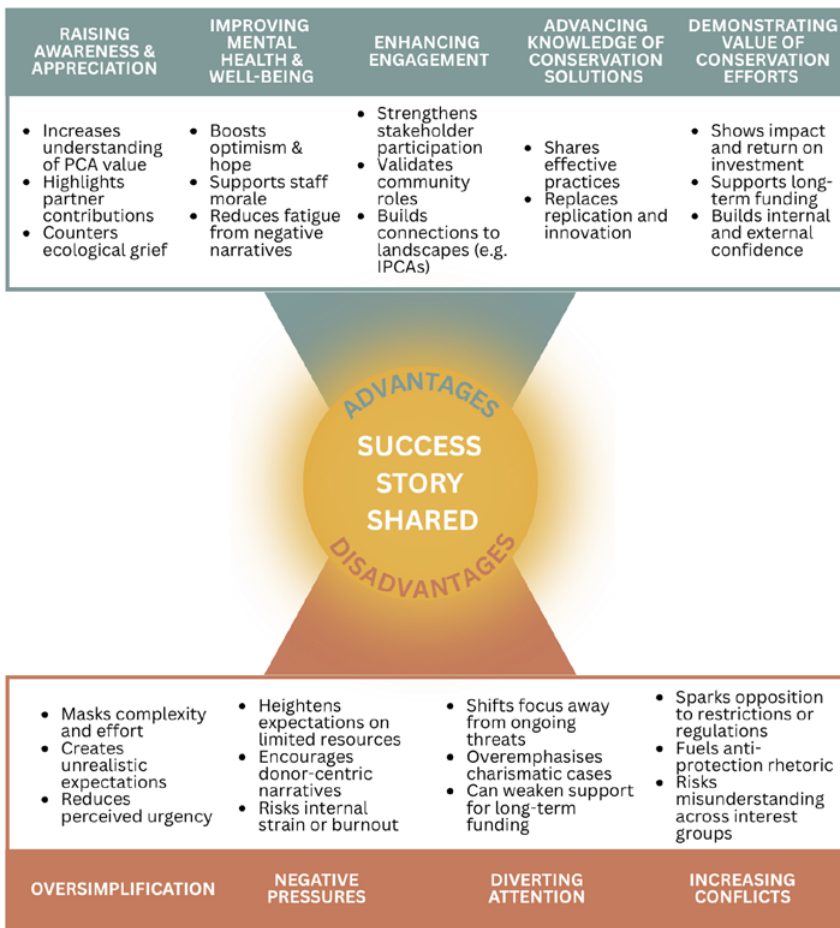


Figure 1. High-order and cascading impacts of communicating conservation success

The most frequently cited advantage involved fostering awareness and support for PCAs as vital conservation tools, and for conservation efforts more broadly. As one respondent noted:

*“Protected areas are managed with a lot of competing demands. Sharing success stories can help to show appreciation for the efforts of partners (i.e. community groups, volunteers, Indigenous collaborators) ... sharing success stories effectively can help to combat conservation grief that can emerge, especially in protected areas staff who often feel like they are swimming upstream.”*

Other respondents emphasised that success communication also plays an important internal role within conservation organisations. As one participant explained:

*“It is necessary to not only build public confidence and support for conservation agencies, but also build confidence and support for conservation within the protected area agency itself. Many conservation agencies are dependent on revenue from recreation (Crown), or from donors (e.g. non-government organizations). Communicating success stories indicates the lead agency is allocating those resources/revenue wisely and effectively.”*

Extending this outwards, another participant highlighted how success stories can shape public values and strengthen local engagement:

*“It increases the value of protected and conserved areas in the public eye and therefore favors their conservation, as people can better understand the benefits gained. It can also validate local support groups and incentivize their efforts as ambassadors for the areas.”*

Highlighting conservation success carries inherent risks that PCAs must carefully weigh against potential advantages. Respondents emphasised the importance of effectively communicating success to non-specialist audiences in a way that maintains a sense of urgency and avoids the misconception that successful biodiversity conservation is easy or is limited to PCAs. Four key disadvantages emerged from the qualitative analysis in this regard:

