

Census of Environment: Ecosystem integrity and conservation of terrestrial ecosystems

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In 2024, nearly 1.4 million square kilometres of Canada's terrestrial area, accounting for 13.7% of its land and freshwater, was conserved through protected areas or other effective conservation measures.

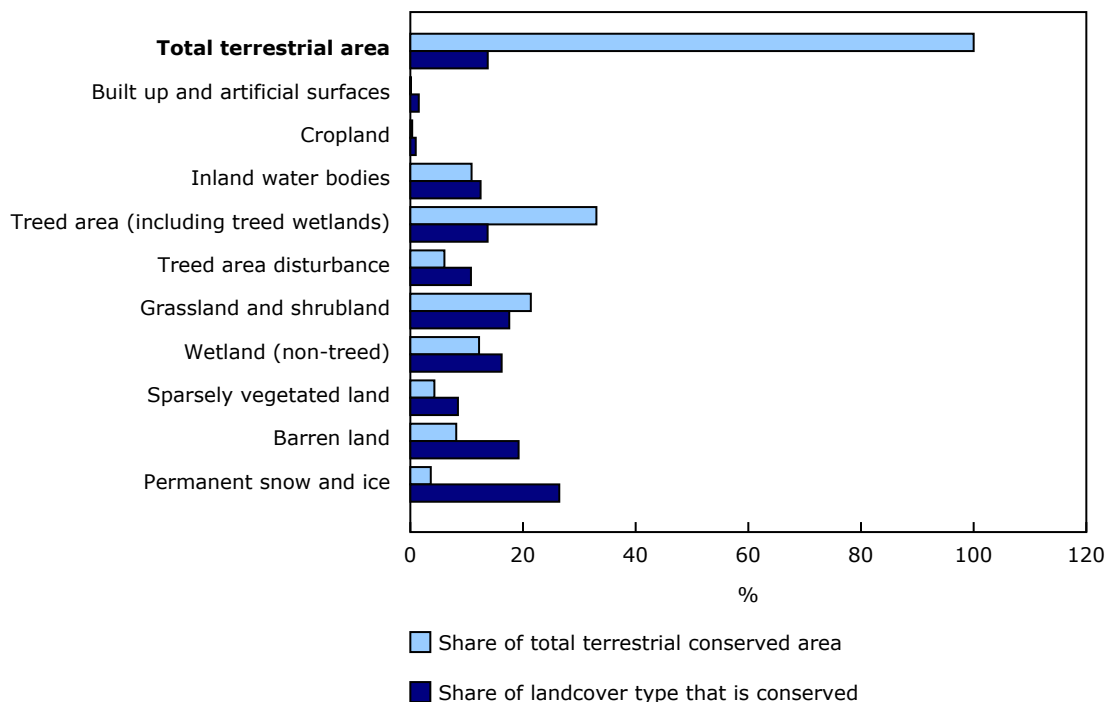
Three-fifths of Canada's conserved area was treed area or grassland and shrubland in 2024

In 2024, the most commonly conserved land cover type was treed area, with treed area classes (including treed wetlands and treed areas disturbed by wildfires and harvesting) accounting for almost 40% of Canada's terrestrial conserved area. Grassland and shrubland area comprised over 20% of the total conserved area.

Over one-quarter of all areas of permanent snow and ice were conserved in 2024, although this land cover type accounted for slightly less than 4% of total conserved area.

Since 2015, terrestrial conserved areas have increased by more than 350 000 square kilometres. Treed areas as well as grass and shrub lands accounted for the largest share (70%) of this increase in conserved area. While the level of protection and management can vary, conserved and protected areas help reduce pressures on ecosystems and help protect biodiversity.

Chart 1
Conserved areas, by land cover type, 2024



Note(s): Land cover areas used to calculate these percentages were based on pixel counting rather than statistical estimates of area by land cover class.
Source(s): Table 38-10-0193-01.

Landscape fragmentation affects ecosystem integrity

Linear features such as roads, railways, electrical transmission lines and cutlines are necessary for human and economic activity, but they compromise the integrity of natural landscapes. In 2020, the density of linear features across the landscape was highest in the Georgia Depression ecoprovince (3 509 m/km²) in southwestern British Columbia, the Boreal Foothills ecoprovince (3 401 m/km²) covering parts of northwestern Alberta and northern British Columbia, and the Huron-Erie Plains ecoprovince (2 789 m/km²) in southern Ontario.

The size of each patch of natural and semi-natural area and the distance between these patches are also important characteristics affecting ecosystem integrity, as they affect an ecosystem's ability to provide habitat, ecological corridors, and climate resilience. In 2020, the smallest and most isolated natural and semi-natural patches were found in ecoprovinces across the Mixedwood Plains and Prairie ecozones of Central Canada.

