



July 10, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, PC, MP
Prime Minister of Canada

Office of the Prime Minister and Privy Council
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1A6

Nature conservation should be central to Canada's recovery from Covid-19

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

As organizations with a strong commitment to defending nature in Canada, we want to acknowledge the efforts that the Government of Canada has made to protect Canada's population from the Covid-19 pandemic, and the extraordinary efforts that are currently underway to manage the economic consequences of putting public safety and community health first. We were encouraged to hear your statement on World Environment Day that, "As we look toward restarting our economy, we need to continue investing in the protection of our natural surroundings and the fight against climate change—because if you do not have a plan for the environment, you cannot have a plan for the economy."¹ We also applaud the efforts by certain cabinet ministers in your government to advance a "green recovery."

As we all work to emerge from this unprecedented disruption, our 235 organizations and millions of supporters want to emphasize that investments in nature and biodiversity on our lands and in our ocean can create jobs and be an essential part of an economic recovery and a sustainable future. Canada is in a particularly strong position to lead global efforts in this regard. We support your commitments to increase protection of lands, freshwater, and ocean, embrace nature-based climate solutions, and urge you to invest in achieving these outcomes.

¹ <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2019/06/05/statement-prime-minister-world-environment-day>

THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE

This country's ecosystems – forests, wetlands, grasslands, ocean, lakes and rivers – and the biodiversity they support are essential to provide Canadians with clean air, clean water, healthy food, sustainable economic goods and services, and opportunities for work, play, mental health and physical wellbeing. These systems are fundamental to the rights and title of Indigenous peoples and have inherent value as an integral part of the world we inhabit.

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Our economies, livelihoods and well-being all rely on Nature... without Nature, there would be no life.

– The Dasgupta Report

A recent interim report commissioned by the Government of the United Kingdom on the economics of biodiversity (The Dasgupta Report)² emphasizes that, “(o)ur economies, livelihoods and well-being all rely on Nature... without Nature, there would be

no life.”³ As warned by the Intergovernmental Panel for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services last year, and by other expert reports, the relationships between biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and declining human and economic wellbeing (including health) are becoming increasingly clear.

Despite the increasing recognition of nature's importance, biodiversity (species and ecosystems) loss is accelerating everywhere on the planet. As the second largest country in the world, harbouring a tremendous variety of ecosystems, Canada has a major responsibility for the welfare of planetary diversity. However, of the 80,000 species in Canada, we only have sufficient information to assess the health of 30,000. And of these, 20% are imperiled to some degree. As pointed out by the Dasgupta Report, “(j)ust as diversity within a portfolio of financial assets reduces risk and uncertainty, diversity within a portfolio of natural assets – biodiversity – directly and indirectly increases Nature's resilience to shocks, reducing risks to the services on which we rely and the species with which we share this planet.”

Importantly, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes that nature will be essential for safeguarding and sequestering enough carbon to avoid catastrophic climate change. **According to the IPCC, nature could absorb up to 20% of GHG emissions from now to 2050.**⁴ Yet, in Canada, our ecosystems are projected to sequester less carbon in 2030 than ever before, jeopardizing our ability to meet our Paris climate target and keep warming below 2 degrees. This drop in sequestration is due to human disruption of the environment – the same kinds of disruption that also cause habitat loss and put species at risk. It is a stark reminder that we cannot take the condition of the environment and the services it provides for granted.

2 The Dasgupta Review – Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity Interim Report, April 2020. UK Crown copyright 2020. Open Government Licence 3.0

3 Ibid.

4 <https://archive.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/tar/vol4/index.php?idp=178>



Protecting and enhancing nature and biodiversity on our land, and in freshwater and the ocean will help mitigate and adapt to climate change, by storing and sequestering carbon in ecosystems and by improving resilience of communities and ecosystems to the unavoidable effects of climate change.

Implementing nature-based climate solutions that help to address the biodiversity and climate crises at the same time will be of significant benefit, especially where such solutions are informed by efforts to promote reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, gender and racial equality, and meeting the needs of Canada's most vulnerable communities.

