



PROTECTING THE HIGHLANDS CORRIDOR

**A nature-based solution to building climate change resilience,
protecting lands and waters, and maintaining biodiversity**



Haliburton
Highlands
Land Trust



GLENSIDE ECOLOGICAL
SERVICES LIMITED



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
DECEMBER 2022**

Photo Credit: Brad Brown

Land Acknowledgement

The Highlands Corridor is situated on the Anishinaabe lands covered by Treaty 20 Michi Saagiig territory and the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig and Chippewa Nations, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations, which include Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Alderville, Scugog Island, Rama, Beausoleil and Georgina Island First Nations.

The Haliburton Highlands, called “Gidaaki” by Anishinaabe, resides within the territory protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” wampum agreement between the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Peoples to share and safeguard this land in the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect.

The Haliburton Highlands Land Trust, Ontario Nature and Glenside Ecological Services Limited respectfully acknowledge that the Williams Treaties First Nations are the stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters in perpetuity, and that they continue to maintain this responsibility to ensure their health and integrity for generations to come. We are grateful for their wisdom and leadership and are mindful of broken covenants and the need to learn, heal and reconcile with all our relations. We are committed to caring for this land and each other, in peace and friendship, for the sake of generations to come.

Acknowledgements

The Haliburton Highlands Land Trust, Ontario Nature and Glenside Ecological Services Limited would like to thank all funders of this project for their support of research, education, analyses and field evaluations. Contributors consisted of the following:

- The Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry
- The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Species at Risk Stewardship Fund
- The Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Environment and Climate Change Canada, Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP)
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- U-links Centre for Community-based Research
- John and Heather Harbinson



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Executive Summary

This report outlines the ecological significance of the Highlands Corridor and a strategy for its protection. Extending across southern Haliburton and northern Peterborough counties, within the territory of the Williams Treaties First Nations, the Highlands Corridor covers over 100,000 hectares of unceded public and private land, rich with wetlands, forests, wildlife communities, species at risk, and deep carbon deposits. Connecting three provincial parks, the corridor offers a nature-based solution to building climate change resilience, protecting lands and waters, and maintaining biodiversity. Its protection provides an opportunity to meet federal, provincial and municipal government commitments to building resilience to climate change and expanding protected areas. These commitments include Canada's pledge to support nature-based climate solutions and to protect at least 30% of our lands and waters by 2030; Ontario's plan to expand protected areas and natural areas to mitigate impacts of flooding; and the objectives set out in the County of Haliburton's Community Climate Action Plan (in development).

Ecological Significance

The following are the key conservation values documented in this report, based on desktop analyses and field evaluations:

- The Highlands Corridor follows a band of granite rock barrens which have limited occurrence elsewhere in southern Ontario but cover 1.2% of the Highlands Corridor.
- Total wetland coverage in the Highlands Corridor is approximately 17.9%, indicating high regional representation. This includes twelve Provincially Significant Wetland (PSW) complexes totaling 4892 ha, approximately 916 ha of an additional candidate PSW, and 13,420 ha of unevaluated wetlands.
- About 23% of the wetlands in the Highlands corridor are fens, bogs or coniferous swamps with deep organic deposits, providing highly valuable functions for climate resilience, including carbon storage and flood prevention.
- 75% of the forests of the Highlands Corridor are mature and 2% qualify as old growth forests. The largest old growth forest identified is the 210 ha Catchacoma Old-growth Forest, notable for eastern hemlock.
- The Highlands Corridor supports 39 federal and/or provincial species at risk, and an additional 26 provincially significant species and 43 regionally rare species.
- A circuit theory analysis, conducted to show areas of concentrated wildlife movement, found high priority areas for conservation that enhance connectivity and allow wildlife movement among the three existing provincial parks.
- One candidate provincially significant Earth Science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) (Lochlin Esker) and two candidate regionally significant Life Science ANSIs (Lochlin Bog and Silent Lake – Lowrie Lakes) are within or adjacent to the Highlands Corridor.

Existing Commitments

The following outlines existing commitments to protection in the Highlands Corridor:

- Haliburton Highlands Land Trust owns and protects 250 ha
- The Kawartha Land Trust owns and protects 40 ha
- The Township of Minden Hills owns and protects 190 ha
- HHLT Partners in Conservation protect 886 ha.

