



# LFN Lands Department Newsletter

May 2025

*This newsletter is from the Liard First Nation Lands Department (LFN Lands). It covers Kaska land and natural resource management and protected area planning in Kaska Territory in BC, NWT, and Yukon.*

In this newsletter, we share highlights from a recent community meeting held at the Watson Lake Rec Centre on March 12th, where we talked about the **LFN IPCA initiative**.

We explain what the initiative is, why LFN's proposed IPCAs matter for our Nation, and what's involved in establishing LFN-led IPCAs in Kaska Territory.

You'll also find general information about what IPCAs are, and how First Nations are using them to care for the land and protect the rights of future generations.

And don't miss the update at the end—we've included details about **our next community meeting on May 7th**. We hope to see you there!

*Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, or 'IPCAs', are "lands and waters where Indigenous Nations, their communities, and/or governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems."*

*- Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018*

## Our March Workshop

One way that Kaska First Nations are working to protect Kaska Rights and Title is by establishing Kaska Protected and Conserved Areas, also referred to as Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (or IPCAs) in the wider Canadian context.

Currently, there are several Kaska-led IPCA initiatives underway in Kaska Territory. These include the **Dene K'éh Kusān** IPCA initiative, the **Ross River** IPCA initiative, and an **LFN-led IPCA** initiative that is focused on (but not limited to) three proposed areas:

- Tū Chō (Frances Lake)
- Toobally Lakes
- Little Rancheria

**On Wednesday, March 12, 2025, LFN Lands hosted a community meeting about the IPCA opportunity and the LFN IPCA initiative.** A big focus was on exploring what IPCAs are and how First Nations are using them to protect the rights of future generations. We also discussed how an IPCA is created and what it can offer. The meeting was a chance to learn, share ideas, and start building a vision for LFN Protected and Conserved Areas that will support LFN's goals for Kaska-led stewardship in Kaska Territory. There was plenty of time to ask questions, talk together, and discuss what matters most to LFN citizens.

The doors were open to all LFN citizens and remained open for people to drop in and listen throughout the event. We received a lot of great questions and are working to create a "Frequently Asked Questions" document. Stay tuned for its release! In the meantime, the summary on the next page provides an overview of some key themes and recommendations we heard during the meeting.



## What We Heard: Summary of Key Points

During the event, we covered a lot of important topics, including:



- **Current protections in Kaska Territory and the opportunity for stronger protections for Kaska Rights through the creation of LFN Protected and Conserved Areas** – Many people had questions about how the lands and waters in Kaska Territory are currently protected and what level of protection the establishment of LFN-led Protected and Conserved Areas will be able to offer. They also shared thoughts on why it's important to take care of these areas—land, water, animals, and all living things—for future generations.



- **Planning by the community, for the community** – People talked about how important it is for this work to be led by our community, for our community. They suggested a number of ways for LFN to take advantage of the IPCA opportunity and get this work flowing, including one-on-one engagements, family group meetings, Elders meetings, and a committee. They also said it's important to give plenty of notice before community events and to meet people where they are, like visiting Elders in their homes, if that's their preference.



- **A collaborative approach** – People talked about how important it is to meet and work together as a community and as a Nation. They pointed out the value of working together under the guidance of our Elders to build stronger relationships, collaborate on protected areas, and talk about IPCAs. They recommended having discussions about Kaska-led IPCA development at both the community and Kaska Nation level.



- **Kaska Knowledge** – People talked about how important Kaska Knowledge is in guiding this process. They recommended building on past interviews and the need to protect and secure the documented Kaska Knowledge collected in previous studies.



- **Kaska presence on the land** – People mentioned the importance of creating more opportunities for Kaska citizens to be out on the land, and of increasing our presence and visibility. They suggested constructing more cabins and signage throughout the proposed protected areas.



- **Guardians and monitoring** – People talked about the LFN guardian program, and how the program needs to be larger and year-round. People also stressed the importance of working together, starting with our local community, and how the guardians are a presence on the land to help monitor and support our citizens.