To reverse the continued degradation of nature and biodiversity and the services they provide we need to transform the relationship we have with Canada's lands, waters and species. And not just one place at a time, but at an ambitious and unprecedented scale.

Actions to achieve this include restoring degraded ecosystems, improving our management of forest and croplands, recognizing natural assets as vital infrastructure for our communities, proactively protecting land and ocean areas, modifying land use, and putting in place safeguards to maintain fully functioning ecosystems and minimize GHG emissions. These interventions will have a range of benefits. For example:

- » Reducing the rate of harvest and degradation of boreal peatlands from roads and other infrastructure will have significant, immediate GHG mitigation value
- » Large scale reforestation can provide immediate biodiversity gains and GHG sequestration value over the longer term
- » Protection and restoration of wetlands, will have measurable impacts on conserving and restoring biodiversity and ecosystem services
- » Restoring seismic cut lines and habitat degraded by industrial activity will be job creators and directly benefit economic activity
- » Developing nature-based municipal infrastructure will reduce costs and increase climate resilience and well-being in towns and cities, helping pollinators and numerous species at risk

Cumulatively, all these interventions will create jobs while being vital to restore nature, address biodiversity decline, improve food security, address climate change, and support the long-term health of our country and its people. In many cases these actions will assist Canada in meeting international commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

SCALING UP NATURE INVESTMENTS

You have already made many important commitments to increase the protection of lands, freshwater and ocean in Canada.

If Canada continues to find innovative and equitable solutions that allow us to scale up and maintain our biodiversity conservation actions over time, this will reverse the trends of species decline, ecosystem service degradation, loss of sequestration potential, and rising carbon emissions from land use. In particular, we hope green recovery planning will continue to advance and support important actions such as:

- » **Habitat and Ecosystem Restoration:** Large-scale landscape restoration will provide meaningful jobs and allow re-focusing of resource extraction economies while also providing habitat and recovery opportunities for species at risk. Planting initiatives will provide the additional benefit of carbon mitigation over time. Examples of high-return restoration sites include seismic lines in boreal caribou ranges, abandoned mines and reclaimed wells, as well as wetlands and coastal ecosystems like eelgrass and saltmarsh.
- » **Natural Infrastructure:** Replacing “grey infrastructure” and maintaining or restoring natural infrastructure on private and public lands delivers services like flood control, storm protection, extreme heat reduction, and preventing shoreline erosion while reducing costs and avoiding the ecosystem loss and GHG emissions resulting from cement and steel manufacturing.
- » **Protected Areas on Public and Private Lands and in the Ocean:** Protecting areas of high ecological value and importance to species at risk helps to increase resilience to climate change, supports adaptation, locks in sequestered carbon, avoids land use changes that generate the risk of a new pandemic,⁵ and can provide recreation, tourism and employment opportunities. In all cases Indigenous-led or co-managed areas should be a priority. Canada’s commitment to expand protected areas to 30% of Canada’s land, freshwater and ocean by 2030 is a critical goal.
- » **Improved Land Use Planning with Local Governments, Indigenous Governments and Provinces:** Improving land use plans and designing natural asset management to reduce ecosystem loss and restore ecosystems is important for various reasons, including carbon sequestration, adaptation and

5 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341823093_COVID-19_and_protected_and_conserved_areas

biodiversity. Planning that includes nature and its values will help locate business and industrial activities in the places with the least harmful environmental impacts.

» **Support to Farmers and Ranchers:**

Incentives for agricultural practices that reduce emissions and that improve biodiversity can enhance farm financial stability and food security as well as improve water and soil quality. These benefits accrue to both the producer and the wider community.

» **Fisheries and Aquaculture Sustainability and Resilience:**

Invest in the transition of aquaculture out of ecologically sensitive areas, including to land-based finfish aquaculture, in order to reduce harm to wild species and habitats, reduce industry costs for disease management and minimize production risks from storms, warming waters and ocean acidification. Also, invest in fuel

efficient and quiet fishing vessels, and fund science and observer programs, Indigenous-led where possible, that employ people and improve the information available for management decisions and market acceptance of products.