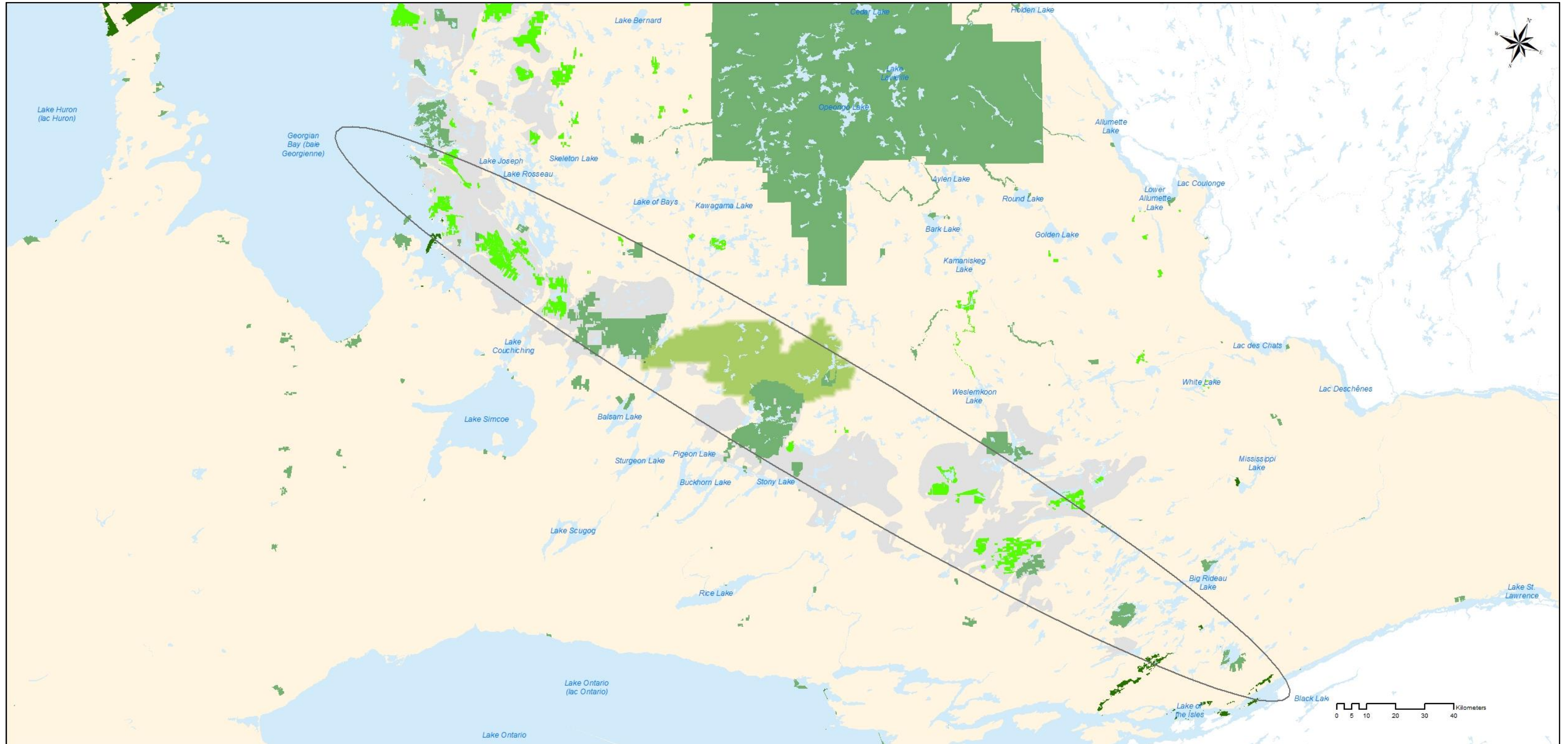
Recommendations for Protection

The report summarizes federal and provincial political commitments regarding climate change and protected areas and outlines a strategy for protecting the Highlands Corridor. The report authors recognize that protection of the corridor will require consultation with and consent from the Williams Treaty First Nations and considerable collaboration among the Ontario government, municipal governments, conservation organizations and community stakeholders. The report sets out three recommendations for the Government of Ontario:

1. With the consent of the Williams Treaties First Nations, apply interim protection measures that put a pause on industrial development within the Highlands Corridor while consultation about opportunities for protection is undertaken.
2. Commit to the protection of the 60,550 ha of unceded Crown land in the Highlands Corridor, with the free, prior and informed consent of affected First Nations.
3. Initiate consultation with affected First Nations and the public to identify the most effective means of protection.