1. Oversimplification;
2. Negative pressures;
3. Diverting attention; and,
4. Increasing conflicts.

While disadvantages were noted less frequently than advantages, respondents nonetheless raised recurring cautions – particularly around the risks of

over-simplifying conservation narratives. One respondent worried that an emphasis on solutions could obscure the scale and difficulty of biodiversity loss:

*“I worry that the public will think the solutions to biodiversity decline are readily available and easy to access. It needs to be a balance between highlighting the needs of biodiversity and how human actions are eroding it, and the ability to mitigate this erosion through success stories.”*

Related concerns focused on how donor-centric communication can flatten the complexity of conservation practice and long-term relationship building:

*“Sometimes the oversimplification of detailed plans and projects to adapt them for communications with a donor-centric approach may seem too general, hyperbolic or too emotional and may miss the nuance required when discussing the decades of work and relationship building and careful inclusion of various communities in getting there. It’s not easy work ...”*

Beyond concerns about erasing complexity, some respondents warned that success-oriented messaging may also gloss over social trade-offs, particularly where conservation outcomes are achieved through restrictions on access or use. In these cases, communicating success too confidently may risk exacerbating existing tensions or generating new ones among affected stakeholders, as one participant cautioned:

*“The natural resource industry and recreational land users may oppose restrictions in protected and conserved areas. The natural resource industry would tend to be responsive to the increase of protected and conserved areas, and not to public communications on this. On the other hand, a portion of the public who fear that recreational activities and economic opportunities may be restricted by conservation efforts, may be more reactive to public communications. It could be perceived by a small portion of the population who feel impacted, that conservation efforts are not well balanced.”*

This perspective highlights how success stories, when detached from discussions of trade-offs and equity, may unintentionally deepen scepticism or resistance among groups who perceive themselves as bearing disproportionate costs. Collectively, these responses illustrate a persistent tension: success stories can enhance credibility, motivation and support, but only when they are communicated with sufficient nuance and transparency.



Experiences of university students at Pinery Provincial Park (Ontario, Canada) illustrate how connecting people with protected coastal ecosystems enhances ecological literacy and builds public trust and support, particularly when conservation outcomes are communicated realistically © C. Lemieux

### Conservation success stories that should be elevated

Respondents offered insights into the types of success stories they believe could be further elevated to support PCA goals and objectives (Table 5, Supplementary Online Material 2). A reoccurring theme was the concept that conservation as a ‘work in progress’ is a shared endeavour, where everyone has a role to play in success. Stories that highlight the connection between people and landscapes were seen as powerful narratives to foster discussions around ecosystem connectivity and promote broad societal collaboration.

Key areas for storytelling included diverse partnerships, incorporating different knowledge systems, and offering more balanced perspectives. Key informants noted that many recent conservation successes have been exemplified by the resurgence of Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, such as IPCAs in Canada. These success stories serve as valuable communications tools, with implications for elevating Indigenous-conservation approaches (e.g. Indigenous Guardians Programs, etc.). Positive examples of Indigenous stewardship have recently attracted substantial support from funders, as these case studies can inspire success in other regions (Artelle et al., 2019). Indigenous-led conservation approaches are increasingly recognised as critical to conservation success. Experts noted that it remains challenging to blend communication approaches using different forms of knowledge, and that additional resources

are needed to support such efforts. It was also recognised that agencies need to be flexible and nimble because they must adapt communications to diverse audiences, contexts and evolving ecological challenges. This adaptability ensures that messages resonate effectively, fostering broader engagement and sustained support for conservation efforts. As one respondent explained:

*“Communications also need to recognize that there are different audiences or interpretive communities within society who each respond to the issue in their own distinct ways. One of the first rules of effective communication is ‘know thy audience’, this is where protected area/biodiversity conservation has failed. You need to know who your audience is, what they currently understand or misunderstand about issues, their perceptions of the risks, their underlying values, attitudes, and emotions, where they get their information, whom they trust. This also requires better engagement with other sectors who are also part of the problem but can be part of the solution.”*

Respondents also emphasised the importance of shining a light on lesser-known conservation achievements across Canada, such as those about unfamiliar or underrepresented species, remote regions and innovative partnerships. For example, collaborations with industry, community-driven initiatives, new monitoring programmes, and imperfect solutions that balance trade-offs. Emphasis was also placed on sharing these

narratives with diverse audiences, particularly those who may not visit PCAs or work in sectors less attuned to the urgency of conservation. These stories, infused with a sense of hope, were viewed as essential for strengthening long-term relationships between people and nature, and encouraging both public and stakeholder engagement. As one participant stated:

