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In 1984, the Inuvialuit of the western Arctic signed a comprehensive land claim agreement with the Canadian government that established a new national park on their traditional territory. The signing of the deal marked the first time in Canadian history that a national park had been created as part of an aboriginal land claim and was widely hailed as the beginning of a new era of conservation in which centralized state policies would be replaced by more democratic initiatives.

Indeed, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement (IFA) granted Inuit peoples unprecedented influence over federal wildlife policy and recognition for their hunting and trapping rights. Yet the agreement also ensured that government officials retained ultimate authority in the new national park. To what extent, then, did the IFA represent a departure from older conservation models? This paper traces the history of cultural and political conflict surrounding the establishment of Ivvavik National Park in order to recover the distinctive vision of environmental protection held by Inuvialuit leaders. By assessing how this vision was challenged and accommodated by park planners and wildlife managers, it will provide key lessons for ongoing efforts to reconcile conflicting conservation values within the framework of northern land claim agreements.