As non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Haliburton Highlands Land Trust and Ontario Nature are committed to supporting the conservation of the Highlands Corridor, and will continue efforts to: 1) raise public awareness and community support for the protection of the Highlands Corridor; 2) seek opportunities to engage with affected First Nations to understand their interests, rights and responsibilities; 3) develop partnerships with upper and lower tier municipalities for protection of the corridor; 4) work with other NGOs to raise the profile of the Highlands Corridor at the provincial level; and 5) continue research in the Highlands Corridor including wetland and habitat evaluations, mapping, and targeted species at risk investigations.

Figure 1: The Highlands Corridor and its proximity to National Parks, Provincial Parks, Conservation Reserves, and the granite barrens

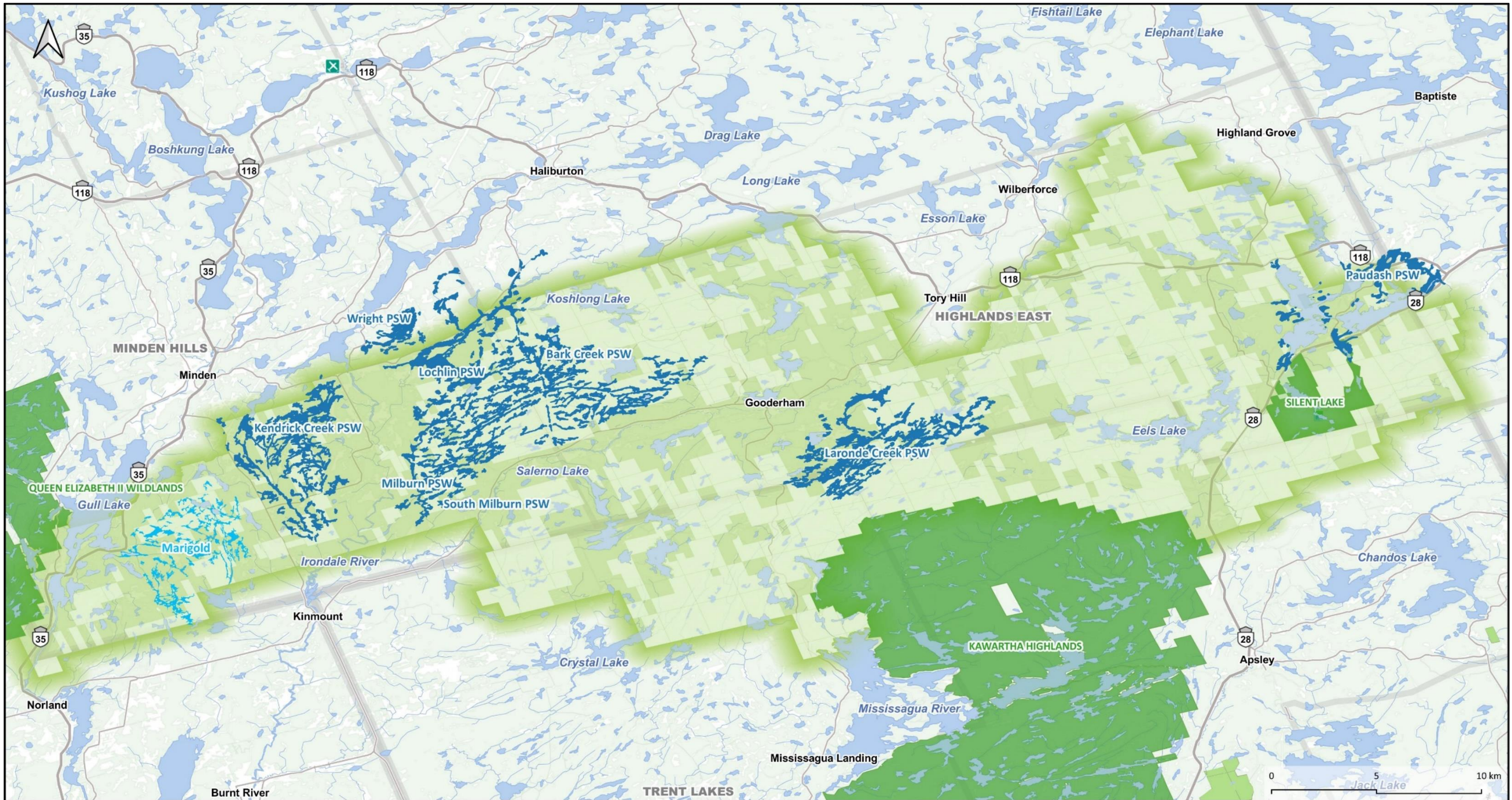


- Legend**
-  Lakes
 -  Granite Barrens
 -  Highlands Corridor
 -  Provincial Park
 -  National Park
 -  Conservation Reserve
 -  Province