- **External development pressures and interactions (including mining, resident hunting, and guide outfitters)** – People asked questions and shared concerns about how protected area planning will work with the Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy, mineral exploration and extraction in the region, and the past, present, and future impacts of mining projects, including abandoned mines. They also expressed worries about the ongoing effects of guide outfitters and registered hunters on the land, pointing out that many of the visitors to the Kaska Territory don't respect the environment, often leaving garbage and damaging the land.

## Our Opportunity: LFN Protected and Conserved Areas

### What Is an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA)?

IPCAs are Indigenous-led initiatives that typically involve one or a group of Indigenous Nations declaring an area (or areas) as a priority for community-led stewardship and management. When an Indigenous Nation decides to establish an IPCA, it means they are taking up the responsibility for leadership in decision making on stewardship practices in that area.

IPCAs can be declared anywhere within an Indigenous Nation's territory. If multiple Nations declare an IPCA together, the IPCA may cover multiple territories. The location, size, and types of areas included (e.g., lands, waters, or both) are determined by the Nation(s) establishing the IPCA.

#### Generally, IPCAs share three common elements:



They reflect the deep connection and interdependence between Indigenous Rights Holders and the land and water and the ecosystems that sustain the meaningful practice of Indigenous Rights



They are designed to ensure that Indigenous Peoples and governments play a central role in decision making and implementation, whether independently or in collaboration or partnership with others.







They support the restoration of governance systems based on Indigenous Laws and Rights while also ensuring they remain meaningful for future generations.

## What Is Involved in IPCA Creation?

Every IPCA is different. As an Indigenous-led process, the outcome—whether it's a protected area or another approach—reflects the unique laws, rights, and needs of the Indigenous Nation(s) involved. Indigenous Nations don't need permission or approval from Canadian governments to declare an IPCA, but some choose to collaborate on shared management plans or pursue special designation under Canadian law alongside Indigenous law. The specifics are shaped by the Nation(s) leading the process, who decide how the area will be protected and managed, with or without outside partners.

Here are some of the key steps we expect will be part of the work involved in creating LFN Protected and Conserved Areas:

- **1 Assessment of past and current conditions on the land and future needs** to understand what's needed to support the meaningful exercise of Kaska Rights in LFN's proposed IPCAs and the surrounding areas. This will involve gathering Kaska Knowledge and ecological data, filling in information gaps, studying social and economic factors, and reviewing how the proposed IPCAs connect with other protected areas and plans in Kaska Territory.
- **2 Community engagement and planning** to refine the proposed IPCA boundaries and identify a vision for future Kaska stewardship and management. This will involve engaging and informing LFN citizens to seek input and guidance about all factors involved in protected area planning, development, management, and governance.
- **3 Evaluation of legal pathways and strategies** to identify options for IPCA establishment and implementation. This will include looking at different land use scenarios, exploring the potential for protected area designation under Kaska and Canadian law, and selecting the best implementation strategy to support the exercise of Kaska Rights, including Title.
- **4 Governance and implementation planning** to help establish the operational and administrative structures that will be needed for implementing LFN IPCAs. This will involve developing a governance plan, setting objectives and strategies for protected area implementation and monitoring, and identifying future operational needs.

## What is Currently Protecting Kaska Interests?

One of the key themes that came out of the March meeting was a desire to better understand current protections in the Kaska Traditional Territory.

Across Kaska Territory, some protections exist through a patchwork of federal, provincial, and territorial laws, legislation, and tenures. A type of protection currently in place is a park, whether it be territorial, provincial, federal, or an LFN LSA tenure. While certain areas—like Coal River Springs Territorial Park, which LFN helped to establish in 1990—does have western-style protections, Kaska interests remain largely unprotected, particularly in southeastern Yukon.

LFN citizens have taken part in regional land planning and protection planning previously, including the effort to designate Frances Lake as a Special Management Area (SMA). However, with no formal recognition of Kaska Title by the Federal or Yukon Governments, progress on designating SMAs stalled, and proposed designations were never completed—despite the obvious Kaska strength of claim.

