



Dene K'éh Kusān

- *Always Will be There*

Kaska's Proposed Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area

Long before provincial land borders were drawn, Kaska Dena peoples lived in 240,000 square kilometres of BC's far north, southeast Yukon and southern Northwest Territories. These ancestral lands extend across a pristine wilderness larger than Vancouver Island.

In our language we say ***Dene K'éh Kusān***, which means ***Always Will Be There***. To ensure our people and ancestral lands will thrive today and into the future, we've built a plan for protecting this vital piece of northern BC.

We're asking the government to work jointly with us to ensure that Kaska Dena ancestral territory:

- Does not suffer the devastating effects of climate change and biodiversity loss we're seeing across British Columbia, Canada and around the world.
- Remains intact, which is critical to preserving Kaska peoples' material, cultural and spiritual lives.
- Continues to shelter caribou, a species struggling to feed itself and breed in other parts of the province.
- Sustains and creates economic opportunities for Kaska and others in northern communities.
- Becomes a world-class protected area for all British Columbians to explore and enjoy.

"One of the Last Best Places on the Planet"

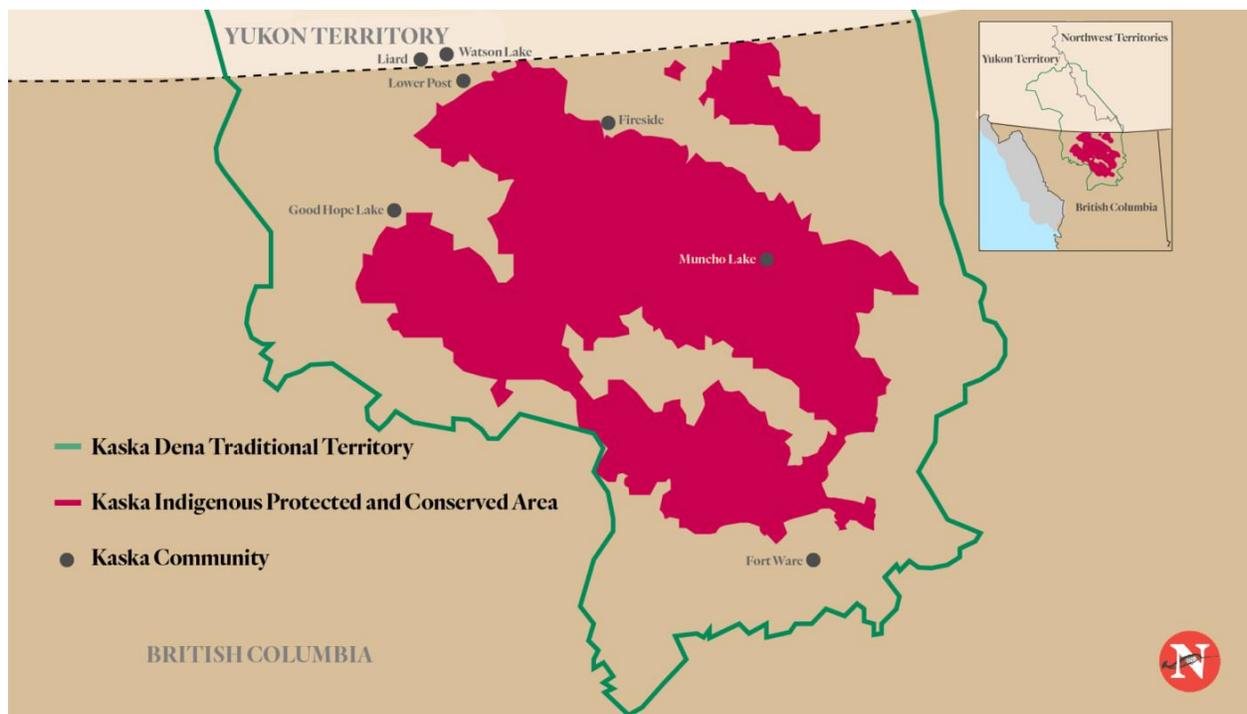
Conservation scientist John Weaver calls the region that includes the proposed Kaska conservation area "one of the last best places on the planet."

At 40,000 square kilometres, the ***Dene K'éh Kusān*** would be larger than Vancouver Island. Jasper, Yoho, Banff and Kootenay parks combined would still have only about one-half the area the Kaska propose for conservation.



The Kaska Dena say the plan is necessary to protect nature and preserve their way of life at a time when Indigenous cultures across the globe are threatened with extinction, global warming is a significant threat and intact eco-systems are scarce.

John Weaver’s recent conservation report examines the Greater Muskwa-Kechika area. In a recent interview with the Narwhal, Mr. Weaver says this area is no less important ecologically than the renowned Great Bear Rainforest on the north coast, touted by the provincial government as B.C.’s “gift to the world.”



Kaska Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area. Map: Carol Linnitt / The Narwhal

Certainty for Industry and Sustainable Jobs

Resource extraction, including logging and mining, would take place on the periphery of the conserved area, while current land uses such as guide outfitting and commercial trapping would be grandfathered in.



Priorities of the *Dene K'eh Kusan*

The key priorities of the *Dene K'eh Kusān* are:

- Maintain healthy functioning ecosystems in the boreal forest, a carbon sink known as the northern lungs of the world;
- Protect and preserve habitat for some of BC's healthiest caribou herds, Stone's sheep, mountain goats, moose, grizzly bears and other key species, particularly in the advancement of climate change and the impact this will have on wildlife habitat; (e.g. The Rabbit herd, whose range would be almost entirely preserved in the proposed Kaska conservancy, was estimated at 1,000 animals in 2018. That could be a wildlife spectacle in today's industrialized B.C., which holds the dubious distinction of having more species vulnerable to extinction than anywhere else in Canada, and no provincial law to protect them.¹)
- A conservation-based economy would create new long-term jobs in land stewardship through an expanded Indigenous land guardians program and ecotourism ventures.

Partnering with Government

The Kaska proposal, backed by a number of organizations, including World Wildlife Fund and the Indigenous Leadership Initiative, can only move forward with federal and provincial government approval.

Federal Government

In mid-August, the federal government confirmed it will provide \$587,500 to advance the initiative, one of 67 conservation projects supported through the Canada Nature Fund, which aims to expand the country's connected and protected areas as part of government's pledge to double the amount of nature Canada protects. These funds are being matched by NGOs.

¹ <https://thenarwhal.ca/serengeti-of-the-north-the-kaska-denas-visionary-plan-to-protect-a-huge-swath-of-b-c-wilderness/>



BC Provincial Government



On September 10, 2019 Kaska Leadership met with BC Ministers Fraser, Donaldson and Heyman in Victoria to discuss the Kaska proposed ***Dene K'éh Kusān***.

Kaska leaders were very appreciative of the positive response received from the Ministers and look forward to working with the provincial government in advancing this initiative.

*Corrine Porter, Dena Kayeh Institute, showing a map of the ***Dena K'eh Kusan*** to BC provincial Ministers on September 10, 2019*