

Census of Environment: Protected and conserved ocean and coastal ecosystems

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Monday, November 7, 2022

In 2021, 13.9% of Canada's ocean and coastal ecosystems were conserved, representing an area of 798,480 km². Almost two-thirds (64.7%) of this area were located in the Arctic Ocean, compared with 21.3% in the Atlantic Ocean and 13.9% in the Pacific Ocean.

Ocean and coastal ecosystems are affected by climate change and human activities, such as fishing, transportation, recreation and other pressures. Conservation networks across ocean and coastal ecosystems play an important role in preserving marine ecosystems and biodiversity and reducing pressures from human activity. Canada has committed to conserving 25% of its oceans by 2025, working toward 30% by 2030.

In 2021, close to one-quarter (24.5%) of the country's ocean and coastal ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean were conserved, compared with 14.4% in the Arctic Ocean and 10.0% in the Atlantic Ocean.

These data are tracked in a new table that will report the status of protected and conserved ocean and coastal ecosystems over time. This table focuses on the Protected and conserved ocean and coastal ecosystem extent account, which is part of [Statistics Canada's new Census of Environment program](#), which will eventually report on all ecosystems in Canada.

Marine and coastal areas conserved through different measures

Ocean and coastal areas are conserved through various means. In 2021, 66% of the total conserved areas were protected by being designated as marine protected areas established under the *Oceans Act*, national marine conservation areas and other protected areas.

The total conserved area also includes regions that are conserved under other effective conservation measures (OECMs), such as the establishment of marine refuges with long-term fisheries area closures. These types of measures apply to approximately 35% of the total conserved area.

Most of Canada's conserved ocean area has depths that range from 200 m to 4,000 m, 22% of which were conserved. Meanwhile, 5% of shallower waters (depths of less than 200 m) were conserved, while approximately 3% of Canada's deepest waters (depths of more than 4,000 m) were conserved.

In 2021, 29% of the known area of cold-water coral and sponge ecosystems occurring within Canada's ocean and coastal ecosystems was conserved, largely by the federal government using OECMs. These fragile ecosystems are located on the seafloor and can be damaged by fishing and other human activities.

Important coastal ecosystems are often protected by the provinces and territories. More than one-third of the known area of kelp forest (35%) and seagrass meadow (34%) was conserved in 2021. However, coastal ecosystems are more likely to be identified in areas that are actively managed.

Overall, 23% of the protected areas allowed for the sustainable use of natural resources, 3% were designated as national parks, 3% were wilderness areas and 2% met other International Union for Conservation of Nature protection categories. The protection category was unspecified for 69% of protected areas.

Canada's marine conservation network has rapid growth

In 2017, several large areas were conserved. This included the Tallurutiup Imanga national marine conservation area in the Eastern Arctic, as well as the Offshore Pacific Seamounts and Vents Closure and the Northeast Newfoundland Slope Closure conservation areas. A large increase also occurred in 2019, with the addition of the Tuvaqjittuq marine protected area, west of Baffin Island in the Arctic.



Table 1
Conserved ocean and coastal ecosystems

	Share of total ecosystem area that is conserved
	%
2015	1.2
2016	1.4
2017	7.8
2018	8.0
2019	13.8
2020	13.9
2021	13.9

Source(s): Table [38-10-0157-01](#).

Note to readers

Statistics Canada's Census of Environment program reports on ecosystems in Canada, providing information to help Canadians make evidence-based decisions to protect and enhance the environment. It follows the internationally accepted environmental economic standard for producing information on ecosystems' extent, their condition and the services they provide.

The new table released today will track protected and conserved ocean and coastal ecosystems. It uses the extent from the [Ocean and coastal ecosystem extent account](#).

Conserved areas include protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). Protected areas are areas that meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature definition of a protected area. They include national, provincial and territorial parks; Indigenous protected areas; national wildlife areas; migratory bird sanctuaries; and marine protected areas. OECMs are areas that do not meet the formal definition of protected area but are managed in a way that conserves biodiversity over the long term. These areas can include Indigenous territories; watersheds, resource management areas or marine refuges; and areas with restricted access, such as those used by the military.

Have your say: The Census of Environment

Help shape the future of the Census of Environment. Visit the page "[Statistics Canada is seeking input on the new Census of Environment program](#)" to participate.

For more information, see [Canadian System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – Ecosystem Accounts \(5331\)](#).

Available tables: table [38-10-0157-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5331](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).