In BC, the Muskwa-Kechika (MK) Management Area, created in 1998, includes provincial parks, wilderness areas, and conservancies like the Ne'ah' Conservancy, which help protect some Kaska interests. Kaska representatives sit on the MK Advisory Board, but Kaska Title is not officially recognized here. There's work happening to redesignate the MK as the Dene K'éh Kusān IPCA, building on the vision, principles, and goals that Kaska citizens have already developed for the area.

The Kaska-led IPCA opportunities are shown alongside some existing protected areas on the map on the next page.



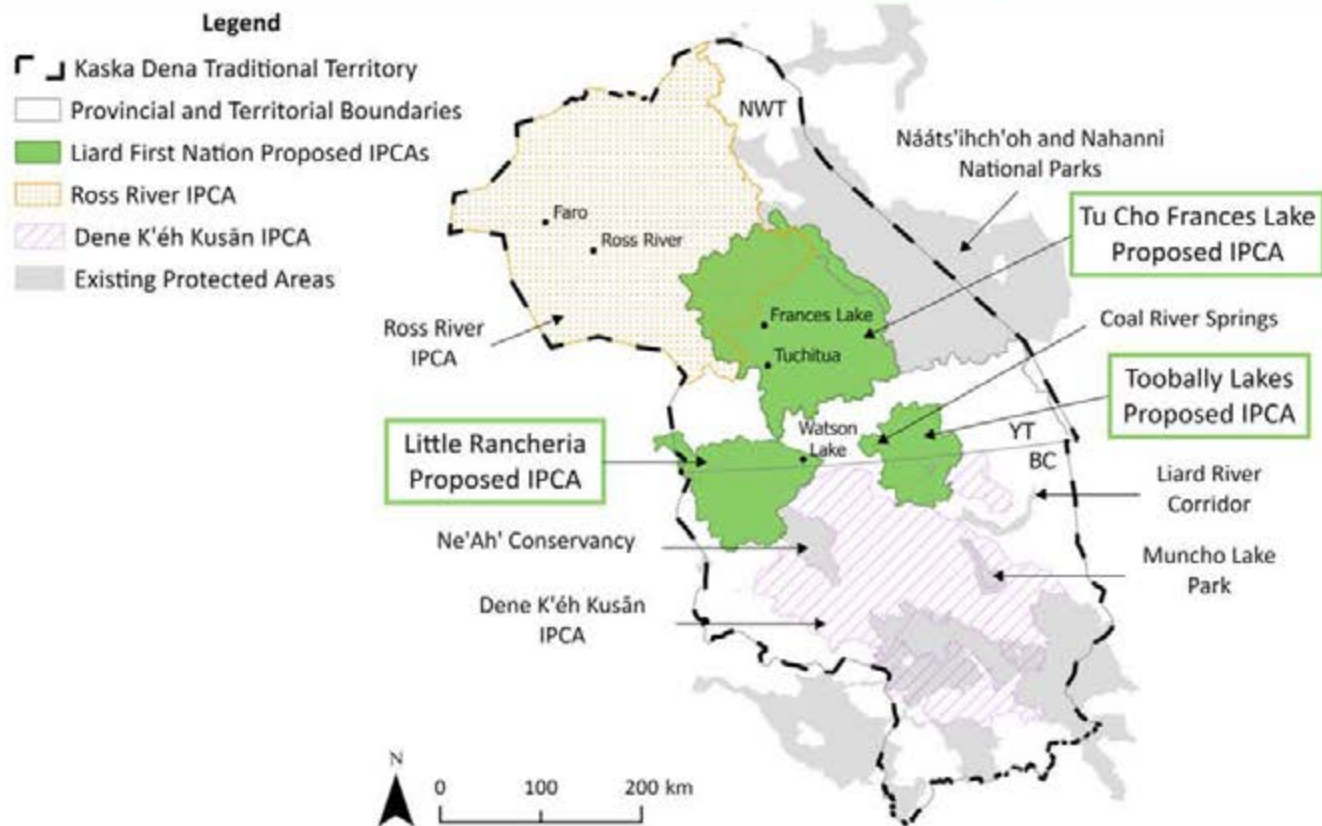


Figure 1: Proposed LFN Protected and Conserved Areas within Kaska Territory

## Why Are the Proposed LFN IPCAs Needed?

LFN-led protection planning and implementation that is governed by Kaska Laws and Rights strengthens the opportunity for Kaska citizens to collectively exert a substantial decision-making influence over land development in Kaska Territory. We continue to experience development and exploration pressures that have occurred without Kaska consent, harming the ability of Kaska citizens to meaningfully practice Kaska Rights. The portion of Kaska Territory that straddles the Yukon/BC border has been subject to a wide range of industrial and rural development activities, including road construction, mining, mineral exploration, big game hunting and outfitting, wilderness and other tourism, and forestry. Increased access, hunting pressures, and contamination from abandoned mines have all significantly undermined Kaska Rights and livelihoods.

Both the Government of Canada and Government of Yukon agree that IPCAs should be part of the solution. LFN has taken up the responsibility of identifying IPCAs and working with neighbouring Nations to determine (1) the best mechanisms for establishing an IPCA within the context of Kaska Territory, and (2) an appropriate governance framework that will prioritize meaningful Kaska decision making.

The establishment of IPCAs in the proposed areas will shift how LFN works with other governments, providing a new framework for the meaningful exercise of Kaska Rights and the enjoyment of Kaska Title. It will also empower our people to take up and take back our Kaska stewardship responsibilities through protection of our lands and waters for future generations.

## More About the Proposed LFN IPCAs

Proposing the location of LFN Protected and Conserved Areas involves extensive research by Kaska and non-Kaska experts, community engagement, and planning. This combination of Kaska Knowledge and western science helps to ensure that the vision for each IPCA is grounded in community perspectives on what is most important.

