



# The proposed Wiinipaakw Indigenous Protected Area & National Marine Conservation Area





# Background

- Years later, in 2019, the Cree Nation and Canada signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to **assess the feasibility** of establishing a **National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA)** in the Eeyou Marine Region (EMR)
- A Cree-Canada **Steering Committee** was established to oversee the feasibility assessment process
- Parks Canada provided funding through a **Contribution Agreement** (signed in 2023), which has allowed the Crees to participate fully and effectively in the process



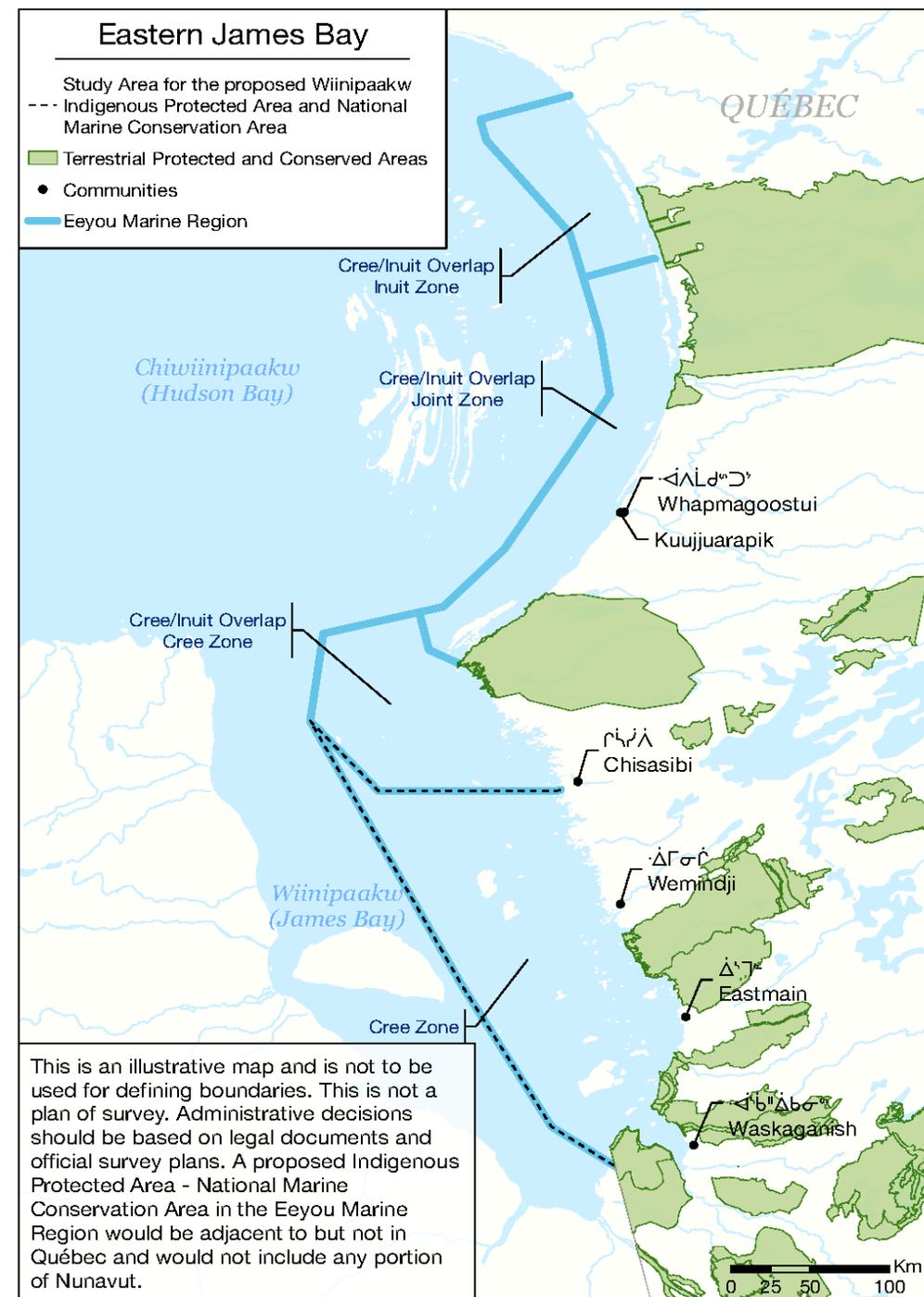
# National Marine Conservation Area: Some Key features