*“Often, we celebrate success in areas that are well known and close to us, but I think by telling success stories from less frequented and remote areas, we might be able to both highlight the success and increase familiarity and ability to relate to the more remote areas and species of Canada. In a massive country like Canada, I think that it’s important to find ways to get people thinking about the 90 per cent of it that’s remote and that most Canadians may never see.”*

## DISCUSSION

Success stories related to PCA investments can provide compelling examples of progress, viable solutions and tangible conservation outcomes. Strategic communication that highlights synergies and mutual benefits can reinvigorate conservation efforts and strengthen public engagement (Cvitanovic & Hobday, 2018; Dietz et al., 2021; Legegneux et al., 2018), particularly in the context of global commitments to halt biodiversity loss, including targets to protect 30 per cent of terrestrial, freshwater and marine areas by 2030 and restore biodiversity by 2050 (CBD, 2022). Our research indicates that communicating conservation successes raises awareness and support, enhances the visibility of PCAs, and improves understanding of pathways to address biodiversity loss. These narratives were also perceived to support mental well-being among both the public and conservation professionals, while strengthening fundraising and collaboration by demonstrating effectiveness and impact.

While fear- and anger-based narratives can effectively capture attention, they may also contribute to fatigue, polarisation and disengagement over time, underscoring the need for complementary communication approaches that sustain long-term engagement. The role of success stories in supporting mental health and well-being – both within the conservation sector and among external audiences – remains underexplored, yet experts emphasised the importance of integrating hope and optimism into conservation messaging. This perspective aligns with existing literature showing that communication strategies are more impactful when they account for emotional states and audience perspectives during message design and dissemination (Coelho et al.,

2017; Kidd, Garrard et al., 2019; McAfee et al., 2019; Park et al., 2020). In this sense, evidence-based success stories can serve as important counterweights to the persistent circulation of anxiety-inducing environmental narratives in mass media and public discourse (see Ogunbode et al., 2022).

However, calls for more success stories also revealed tensions in how conservation progress is perceived, particularly when interventions are assessed across mismatched or accelerating timescales. Several respondents suggested that genuine gains may appear insufficient when measured against crisis-oriented narratives, moving targets, or highly visible achievements elsewhere. In this context, progress can represent meaningful success yet still feel like ‘not doing enough’, contributing to frustration despite real advancements. This dynamic is reflected in growing attention to conservation-related emotional responses among practitioners, including initiatives addressing ecological grief (CPCIL, 2024). Together, these insights underscore the importance of communicating conservation as an ongoing process of *measurable progress* rather than a static end point, ensuring that incremental gains are recognised as success when, and where, they occur.

Our results underscore the need for a strategic approach to conservation messaging, including Western and Indigenous approaches, ensuring that communications resonate with diverse audiences and serve multiple purposes effectively. While strategies from other disciplines can offer useful insights, they must be critically evaluated, as they may lack empirical data necessary to meet the specific goals of area-based conservation (see Bekessy et al., 2018; Kidd, Bekessy et al., 2019b). Further research is required to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of biodiversity communication strategies and message-framing techniques, including the ways in which audience emotions, perspectives and values are integrated (Coelho et al., 2017; Kidd, Garrard et al., 2019; McAfee et al., 2019).

We revealed that although messages of hope and inspiration can foster optimism and momentum, balanced messaging is essential to convey the complexities of conservation with realism. The concept of ‘success’ also remains inadequately defined (Post & Geldmann, 2018), and communication strategies must acknowledge this inherent uncertainty. Experts emphasised that care must be taken to avoid oversimplifying the work and resources that are required to achieve and maintain ‘success’, as this can lead to the misconception that conservation is not difficult to achieve, or that solutions are readily available for every challenge.