As shown in **the map on page 7**, three areas have been identified as a starting point for community discussions on the LFN IPCA initiative. The LFN community is not limited by these three areas and our next steps include reviewing them with the community and making changes as needed. Below is a brief summary of each area. More details on each area can be found in the March 2025 LFN Lands Newsletter.

### Tu Cho (Frances Lake)

- Area of significance to Kaska Dena for thousands of years
- Home to cabins, teaching areas, ceremonial and spiritual places, and burial and birth sites
- Waterways and lakes deeply tied to Kaska ways of life and Rights-based practices (known travel and trade routes used by Kaska ancestors)
- Intersects with Kudz Ze Kayah, which means “caribou country”

### Toobally Lakes

- Important fishery and hunting and trapping area
- Important habitat for tens of thousands of migratory birds
- Home to Kaska places of significance (camping sites, burial places) throughout the Coal River Springs area
- Key part of critical trail systems and trade routes

### Little Rancheria

- Home to cabins, burial places, and gathering locations
- Two Mile Lake - central to Kaska knowledge transmission
- Core habitat for the Little Rancheria caribou herd as well as habitat for moose and sheep
- Many significant Kaska landmarks
- High mineral potential with active claims and exploration, abandoned mines

## What to Expect at the May Workshop

### Session 1: Brief Re-Introduction of IPCAs and Summary of What We Heard From March Workshop

**Who:** LFN Lands and The Firelight Group

**Description:** This session will serve as a refresher for people that attended the March workshop, and a brief introduction for all new participants. More detailed information shared at the previous workshop is available on the LFN Lands Department webpage ([liardfirstnation.ca/land-resources/](http://liardfirstnation.ca/land-resources/)) and at the Lands office.

### Session 2: Our Journey to Proposed LFN Protected and Conserved Areas in Kaska Territory

**Who:** BEACONS Project, Yukon University and University of Alberta

**Description:** Join us for an exciting journey through Kaska Territory as we explore the evolving story of LFN's three proposed IPCAs (Tu Cho, Toobally Lakes, and Little Rancheria) and why these areas have been chosen as a starting point for community discussions. Using a variety of wildlife, ecological, and environmental data, we'll share maps of the proposed IPCAs and demonstrate how these boundaries have shifted and changed as new information has become available.

