



Dene K'éh Kusān – Kaska Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area



Proposal Questions

Mission/History Of Organization

The Dena Kayeh Institute (DKI) is a non-profit society established in 2004 to empower, preserve, and protect the Kaska Dena language, oral traditions, history, culture, and traditional knowledge. DKI is committed to supporting the Kaska Dena Nation in

JEDI Efforts and Impact

DKI's journey to uphold Indigenous values has been both vital and challenging. Our communities have faced historical and racial marginalization due to colonial oppression, which continues to impact us today. To reclaim our connection to the

reclaiming its role as stewards of our ancestral lands while ensuring the sustainability of our ecosystems and cultural heritage.

For over 20 years, DKI has focused on integrating Traditional Knowledge and Western Science to protect the ecological integrity of Kaska lands and waters. Through research, advocacy, and capacity-building, DKI strengthens the connection between our people and our territory, fostering self-determination and sustainable development. Our work ensures that the Kaska Dena land ethic continues to guide future generations, promoting environmental stewardship, cultural revitalization, and socio-economic well-being for our communities.

Final Success

That Dene K'éh Kusān remains intact and protected, ensuring that our Indigenous community's material, cultural, and spiritual ways of life thrive and remain resilient within our proposed 40,000-square-kilometer world-class protected area for generations to come.

Location Details

land and combat this exclusion, DKI is working to secure and protect a core part of our traditional territory. Our Indigenous-led protected area proposal is created by the people, for the people, and with the people. DKI is committed to inclusion and equity, engaging elders, youth, and land stewards to preserve our collective knowledge. By ensuring active community involvement, we strive to protect our lands from the harmful effects of climate change and biodiversity loss. Through this work, we strengthen our cultural ties and reaffirm our role as stewards of the land and water for future generations.

The Kaska Traditional Territory spans across the colonial borders of British Columbia, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories, encompassing five contemporary Indigenous communities. Within this vast landscape lie ecologically and culturally significant areas that our ancestors have safeguarded for millennia to ensure their protection for future generations. One of the most vital of these areas is Dene K'éh Kusān, meaning "The People's Way We Follow" in the Kaska Dena language.

Covering 40,000 square kilometers, Dene K'éh Kusān is one of the last large, intact wilderness areas in North America. This pristine landscape is home to an abundance of wildlife, including grizzly bears, caribou, moose, and wolves, all of which rely on the region's intact ecosystems. Beyond its biodiversity, Dene K'éh Kusān serves as a critical carbon sink, helping combat climate change by preserving vast ancient forests, wetlands, and waterways. For the Kaska Dena, this land is more than just territory—it is our identity, history, and future. Our way of life has always been deeply connected to the land, and its protection is essential for the survival of our culture, language, and traditions. However, Dene K'éh Kusān faces growing threats from industrial development, climate change, and biodiversity loss. The urgency to protect it is clear, and our Nation has prioritized its conservation, with strong support from our leadership and community members. To prevent fragmentation and degradation, we are leading an Indigenous-driven conservation initiative to secure legal protection for Dene K'éh Kusān. This effort ensures that its ecological integrity remains intact, wildlife is protected, and Kaska Dena rights and traditions are upheld. By integrating Traditional Knowledge with Western Science, we are building a

model of conservation that reflects our land stewardship values. This is not just about protecting land—it is about ensuring that our people, culture, and future generations remain strong and connected to our homeland. Dene K'éh Kusān is a powerful vision of Indigenous leadership in conservation, where safeguarding the land also means protecting the future of our people and the planet.