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Figure 3: Provincially Significant Wetlands in the Highlands Corridor



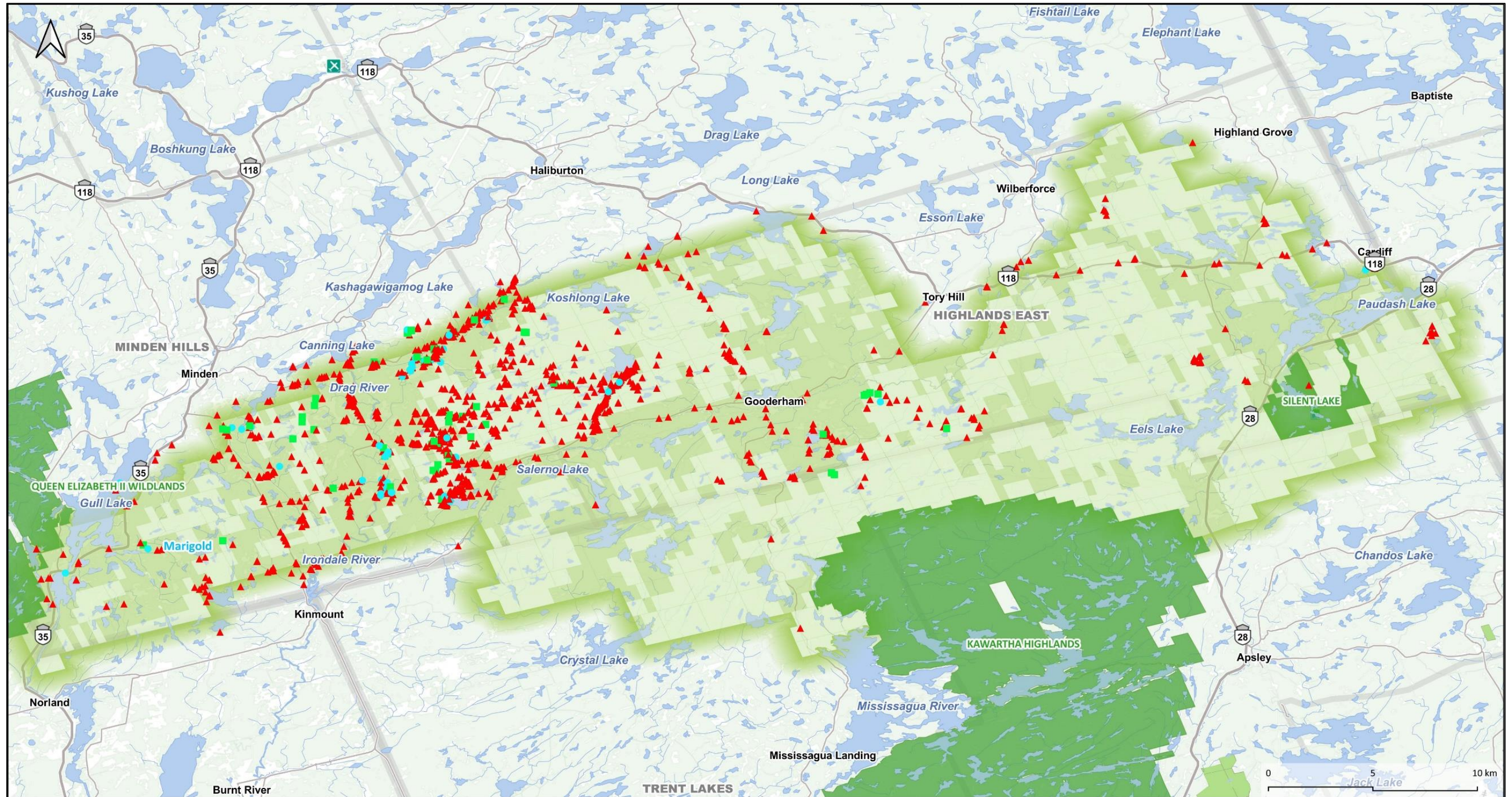
Legend

- Conservation Reserve
- Provincial Park
- Highlands Corridor (HC)
- HC Unceded Crown Land
- Provincially Significant Wetland (PSW)
- Candidate PSW








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Figure 7: Documented observations of rare species in the Highlands Corridor