Early forest regeneration along a Jasper National Park trail shows post-wildfire recovery as a hopeful but incremental process dependent on long-term protection, adaptive management, and collaboration © C. Lemieux

Our results emphasise the need for organisations to be mindful of challenges that may arise when sharing success stories. Without adequate context, such narratives may inadvertently suggest that conservation efforts are complete, reducing urgency and potentially contributing to public disengagement or anti-protection rhetoric. Frequent use of success stories may also create the misconception that sustained long-term funding is unnecessary and raise unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved with chronically limited resources (see Lemieux et al., 2021). Emphasizing milestone achievements as conservation successes risks erasing Indigenous Peoples and local communities by masking their historical and ongoing contributions and perpetuating colonial narratives of conservation effectiveness (Loring & Moola, 2020). Success stories can also be romanticised when positive outcomes are emphasised while ongoing challenges, trade-offs, or internal community diversity are downplayed, risking simplified narratives that privilege symbolic inclusion over substantive changes in power, governance and decision-making authority.

Ensuring that success narratives are community-controlled, context-rich and reflective of lived realities is therefore critical to ethical and effective conservation communication. One constructive step would be establishing an inclusive national working group to co-develop a strategic communication

framework guiding how conservation successes are framed, shared and evaluated across audiences. Such a framework could support tailored messaging for policymakers, communities, rights holders, the private sector, and philanthropists, while remaining attentive to plural definitions of success and avoiding overly standardised or donor-centric framings. When done thoughtfully, systematic reporting of conservation outcomes can strengthen public support, enhance transparency and accountability, demonstrate the value of investment, and foster shared responsibility across Canada's diversifying conservation community while supporting the long-term financing and policy commitments needed for effective management.

A complementary step is to collaboratively define how conservation success should be tracked, including the development of metrics that allow comparability across contexts while acknowledging that success is diverse and place-specific (Hoesen & Lemieux, 2025). This is particularly important for initiatives grounded in different knowledge systems, where success in Indigenous-led and community-based conservation may be defined through strengthened governance, cultural continuity, language revitalisation, intergenerational knowledge transfer, or renewed relationships with land and water – outcomes that often fall outside conventional ecological indicators or short-term project timelines (Artelle et al., 2019; M's-t No'kmaq et al., 2021). Because

knowledge systems are internally diverse, complementary, and deeply situated in specific contexts, they resist universal definitions of success. Future research should therefore examine how communication approaches, particularly those blending Western science and Indigenous knowledge, can be co-developed to foster trust, inclusivity and engagement, including guidance for IPCAs where compelling narratives exist but practical framing remains limited (Ens et al., 2022). Exploring audience segmentation and framing strategies, such as balancing optimism and realism or emphasising cultural relevance, would further support behavioural change and policy commitment while respecting diverse cultural contexts (e.g. McAfee et al., 2019).

As a result, externally driven evaluation frameworks risk misinterpreting or undervaluing forms of success that are meaningful within their originating knowledge systems. Shared approaches to documenting results should prioritise clarity and transparency while remaining flexible enough to accommodate community-defined values, plural success criteria, and the situated realities of different knowledge systems and worldviews to avoid 'blending' values in a way that risks oversimplifying perspectives. By prioritising metrics that reflect this diversity, conservation can ensure that community-led priorities are not obscured by generalised metrics, thereby upholding the integrity of the specific knowledge systems involved.

This study shares common limitations of survey-based research. Although experts from diverse conservation fields were purposefully selected to support more holistic perspectives, Indigenous governments and communities were not directly engaged, meaning the findings do not fully reflect Canada's wider conservation community. Additionally, interpreting Indigenous-led conservation initiatives through secondary accounts carries a risk of reinforcing simplified or external framings of success. Future research would benefit from community-led articulation of success narratives and evaluation criteria to ensure authenticity and accountability in conservation communication. Finally, the use of a single coder also introduces potential researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021), as decisions about coding and theme development may have been influenced by individual interpretation (Allsop et al., 2022). Nonetheless, open-ended responses allowed participants to articulate their views in their own words, providing contextual depth that helped validate the analysis and indicate that the questions were generally well aligned with respondent intent.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our results revealed that conservation success stories remain underused within Canada's PCA community, despite their potential to shift attention from sitelevel crises towards landscapescale, communitydriven solutions. This gap matters because conservation is a continuous learning process constrained by limited resources (Lemieux et al., 2021). When narratives focus only on negative outcomes, progress 'beyond hectares' appears rare, reinforcing the misconception that areabased conservation – central to Target 3's 30x30 goal – is a poor investment and diverting resources away from effective PCA management.