Biodiversity in Project Area

The protection of Dene K'éh Kusān will have profound benefits for climate resiliency, biodiversity conservation, and landscape connectivity. As one of the largest intact ecosystems in North America, securing this land will strengthen nature's ability to withstand climate change while preserving critical habitats for diverse wildlife species. Dene K'éh Kusān acts as a significant carbon sink, storing vast amounts of carbon within its ancient forests, wetlands, and peatlands. Protecting this landscape from industrial development prevents deforestation, habitat destruction, and carbon release, helping to mitigate climate change at a global scale. Additionally, safeguarding these ecosystems ensures the resilience of freshwater sources, maintaining the health of rivers and wetlands that provide essential ecosystem services for both wildlife and local communities. This area is also home Dene K'éh Kusān is home to diverse and at-risk species that rely on large, undisturbed habitats to survive. Industrial activity has caused habitat fragmentation, putting many of these species further at risk. By protecting this intact wilderness, we will create a safe haven for wildlife, allowing populations to thrive without human-induced pressures. Establishing Dene K'éh Kusān as a legally protected area will significantly enhance regional conservation efforts by creating a critical ecological corridor between existing protected lands. This will strengthen the connectivity of important wildlife migration routes across the Rocky Mountain Trench and beyond. The area serves as a natural bridge between adjacent and established protected areas, and provincial parks, allowing species to move freely and adapt to shifting environmental conditions. We know that this initiative is the future of conservation in Canada and if our project is successful the impact on the land and the people will be beyond measure.

Expected Economic & Recreational Impact

The successful protection of Dene K'éh Kusān will create long-term economic opportunities while promoting sustainable outdoor recreation that strengthens connections to the land and water in Northern British Columbia. Establishing this Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) will foster a more equitable economy, rooted in Kaska Dena values and expertise. We will pursue a variety of cultural tourism and land-based employment opportunities, ensuring that conservation remains central to all activities. Dene K'éh Kusān offers world-class outdoor recreation, with opportunities for hiking, canoeing, fishing, wildlife viewing, and backcountry camping. Visitors will have access to some of the most pristine and undisturbed wilderness in North America, experiencing the land through the stewardship lens of the Kaska Dena. Protecting Dene K'éh Kusān will generate sustainable employment for Kaska Dena community members in roles such as land guardians, eco-tourism providers, cultural educators, and conservation managers. The region has immense potential for eco-tourism and Indigenous-led experiences, including guided wildlife tours, storytelling, and traditional knowledge-sharing programs that offer visitors a deeper connection to Kaska Dena culture and land stewardship practices. Additionally, the area supports a sustainable land-based economy, allowing for fish and wildlife harvesting under Kaska stewardship laws. This ensures that traditional economies continue in a culturally and environmentally responsible way, maintaining food sovereignty and self-sufficiency for our people. By securing Dene K'éh Kusān, we are not just protecting a critical ecosystem—we are building a sustainable economy where conservation, cultural preservation, and outdoor recreation come together to benefit both the Kaska Dena Nation and future generations of visitors.

Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

Our strategy to protect Dene K'éh Kusān follows an Indigenous-led approach, ensuring that this 40,000-square-kilometer landscape is legally protected while fostering sustainable stewardship,

Key Decision Makers

To achieve legal protection for Dene K'éh Kusān, we are working with key government decision-makers who can support our Indigenous-led conservation efforts. Our approach focuses on

economic opportunities, and cultural revitalization for the Kaska Dena Nation. This initiative integrates Kaska laws and Traditional Knowledge with conservation science to create a sustainable, resilient, protected area. Legal recognition, Indigenous stewardship, cultural knowledge-sharing, and strategic partnerships will ensure long-term environmental and community well-being.

Project Goals and Objectives

1. Achieve Legal Protection for Dene K'éh Kusān

- o Secure legislative protection, ensuring stewardship by the Kaska Dena for future generations.

- o Collaborate with federal and provincial governments to designate Dene K'éh Kusān as a protected area.

- o Obtain long-term funding to support conservation and economic initiatives.

- o Develop a Kaska-led governance framework for land protection, enforcement, and policy-making.

2. Strengthen Indigenous Stewardship and Land Management

- o Expand the Kaska Guardian Program to monitor and protect land, waters, and wildlife.

- o Develop a stewardship plan aligned with Kaska laws and conservation priorities.

- o Conduct ecosystem assessments to understand biodiversity, climate impacts, and ecosystem services.

3. Promote Cultural Revitalization and Knowledge Sharing

- o Establish cultural camps and learning programs to educate youth and visitors about Kaska heritage and stewardship.

- o Develop Indigenous-led eco-tourism initiatives, including guided tours and storytelling.

- o Engage Kaska elders and knowledge holders to ensure intergenerational transfer of Traditional Knowledge.