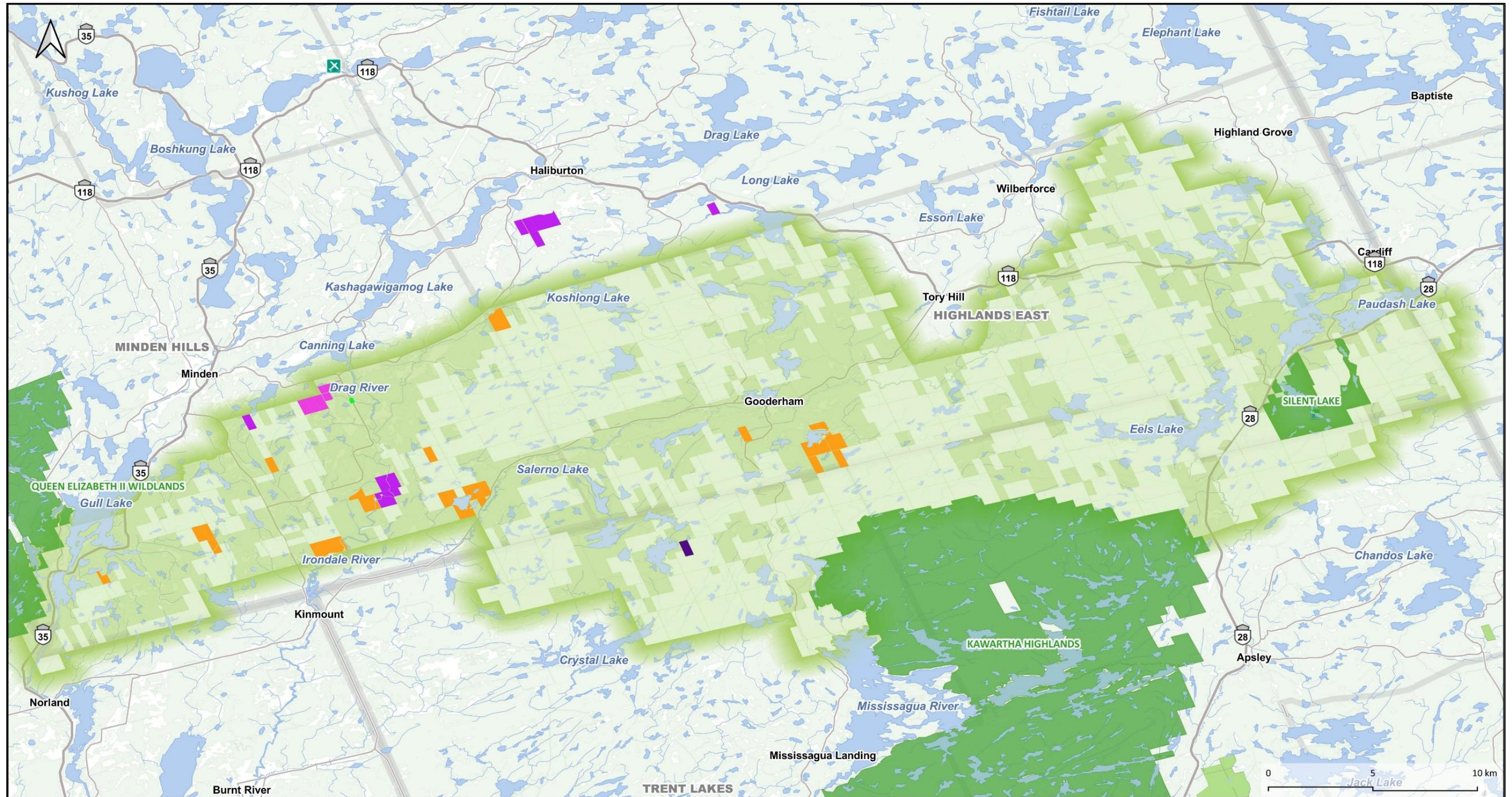
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- | | |
|---|--|
|  Conservation Reserve | Rare Species |
|  Provincial Park |  Regionally/Locally Significant Species |
|  Highlands Corridor (HC) |  Provincially Significant Species |
|  HC Unceded Crown Land |  Species at Risk |

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Figure 10: Protected areas and conservation in the Highlands Corridor



Legend

- HHLT Turtle Project
- HHLT Partners in Conservation
- Conservation Reserve
- HHLT Properties
- Snowdon Municipal Park
- Provincial Park
- KLT Properties
- HC Unceded Crown Land
- Highlands Corridor (HC)

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Haliburton
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*Protecting the land we love
for future generations*



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Photo Credit: Bred Brown