» **Improved Forest Management:**

Reforming forestry to focus on getting high-value goods with minimum ecological disruption can improve the economic value for communities, preserve jobs, reduce direct GHG emissions and preserve critical habitat for endangered species, including coastal forestry sites. Protecting and restoring forests to support carbon markets and offsets is a viable option when done with rigorous criteria and monitoring. Restoring former log handling sites, southern forests and caribou habitat are high-potential areas for employment that benefits nature.



» **Promoting Indigenous Stewardship of Lands and Ocean:** Many Indigenous communities and governments have indicated interest in habitat restoration, land and ocean management, and carbon stewardship. Supporting these initiatives would create employment, biodiversity and climate benefits. Continued investment in the creation and management of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, for example, would help to create a conservation economy that aligns with local cultural values and Canada's commitments to reconciliation, not to mention the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and many of Canada's Sustainable Development Goal commitments. Also, enhancing support for Indigenous Guardians programs, through which community members take on central

management and monitoring roles in these conservation areas, produces demonstrable returns on investment.

» **Building Back Canadian Tourism, Better:** The tourism industry faces significant and lasting impacts from Covid-19. However, in light of reduced international travel there will likely be increased interest from Canadians to get outside and travel in Canada in a safe manner. Now is a great time to re-envision a more sustainable tourism model that respects nature and empowers Canadians to reconnect with the amazing nature around them. Particular attention should be paid to northern tourism, including the burgeoning Indigenous tourism industry, which provides a valuable alternative for local economies otherwise dependent on natural resource extraction.



Canada has an opportunity to deploy recovery investments in a way that maximizes how our society benefits from nature while minimizing the degradation of our natural heritage. Our economic recovery from Covid-19 provides us with an opportunity to make an initial investment that will create good jobs quickly, while we collect the data and adopt appropriate policies and regulations that will lead to a transformative change in our relationship with Canada's lands, waters and species.

We are aware that numerous submissions are being made to government on how to invest in a recovery that builds a healthier, more sustainable future. We note in particular that the Green Budget Coalition and several large groups of stakeholders in the fields of natural infrastructure, protected areas, and ocean conservation are, or will be, making important submissions to the federal government and relevant departments.

Over the next six to 18 months, we urge the government to support investments in a variety of economic recovery solutions that support climate and biodiversity outcomes. Funding can be channeled through existing programs in Environment and Climate Change, Infrastructure and Communities, Fisheries and Oceans, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Agri-foods, and Indigenous Services Canada in order to expedite delivery.

Over the longer term, expert advice should be sought by relevant departments on how to structure programs and investments in order to achieve the transformative relationship between society and nature that is needed to ensure a healthy and sustainable future for Canadians. New and dedicated programs for approaches like Nature-Based Climate Solutions and Natural Infrastructure may be advisable in order to reduce barriers to program utilization, get maximum benefit from dollars spent and have effective program evaluation.





NEXT STEPS

Recognizing that the federal government faces numerous high-priority challenges over the coming months and, also, that financial resources are already strained, we recommend the following next steps to advance on this essential task in these difficult times.

1. Convene an expert group on nature restoration that can screen potential stimulus investments for relative biodiversity, climate and well-being values
2. Make immediate job-creating recovery investments (6-18 month timeframe) in ready-to-go projects that maximize biodiversity, mitigation and adaptation potential
3. Collect data and establish the criteria needed to advance long-term transformational policies
4. Invest in and lay out a strategy to achieve Canada's 2030 targets on nature and climate. Use existing federal programs to move money quickly and formally assess the potential for new programs like a national natural infrastructure fund and a national habitat restoration program (similar to DFO's habitat restoration via the OPP)

We stand ready to provide staff, research and resource support to assist you in this undertaking wherever possible.