4. Build Regional and Global Partnerships

- o Strengthen conservation connectivity with neighboring IPCAs and protected areas.

- o Partner with Indigenous Nations, conservation groups, and research institutions.

- o Raise national and international awareness about Indigenous-led conservation efforts.

Timeline for Success

- 2025: Foundations for Protection

- o Advance legal negotiations with the BC government for IPCA recognition.

- o Expand the Kaska Guardian Program.

- o Finalize governance structures ensuring Indigenous authority over conservation.

- 2026: Legal Designation and Conservation Implementation

- o Secure official IPCA designation.

- o Implement the Kaska-led stewardship

collaboration, advocacy, and showcasing the economic, environmental, and cultural benefits of protecting this landscape.

Key Decision Makers & Support Likelihood

1. Federal Government (Canada)

- o Target: Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)

- o Support Likelihood: High—Canada has committed to protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030 and prioritizes Indigenous-led conservation (IPCA model).

- o Approach: Engage policymakers to secure funding for Dene K'éh Kusān.

2. British Columbia Provincial Government

- o Target: BC Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship

- o Support Likelihood: High—BC supports our project and signed a process agreement with our Nation to advance our IPCA proposal.

- o Approach: Government-to-government negotiations to ensure protection under BC and Kaska law through modernized land use planning.

3. Kaska Dena Leadership & Community

- o Target: Kaska Dena Nations Leadership, Elders, and Community Representatives

- o Support Likelihood: High—Protecting Dene K'éh Kusān aligns with Kaska laws, values, and self-determination.

- o Approach: Ongoing engagement via meetings, cultural camps, and stewardship programs.

Business Community Engagement

The business sector can support our efforts by:

- Investing in Kaska conservation-based economies (e.g., Indigenous-led eco-tourism, land stewardship).

- Partnering with Kaska businesses to create jobs and promote cultural tourism.

- Providing philanthropic funding to strengthen the Kaska Guardian Program and long-term stewardship.

By collaborating with decision-makers and responsible businesses, we can secure long-term protection and sustainable economic opportunities for the Kaska Dena Nation while preserving one of North America's last intact wilderness areas.

- plan and monitoring frameworks.
- o Launch cultural tourism and economic development programs.
- 2027-2030: Sustainable Management and Long-Term Stewardship
- o Establish financial sustainability through conservation funds and partnerships.
- o Conduct biodiversity and climate impact monitoring through Indigenous-led research.

o Enhance conservation connectivity with neighbouring protected areas.

Role of the Dena Kayeh Institute
As the lead organization, the Dena Kayeh Institute (DKI) oversees the successful implementation of this initiative, ensuring it remains Indigenous-driven, legally recognized, and sustainably managed. DKI's responsibilities include:

- Leading negotiations with government and conservation partners.
- Expanding and managing the Kaska Guardian Program.
- Developing policies aligned with Kaska governance and conservation priorities.
- Engaging Kaska communities to integrate cultural and economic priorities.
- Advocating for Indigenous-led conservation on national and global platforms.

The protection of Dene K'éh Kusān represents a historic opportunity to secure an ecologically intact wilderness under Indigenous stewardship. This strategy ensures legal protection, sustainable management, and deep integration with Kaska culture and governance. It stands as a model for Indigenous-led conservation, demonstrating that when Indigenous Nations lead, both people and the land thrive together

Elevate Voices

Our approach to protecting Dene K'éh Kusān is centered on uplifting Indigenous voices, ensuring community support, and mobilizing our historically underrepresented Nation. Despite being the original stewards of our ancestral lands, the Kaska Dena Nation has long been excluded from decision-making processes that impact our territory. This initiative prioritizes Indigenous self-determination, ensuring that Kaska perspectives shape conservation efforts, governance, and land stewardship policies.

