



RURAL WELLBEING

Conservation



HIGHLIGHTS

- Rural Ontario holds 94% of the province's protected areas, covering nearly 98,000 sq km, rural communities are the backbone of Ontario's conservation landscape.
- Northern Ontario dominates protected land: amongst the top 9 communities by protected area, 9 of them are in Northern Ontario and together account for 86% of Ontario's total protected areas, with Kenora Unorganized alone covering over 50,000 sq km.
- Provincial parks are the primary protection mechanism: they account for 85.8% of all protected areas in Ontario.

Overview

Conservation areas can play an important role in mitigating and adapting to climate change and protecting the biodiversity. They can also play a key role in the wellbeing of the residents by providing recreational opportunities and participating in creating a healthy environment.

Rural areas are less covered with built infrastructure and thus play a key role in the protection of the environment. Governments and other organizations play a key role in protecting those. There are different types of conservation areas.

For details see [Ontario's parks and protected areas | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca/en/government/ontario-parks-and-protected-areas)

This factsheet presents information about conservation indicators from ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#). Explore the dashboard to view interactive maps and data visualizations.



Date source:

- Ontario Geohub. [Municipal Park](#). [Federal Protected Areas](#). [Provincial Park Regulated](#). [Greenbelt designation](#). Contains information licensed under the [Open Government Licence - Ontario](#).
- [Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database](#). Environment and Climate Change Canada. Contains information licensed under the [Open Government Licence - Canada](#).
- [2021 Census Boundary files](#). Statistics Canada Boundary file, Administrative boundaries of the Census subdivisions, 2021.

Definitions:

Community: Census subdivisions, municipalities, and areas treated as municipal for statistical purposes, such as unorganized territories.

Community type: Categories of communities as rural or urban.

Rural: Any municipality outside of census metropolitan areas. Does not include communities designated as First Nations reserves or settlements.

Urban: Any municipality within a census metropolitan area. Does not include communities designated as First Nations reserves or settlements.

Protected areas (sq km): The area (square kilometres) and proportion of area that is protected by federal, provincial, or municipal legislation, or by non-profit organizations, land trusts and/or agencies.

Rural Ontario plays a key role in conserving protected areas

Table 1. Total protected area for each type of community.

Community type	Total protected area (sqkm)	Share protected area (%)	Proportion in total protected area of Ontario
First Nations	104	1.3%	0.1%
Rural	97,655	10.4%	94.0%
Urban	6,112	16.7%	5.9%
Ontario	103,871	10.6%	

Most of the protected areas in Ontario are located in rural areas (see Table 1). Rural Ontario (see the [Rural Classification factsheet](#) for more details) covers more than 95% of the areas in Ontario.

Location of the protected areas in Ontario

The communities with the largest area protected are located in Northern Ontario. Together, the protected areas in those 9 communities of Northern Ontario (see Table 2) cover 86% of the protected areas of Ontario.

Figure 1 - Top 10 communities with the largest protected areas in Ontario. Communities with a higher proportion of protected area are shown in dark blue; those with a lower proportion are shown in light blue.

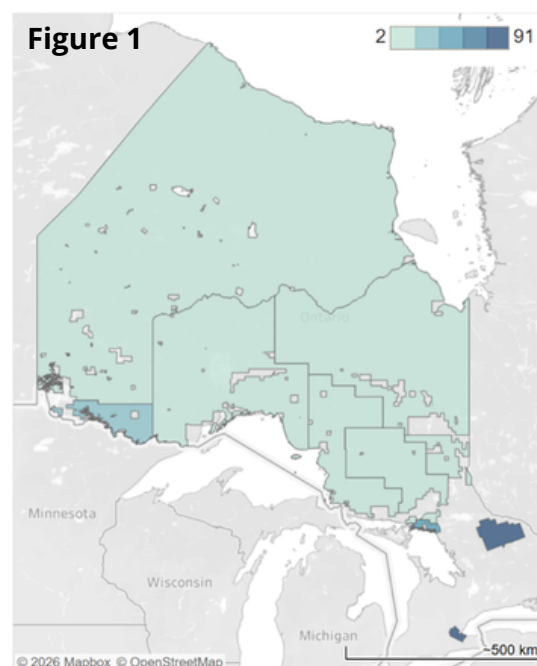


Table 2. Top 10 communities with the largest protected areas in Ontario.

Community	Protected areas (sq km)	Proportion the protected areas represent in the CSD	Type of protected area
Kenora, Unorganized	50,070	11.8%	Provincial park, NGO/Land Trust/Agency
Thunder Bay, Unorganized	14,671	13.2%	Provincial & federal parks, NGO/Land Trust/Agency
Nipissing, Unorganized, South Part	6,963	91.0%	Provincial park
Algoma, Unorganized, North Part	5,295	11.1%	Provincial park, NGO/Land Trust/Agency
Rainy River, Unorganized	4,781	32.9%	Provincial park
Cochrane, Unorganized, North Part	3,234	2.4%	Provincial & federal parks, NGO/Land Trust/Agency
Sudbury, Unorganized, North Part	2,915	7.4%	Provincial park
Hamilton	1,026	86.3%	Greenbelt area, NGO/Land Trust/Agency
Killarney	905	53.8%	Provincial park
Timiskaming, Unorganized, West Part	837	7.5%	Provincial park

The provincial parks represent the largest areas protected in those communities, except for Hamilton, for which the protected areas are in the Greenbelt.

Types of protected areas

A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

There are different types of protected areas depending on what organization manages the area. The areas were classified as follows in the RCWB dashboard:

- Federal protected area
- Greenbelt area
- NGO/Land Trust/Agency - Fee Simple Property
- Federal protected area
- Municipal protected area
- Other category corresponds to the other types reported: Privately Owned Old Growth Natural Forest ; Provincial Plan Protected Area; Research Station/Outdoor Education; Valued Natural Habitat

Table 3. Type of protected area and the part of the protected area they represent.

Type of protected area	Protected area (sq km)	Percentage in the total protected area
Provincial protected area	89,116	85.8%
Greenbelt area	8,457	8.1%
NGO/Land Trust/Agency - Fee Simple Property	3,681	3.5%
Federal protected area	2,446	2.4%
Municipal protected area	103	0.1%
Other	67	0.1%
	103,871	

Summary

Conservation areas are vital to Ontario's environmental health, supporting biodiversity, climate resilience, and community wellbeing through recreational access and ecosystem protection. Rural Ontario is at the heart of this effort. While rural communities make up the vast majority of Ontario's land base, they hold 94% of the province's 103,871 sq km of protected areas – at a rate of 10.4% of their total land. Urban areas, though smaller in total contribution, protect a higher share (16.7%) of their own land.

The most protected communities are concentrated in Northern Ontario, where vast provincial parks dominate. Nipissing, Unorganized, South Part stands out with 91% of its land under protection. Hamilton is a notable exception in the South, and Greenbelt designations account for most of its protected land.

Provincial parks form the cornerstone of Ontario's conservation framework, representing over 86% of all protected areas, with greenbelt and NGO-managed lands playing a complementary supporting role.



This factsheet was prepared by the Rural Ontario Institute. Questions about data sources and comments or feedback can be directed to facts@ruralontarioinstitute.ca.

This factsheet complements ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#). Factsheets provide insight and analysis of rural facts and trends featured in the dashboards.

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