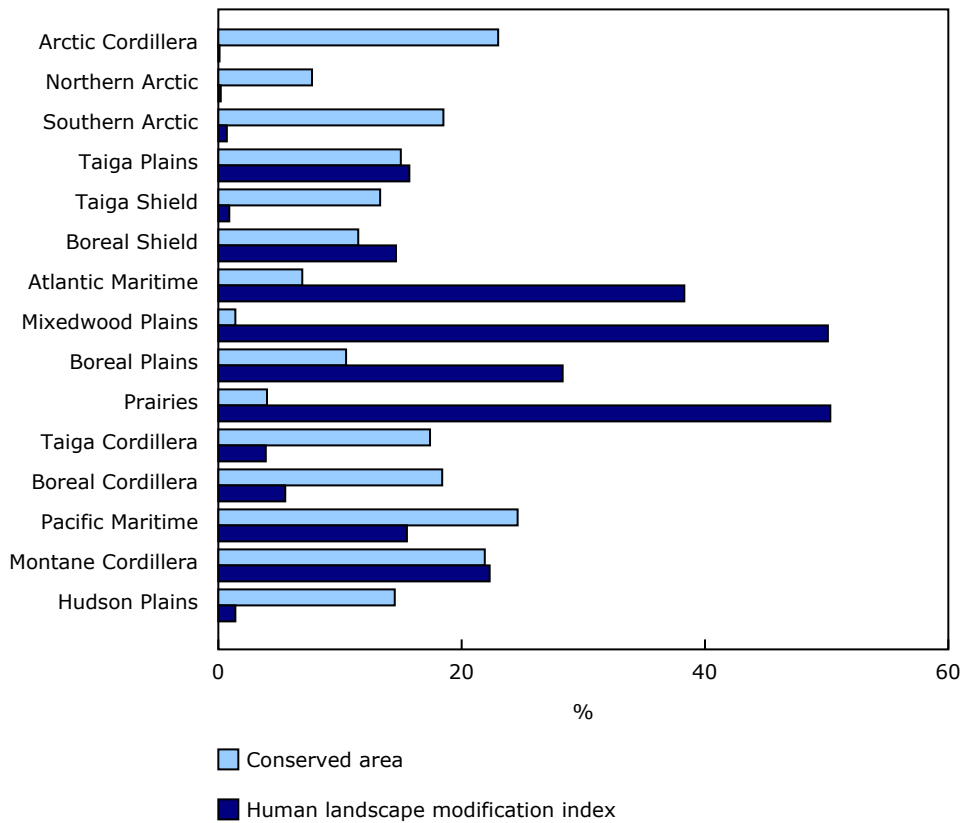
In 2020, the Huron-Erie Plains, Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Lowlands and Parkland Prairies ecoprovinces had the smallest average size of natural and semi-natural area at less than 0.5 km². The average distance to a natural and semi-natural patch was highest in the Eastern Prairies (461 m), the Huron-Erie Plains (355 m), followed by the Central Grassland (298 m) and Parkland Prairies (255 m) ecoprovinces.

Agricultural and settled land in southern Ontario and the Prairies among most heavily modified ecosystems

Combining information on landscape fragmentation with information on land cover and land use—such as land associated with settlements, industry and agriculture—helps identify the areas of the country where ecosystems have been more heavily modified and those where they remain more intact.

In 2020, ecosystems with the highest human landscape modification index (HLMI) scores, representing the most highly modified ecosystems, were located in ecozones in the Prairies, southern Ontario and Quebec. The lowest HLMI scores were found in northern Canada where most of the natural landscape remains intact.

Chart 2
Conserved areas and the human landscape modification index, by ecozone, 2020



Note(s): The human landscape modification index is a measure of direct human modifications to the landscape.
Source(s): Tables 38-10-0193-01 and 38-10-0196-01.

Conserved areas by ecoprovince

In 2024, conserved areas could be found in all ecoprovinces, with the exception of the remote Sverdrup Island ecoprovince in Nunavut and the Western Boreal Cordillera ecoprovince in Yukon. Almost 90% of the Wrangel Mountains ecoprovince, located in Yukon and northwestern British Columbia, was protected within Kluane National Park, Tatshenshini-Alsek Provincial Park and Asi Keyi Territorial Park.

Protected and conserved areas located in more heavily populated regions provide opportunities for recreation and have other influences on human well-being. In 2024, 15.1% of the Georgia Depression ecoprovince, located in southwestern British Columbia, was conserved, surpassing the overall share of terrestrial area conserved for Canada as a whole.

In contrast, 0.4% of the terrestrial area of the Huron–Erie Plains ecoprovince and 2.5% of the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence Lowlands ecoprovince was conserved.

Note to readers

Two new tables on ecosystem condition are now available (38-10-0195 and 38-10-0196). These tables provide data on landscape fragmentation and the human landscape modification index (HLMI) for 2020.

Landscape fragmentation refers to the division of natural and semi-natural ecosystems into smaller and more isolated patches. The (HLMI) integrates data on land use, land cover, linear features, and natural and semi-natural area patch size to provide a measure of direct landscape modifications. A higher HLMI score indicates more landscape modification and a lower HLMI score indicates lower rates of direct modification.

Statistics Canada's new Protected and conserved terrestrial extent account tables provide data on the conservation status of terrestrial ecosystems, by land cover type, protection type and management type (38-10-0193 and 38-10-0194).

These tables present information by ecological and drainage area geographies, which are based on the Ecological Land Classification and the Standard Drainage Area Classification.

Environment and Climate Change Canada produces the Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicator "Canada's conserved areas," which provides estimates of conserved and protected areas, by province as well as ecozone and ecoregion.

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. The program follows the internationally accepted environmental-economic standard for producing information on ecosystems' extent, their condition and the services they provide.

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

Available tables: [38-10-0193-01](#) to [38-10-0196-01](#) .

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).