The session will start with a short presentation. Then, you'll have the chance to dive deeper at your own pace through a self-guided set of posters. Discover how water flows across Kaska Territory, learn about how the land has been impacted over time and where it has remained in a more natural state, and follow the seasonal paths of the Little Rancheria caribou.

Want to try your hand at interactive mapping? You'll have the chance to view and layer real data used to inform LFN's draft IPCA maps, zoom into areas of interest and understand some of the inputs that are used to start the conversation on where the proposed LFN-IPCA should be considered.

## How Can YOU Get Involved?

We want to keep building a strong foundation for IPCA planning and consideration by Kaska citizens. LFN's proposed IPCAs are now at a point where we need to do more work to figure out what LFN citizens want to protect, where the protected areas will be, and what kind of protection and uses they will have. We want to build upon the rich discussions we had in March to guide the IPCA initiative and ensure that our efforts are led by Kaska Knowledge, Kaska Rights, and Kaska priorities.

Our March community meeting was the first in a series of community discussions about the LFN IPCA initiative. We'll be organizing more meetings throughout the spring and summer. **The second meeting is planned for May 7th, 2025. It will take place at the Two Mile Hall from 9:30AM - 3:00PM.** Lunch will be provided.

We want to hear what you think and look forward to your guidance and questions. Join us as we build a solid foundation for the protection of Kaska Rights and interests in Kaska Territory.



### May Community Meeting Details

**Date:** May 7, 2025

**Time:** 9:30AM - 3:00PM

**Location:** Two Mile Hall

**Details:**

- Session 1: Brief Re-Introduction of IPCAs and Summary of What We Heard From March Workshop
- Session 2: Our Journey to Proposed LFN Protected and Conserved Areas in Kaska Territory

Questions, comments or concerns?  
Contact Travis Stewart, Lands Director  
[travis.stewart@liardfirstnation.ca](mailto:travis.stewart@liardfirstnation.ca)



## What We Heard: Summary of Key Points

During the event, we covered a lot of important topics, including:



- **Current protections in Kaska Territory and the opportunity for stronger protections for Kaska Rights through the creation of LFN Protected and Conserved Areas** – Many people had questions about how the lands and waters in Kaska Territory are currently protected and what level of protection the establishment of LFN-led Protected and Conserved Areas will be able to offer. They also shared thoughts on why it's important to take care of these areas—land, water, animals, and all living things—for future generations.



- **Planning by the community, for the community** – People talked about how important it is for this work to be led by our community, for our community. They suggested a number of ways for LFN to take advantage of the IPCA opportunity and get this work flowing, including one-on-one engagements, family group meetings, Elders meetings, and a committee. They also said it's important to give plenty of notice before community events and to meet people where they are, like visiting Elders in their homes, if that's their preference.



- **A collaborative approach** – People talked about how important it is to meet and work together as a community and as a Nation. They pointed out the value of working together under the guidance of our Elders to build stronger relationships, collaborate on protected areas, and talk about IPCAs. They recommended having discussions about Kaska-led IPCA development at both the community and Kaska Nation level.



- **Kaska Knowledge** – People talked about how important Kaska Knowledge is in guiding this process. They recommended building on past interviews and the need to protect and secure the documented Kaska Knowledge collected in previous studies.



- **Kaska presence on the land** – People mentioned the importance of creating more opportunities for Kaska citizens to be out on the land, and of increasing our presence and visibility. They suggested constructing more cabins and signage throughout the proposed protected areas.



- **Guardians and monitoring** – People talked about the LFN guardian program, and how the program needs to be larger and year-round. People also stressed the importance of working together, starting with our local community, and how the guardians are a presence on the land to help monitor and support our citizens.



- **External development pressures and interactions (including mining, resident hunting, and guide outfitters)** – People asked questions and shared concerns about how protected area planning will work with the Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy, mineral exploration and extraction in the region, and the past, present, and future impacts of mining projects, including abandoned mines. They also expressed worries about the ongoing effects of guide outfitters and registered hunters on the land, pointing out that many of the visitors to the Kaska Territory don't respect the environment, often leaving garbage and damaging the land.