- National Marine Conservation Areas (NMCA) are marine areas administered by Parks Canada and their partners to protect and conserve marine ecosystems
- NMCAs work to achieve conservation, while allowing ecologically sustainable activities to occur. These activities include things such as:
  - Indigenous traditional use, including harvesting
  - Scientific research
  - Tourism
  - Indigenous entrepreneurship - eg., services to support NMCA and/or tourism
- NMCAs are protected from activities as ocean dumping, undersea mining, and oil and gas exploration and development
- Fishing and marine navigation are permitted, but they are managed with conservation of the ecosystem as the main goal



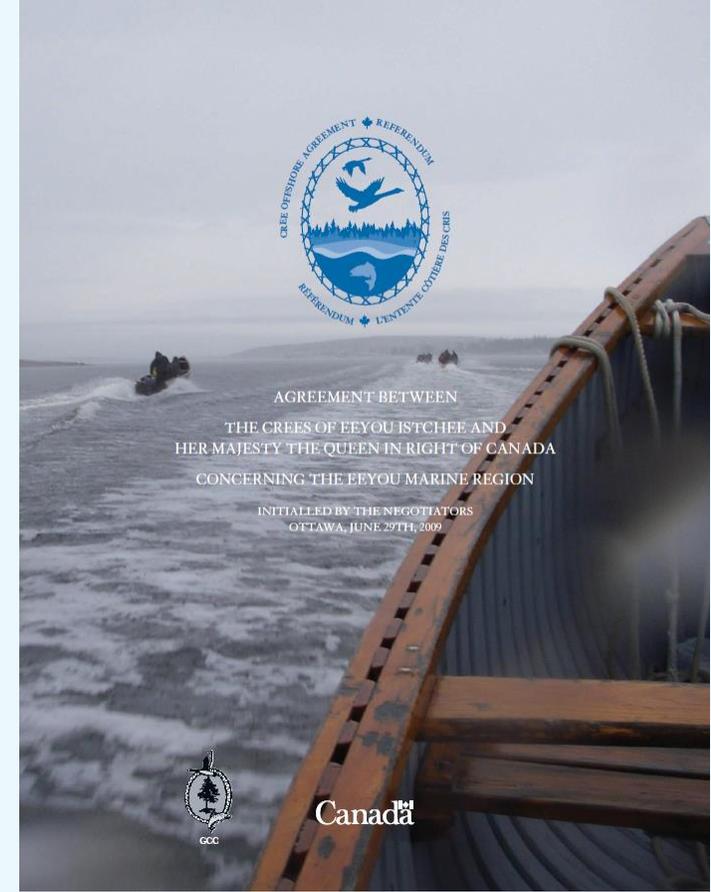
# Study Area

- Area of approximately 27,000 km<sup>2</sup> covering Eeyou Marine Region waters south of the mouth of Chisasibi–Big River, and stretching south to the Québec-Ontario border
- The proposed area would be adjacent to, but not in Québec
- There is a strong interest in exploring the extension of the boundaries northward into the Cree/Inuit overlap area, which requires collaboration with Makivvik and the Inuit of Nunavik



# Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement

- The ***Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement*** (or EMR Agreement), signed in 2010, provides the ***foundation upon which the NMCA will be built***
- The ***EMR Agreement*** contains a whole chapter of ***provisions on protected areas*** establishment, planning and management, including for NMCA's
- **Cree rights, and Cree access and use are protected** by the EMR Agreement. It prevails over the legislation to establish an NMCA
- Establishing an NMCA can be therefore be understood as a ***next step in treaty implementation.***
- Idea is to build upon and **add value what already exists** with the EMR Agreement, not to take anything away



# Engagement and Consultation on Feasibility

- Over the course of 2023-2024, a thorough **engagement and consultation process** on the feasibility of establishing an NMCA was undertaken with the coastal Cree First Nations, with Cree entities and with partners and stakeholders
- It involved **outreach, information sessions, workshops, focus groups and community meetings**. Regional and local Cree leadership and staff worked in close collaboration, which was key to successful engagement, and for building a collective vision of where we want to go with the initiative
- *Some of the **main concerns, interests, and aspirations*** expressed by the Cree people, include things such as:
  - Protection of the marine environment
  - Preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture, and language
  - Tourism, employment, opportunities for youth, Land Keepers (Guardians) programs
  - Food security
  - Access to the territory, travel safety etc.