A key part of this work is elevating the voices of our Elders, who hold Traditional Ecological Knowledge essential to our stewardship goals. Our Elders have always played a critical role in governance, but colonial processes have overlooked their leadership. By actively engaging them in this initiative, we empower them to fulfill their role as knowledge holders and guides, ensuring that ancestral wisdom remains central to

Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

1. Achieve significant progress in government negotiations to secure formal recognition of Dene K'éh Kusān as an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA) under provincial legislation.
2. Expansion of the Kaska Guardian Program – Increase the number of trained and employed Kaska land guardians
3. Work with our communities to determine a co-management framework needed to support joint stewardship with neighbouring nations – the outcome being strong allied relations with other indigenous nations within this important conservation work.
4. Engage with the Kaska communities on conservation economy options, long-term conservation financing options, and co-governance options – the outcome being a clear path forward for how we will protect the area for future generations.



our conservation efforts. Engaging our Nation is also vital to mobilizing local Kaska communities. We prioritize direct engagement with each Kaska community, sharing information, gathering perspectives, and ensuring that every voice is heard. Through this community-based approach, we are fostering grassroots advocacy, strengthening our members' connection to the land, and empowering Kaska people to lead the protection of Dene K'éh Kusān.

By ensuring that Kaska voices drive the conservation of Dene K'éh Kusān, we are reshaping decision-making processes to be more inclusive, equitable, and rooted in Indigenous sovereignty. This work reaffirms that land stewardship is not just about conservation—it is about reclaiming our rightful role as caretakers of our homeland.

TCA Funding Plan

Support from the Conservation Alliance will be crucial in advancing legal protections for Dene K'éh Kusān. Funding will directly support the expansion of the Kaska Guardian Program, increasing the number of trained land stewards monitoring wildlife, climate impacts, and biodiversity. It will also strengthen community engagement, providing resources to educate members and the public on the vision for the Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA). The Conservation Alliance has supported our efforts through three grant cycles, each delivering sustainable benefits to our initiative. This continued support is especially critical at this stage, as we work to secure long-term, sustainable funding that will ensure the ongoing protection and stewardship of Dene K'éh Kusān for future generations.

How long it took to complete application

Confidential Items

The mandate and negotiations associated with our initiative are currently under an NDA until such a time as they are made public. We believe that all elements that connect to government negotiations and our signed process agreement must be kept confidential during this time.

Other Relevant Application Details

Ok to share with members.



Member Collective Grants: Request for Proposal

Dena Kayeh Institute - Dene K'éh Kusān – Kaska Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area

Question 7: What is your strategy and timeline for achieving final success? Include relevant project goals and objectives, as well as the specific role your organization or group will play. (Reframed)

Our strategy to secure the future of Dene K'éh Kusān centers on achieving its formal designation as an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (IPCA)—a recognition that reflects the deep cultural, spiritual, and governance relationship between the Kaska Dena Nation and this 40,000-square-kilometer proposed area for protection. This Indigenous-led initiative affirms Kaska authority and stewardship over the land and is rooted in a vision of cultural resurgence, environmental protection, and self-determination.

The IPCA designation is not only a legal and conservation milestone—it is a transformative assertion of Indigenous governance that honours Kaska laws and responsibilities to the land. Our strategy therefore prioritizes securing this designation while embedding it within a broader framework of legal recognition, cultural revitalization, and nation-building for the Kaska Nation.

Through collaborative negotiations with provincial governments, the project seeks to establish Dene K'éh Kusān as an IPCA that reflects the Kaska Nation's vision and values. The designation will serve as a foundation for long-term environmental integrity, cultural continuity, and sustainable economic development, grounded in our nations rights and responsibilities.

2025: Laying the Groundwork for IPCA Designation

- Advance formal negotiations with the BC government to secure recognition of Dene K'éh Kusān as an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area.
- Finalize and affirm a Kaska-led governance framework that outlines jurisdiction, decision-making authority, and land-use policies grounded in Kaska laws and traditions.
- Strengthen foundational programs like the Kaska Guardian Program as a tangible expression of Indigenous authority and connection to land.
- Conduct key legal, cultural, and ecological assessments to inform the designation process and reinforce the legitimacy of Indigenous-led conservation.

2026: Achieving Legal Designation and Launching Implementation

- Secure official IPCA designation of Dene K'éh Kusān through legislative and/or policy mechanisms.
- Publicly launch the IPCA with ceremonies, national communications, and cultural events that assert Kaska leadership and vision.
- Begin implementation of the Kaska stewardship plan, integrating monitoring protocols, Indigenous knowledge systems, and conservation science.
- Roll out key initiatives aligned with IPCA values—such as cultural tourism, land guardian education programs - to demonstrate the living connection between people, land, and governance.