Success stories can counter these risks by fostering a connectivity mindset and motivating collective action (McAfee et al., 2019), but they must be crafted carefully to avoid oversimplification or unintended consequences such as overvisitation or reduced funding. Equally important is inclusivity: weaving in diverse cultural perspectives and Indigenous knowledge ensures holistic storytelling aligned with GBF priorities on inclusive decisionmaking (Target 22) and knowledge sharing (Target 21) (Dudley et al., 2022).

Our findings emphasise that success stories must be contextrich and realistic to resonate across audiences and avoid implying that conservation gains are easy. Strategic communication linking conservation action (Target 3) with knowledge sharing (Target 21) can support long-term biodiversity goals and public engagement.

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## RÉSUMÉ

La communication des “points positifs” en matière de conservation – c'est-à-dire des avancées concrètes et avérées pour la biodiversité – est essentielle pour inspirer la confiance du public, mobiliser l'engagement politique et maintenir le financement à long terme nécessaire pour amplifier l'impact, notamment en développant, en reproduisant et en accélérant les actions qui améliorent de manière significative les résultats en matière de biodiversité. Pourtant, les recherches sur la meilleure façon de présenter et de partager ces réussites auprès de publics variés restent limitées. Pour combler cette lacune, nous avons interrogé 45 experts canadiens en conservation sur les avantages, les défis et les opportunités liés à la communication des résultats écologiques et sociaux positifs issus des initiatives menées dans les zones protégées et conservées. Les personnes interrogées ont fortement souligné la valeur des exemples de réussite pour démontrer l'impact de la conservation, inspirer l'action et remonter le moral au sein des organisations, en particulier pour contrer le deuil de la conservation. Les récits qui relient les personnes aux paysages – tels que ceux mettant en avant les zones protégées et conservées autochtones – ont été jugés particulièrement convaincants. Cependant, les experts ont mis en garde contre une simplification excessive, qui peut masquer la complexité et les ressources nécessaires à une conservation efficace et urgente. Nos conclusions soulignent la nécessité d'adopter des approches de communication stratégiques et fondées sur des données probantes, qui concilient optimisme et réalisme, intègrent divers systèmes de connaissances et trouvent un écho auprès de tous les publics. Ces informations peuvent contribuer à faire progresser les objectifs et cibles nationaux et internationaux en matière de conservation, notamment les cibles n° 3 (extension des zones protégées et conservées) et n° 21 (partage des connaissances) du Cadre mondial pour la biodiversité de Kunming-Montréal de la CDB.

## RESUMEN

La difusión de los “puntos positivos” de la conservación —logros concretos y demostrados en materia de biodiversidad— es fundamental para inspirar la confianza del público, movilizar el compromiso político y mantener la financiación a largo plazo necesaria para ampliar el impacto, concretamente mediante la expansión, la replicación y la aceleración de acciones que mejoren de manera significativa los resultados en materia de biodiversidad. Sin embargo, la investigación sobre la mejor manera de presentar y compartir estos éxitos con públicos diversos sigue siendo limitada. Para abordar esta laguna, encuestamos a 45 expertos canadienses en conservación sobre los beneficios, retos y oportunidades de comunicar los resultados ecológicos y sociales positivos de las iniciativas de áreas protegidas y conservadas. Los encuestados respaldaron firmemente el valor de las historias de éxito para demostrar el impacto de la conservación, inspirar la acción y elevar la moral dentro de las organizaciones, especialmente para contrarrestar el desánimo en materia de conservación. Las narrativas que conectan a las personas con los paisajes —como aquellas que destacan las Áreas Protegidas y Conservadas Indígenas— se consideraron especialmente convincentes. Sin embargo, los expertos advirtieron contra la simplificación excesiva, que puede ocultar la complejidad y los recursos necesarios para una conservación eficaz y urgente. Nuestros hallazgos subrayan la necesidad de enfoques de comunicación estratégicos y basados en la evidencia que equilibren el optimismo con el realismo, integren diversos sistemas de conocimiento y tengan repercusión en todas las audiencias. Estos datos pueden servir de base para impulsar los objetivos y metas de conservación a nivel nacional e internacional, entre ellos la meta 3 (ampliar las áreas protegidas y conservadas) y la meta 21 (intercambio de conocimientos) del Marco Mundial para la Diversidad Biológica de Kunming-Montreal del CDB.