# NMCA Feasibility Assessment : Activities & Events (2023-2024)



# Feasibility Assessment Phase Findings

## Some Key findings:

- Strong and constant support from Cree leadership and coastal Cree First Nations
- An IPA-NMCA should have no adverse impact on Cree rights and activities. For example, visitors and their activities should not interfere with Cree activities in the IPA-NMCA
- The governance structure would respect Crees as primary stewards in their marine area
- An IPA-NMCA would support preservation and promotion of the Cree way of life, culture and language



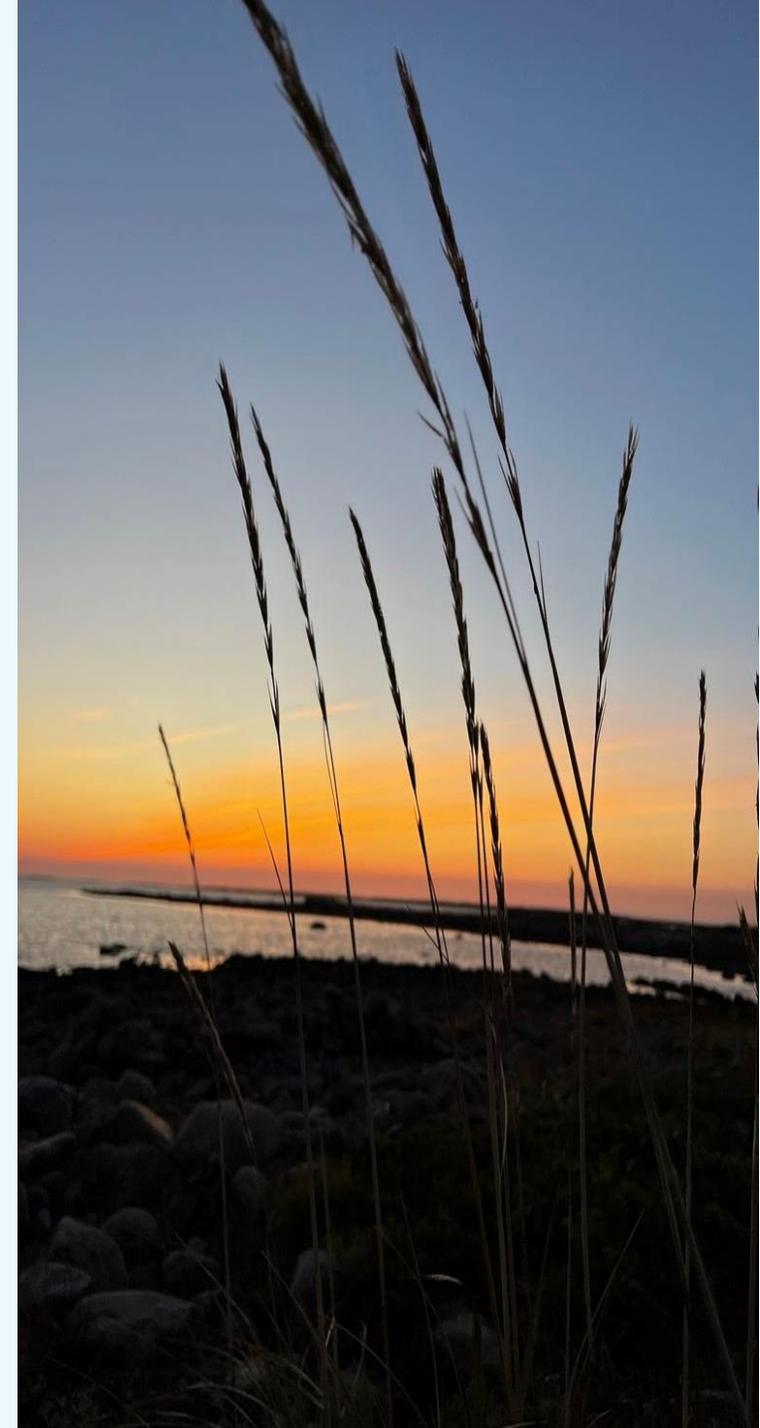
# Moving Forward

- In Fall 2024, the **Crees and Canada** approved the recommendations of Feasibility Assessment Report, and ***agreed to move forward*** on working towards establishing the Wiinipaakw Indigenous Protected Area-National Marine Conservation Area
- The Crees, Québec, and Canada also announced their intention to work towards establishing a ***marine protected area (MPA) for the coastal waters***, which would be adjacent to the Wiinipaakw IPA-NMCA, in Québec