2027–2030: Strengthening the IPCA and Building Long-Term Sustainability

- Establish long-term financial sustainability mechanisms, including conservation trust funds and revenue-generating partnerships that align with IPCA principles.
- Expand research, biodiversity monitoring, and climate adaptation programs led by Kaska Guardians and knowledge holders.
- Deepen conservation connectivity by aligning the Dene K'éh Kusān IPCA with neighboring Indigenous territories, IPCAs, and other protected areas.

The Dena Kayeh Institute (DKI) serves as the driving force behind the designation of Dene K'éh Kusān as an IPCA. As the lead organization, DKI ensures that this process remains firmly Indigenous led, rooted in Kaska law and worldview, and aligned with the long-term vision for cultural resurgence, legal recognition, and environmental integrity.

DKI's role is pivotal in advancing the goals and outcomes of the project, including:

- Leading nation-to-nation negotiations with provincial governments to secure IPCA designation and long-term legal protection for Dene K'éh Kusān.
- Working with the Nations leadership to design and help implement Kaska-led governance structures that uphold Indigenous authority and integrate cultural, legal, and ecological priorities.
- Expanding the ongoing recruitment and retention within the Kaska Guardian Program as an expression of Indigenous jurisdiction and a cornerstone of the IPCA vision.
- Engaging Kaska communities to ensure that economic development, cultural revitalization, and land stewardship reflect shared values and priorities.

- Representing and amplifying Indigenous conservation leadership at national and international levels, positioning Dene K'éh Kusān as a model for how IPCAs can advance reconciliation, resilience, and rights/responsibilities recognition.

The designation of Dene K'éh Kusān as an IPCA is more than a conservation outcome—it is a transformative act of Indigenous Nation-building. Through DKI's leadership, this initiative not only protects an ecologically vital landscape but reaffirms that when Indigenous Nations lead, their homelands—and their futures—thrive.

Question 10: What are 3-5 measurable on-the-ground outcomes (NOT activities) that you hope to accomplish over the next year (Reframed)

1. Secure Key Milestones in Legal Recognition of Dene K'éh Kusān as an IPCA

Achieve concrete progress in provincial negotiations toward the formal designation of Dene K'éh Kusān as an Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area, embedding Kaska governance and legal frameworks into protected area status.

2. Affirm Kaska-Led Governance Structures for IPCA Protection

Finalize and begin implementation of a Kaska-developed governance framework that outlines jurisdiction, decision-making protocols, and the legal foundations for IPCA recognition, aligned with both Indigenous and Crown systems.

3. Advance Nation-to-Nation Agreements Supporting IPCA Status

Collaborate with neighboring Indigenous Nations to build a unified position in support of Dene K'éh Kusān's protection, reinforcing the legitimacy and strength of an Indigenous-led IPCA designation through regional nation to nation alliance-building.

4. Establish a Roadmap for Long-Term IPCA Sustainability

Identify and secure commitments for sustainable financing and legal mechanisms that will ensure the permanence and resilience of the IPCA designation, reflecting Kaska priorities for intergenerational protection.

Question 11: How will TCA's support help move this project forward? (Reframed)

Support from the Conservation Alliance is vital to advancing the formal designation of Dene K'éh Kusān as an IPCA. Continued funding at this pivotal stage will directly contribute to legal, policy, and governance work required to secure provincial recognition of the IPCA, affirming Kaska Dena authority and protecting this culturally and ecologically significant landscape. It will also enable meaningful community engagement around IPCA governance

and vision, ensuring that the designation reflects Kaska values and priorities. The Conservation Alliance's support over three grant cycles has already laid a strong foundation, and sustained partnership now will help ensure lasting protection and recognition of Dene K'éh Kusān as a model of Indigenous-led conservation. Now we are turning to establishing a strong fiscal relationship between the Parties that will enable the Kaska Nation and DKI to carry out their responsibilities for the establishment, management, and operations of Dene K'éh Kusān. We wish to develop an expenditure model based on roles, responsibilities, and implementation options that make sense for how this land base will be protected.