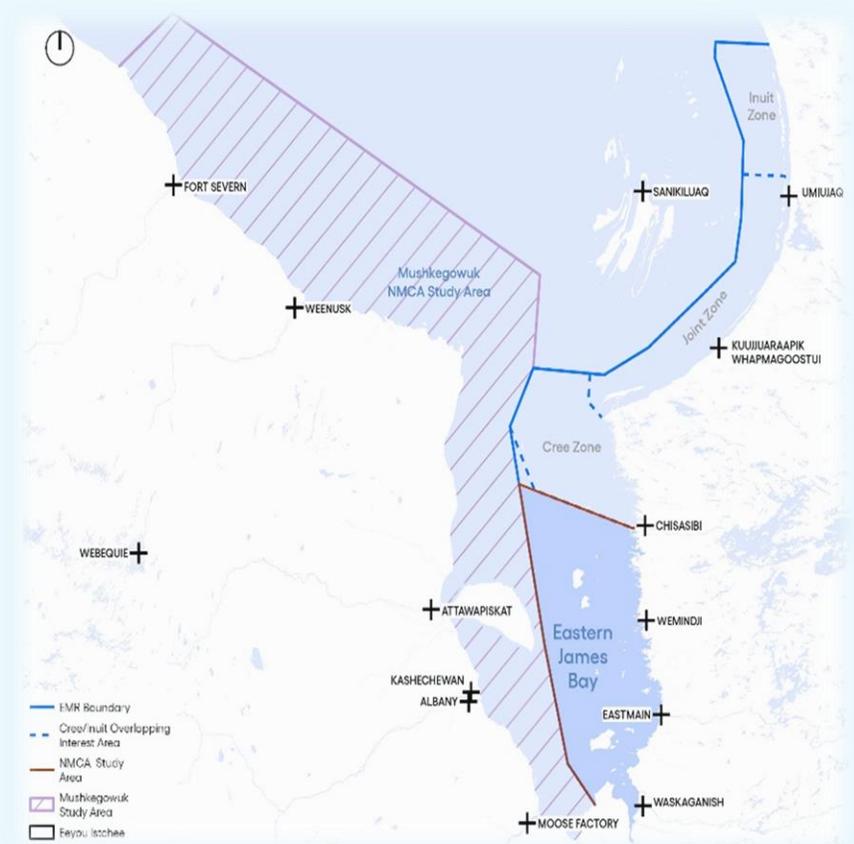
# Establishment Negotiations

- The next step in the NMCA establishment process is to negotiate a Protected Area Impact and Benefit Agreement, which will serve as the Establishment Agreement for the Wiinipaakw IPA-NMCA
- Some of the elements for discussion in the negotiations include:
  - Governance
  - Employment and training
  - Opportunities for Cree enterprises
  - Cultural programs
  - Land Keeper/Guardian programs
  - Management of cultural/heritage resources
  - Research and monitoring
  - Marine navigation matters
- Cree–Canada establishment negotiations began in December 2024 and are ongoing. Aim is to reach an Agreement in Principle in 2025, or as soon as possible



# Working together

- There are **many marine protected areas projects** currently under way. James Bay and Hudson Bay seem to be on the path to becoming **one massive marine protected area**, protected under different designations in different places
- Cree, Inuit and other partners **need to work together**, as these protected areas projects are working towards achieving **similar social and economic goals**
- Ultimately, we are all working towards **protecting** an enormous **shared marine ecosystem**, and the **way of life** of the peoples who have always depended upon it
- **Hudson Bay Consortium** has an important role to play in continuing to create the space for **exchange and collaboration**, and for working towards these **common goals**





*For more info:*

[www.eeyouconservation.ca](http://www.eeyouconservation.ca)

**Christopher Beck**

**Coordinator of Marine Conservation**

**Cree Nation Government**

**[christopher.beck@cngov.ca](mailto:christopher.beck@cngov.ca)**