In closing, we return to the concept that everything we do is dependent on a thriving natural world. Let us celebrate and protect the richness and diversity that Canada possesses while committing to the restoration of what has been degraded or lost.

We again thank the Government of Canada for its dedication to the health, safety and well-being of Canadians, and look forward to contributing what we can to an increased engagement with nature and natural systems as a fundamental part of Canada's economic recovery from Covid-19.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Birds Canada

Canadian Committee for IUCN - Comité canadien de l'IUCN (CCIUCN)

Canadian Ocean Literacy Coalition - La coalition canadienne de la connaissance de l'océan

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - National

Canadian Section of the Wildlife Society

Canadian Wildlife Federation - Fédération canadienne de la faune

Climate Action Network Canada - Réseau action climat Canada

Climate Reality Project Canada - Réalité Climatique Canada

David Suzuki Foundation

Ducks Unlimited Canada - Canards Illimités Canada

Ecology Action Centre

Environmental Defence

Equiterre

IUCN/World Commission on Protected Areas - Union internationale pour la conservation de la nature

Natural Resources Defense Council

Nature Canada

Nature Conservancy of Canada - Conservation de la nature canada

Nature United

Park People - Amis des parcs

Plastic Oceans Canada

Sierra Club Canada Foundation

Take Me Outside

The Gosling Foundation

Trout Unlimited Canada - Truite Illimités Canada

West Coast Environmental Law

World Wildlife Fund - Canada

PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATIONS

ALBERTA:

Alberta Wilderness Association

Battle River Watershed Alliance

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Northern Alberta Chapter

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society- Southern Alberta Chapter

Crooked Creek Conservancy Society of Athabasca

Edmonton & Area Land Trust

Edmonton Native Plant Society

Keepers of the Athabasca Watershed Society

Kimiwan Lake & Wildlife Preservation Society

Lethbridge Naturalists Society
Nature Alberta
Society of Alberta's Protected Areas Association
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment

The Friends of Helen Schuler Nature
Centre Society
Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative

BRITISH COLUMBIA:

Abbotsford-Mission Nature Club
Against Port Expansion Community Group
Arrowsmith Naturalists
BC Nature
BC Shore Spawners Alliance
Boundary Bay Conservation Committee
Bowen Island Conservancy
Burke Mountain Naturalists
Conservancy Hornby Island
Cowichan Estuary Nature Centre Society
Cowichan Valley Naturalists Society
Delta Naturalists Society
Fraser River Coalition,
Friends of Semiahmoo Bay Society
Friends of Shoal Harbour
Galiano Conservancy Association
Garden City Conservation Society
Georgia Strait Alliance
Great Blue Heron Nature Reserve Society
Great Blue Heron Society
Green Teams of Canada
Hope Mountain Centre for Outdoor Learning
Lasqueti Island Nature Conservancy

Lillooet Naturalists Society
Little Campbell Watershed Society
Mayne Island Conservancy
Nanaimo & Area Land Trust
Nature Chilliwack
Nature Nanaimo
Nicola Naturalist Society
North Okanagan Naturalists Club of Vernon, BC
Northern Confluence Initiative
Oak Bay Climate Force
Ocean Park Beautification Committee
Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
Oliver-Osoyoos Naturalists
Osoyoos Desert Society
Raincoast Conservation Foundation
Shuswap Naturalist Club
Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society
Sustainable Environment Network Society
The Fraser Voices Society
The Land Conservancy of BC
The South Coast Bat Conservation Society
Vancouver Natural History Society

VAPOR Society

West Coast Environmental Law

MANITOBA:

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-
Manitoba Chapter

NEW BRUNSWICK:

Bathurst Sustainable Development -
Développement durable de Bathurst

Belledune Regional Environmental Association Inc

Community Forests International

Council of Canadians Kent County Chapter -
Le conseil des canadiens

Council of Canadians, Fredericton Chapter -
Le conseil des canadiens

Daly Point Nature Reserve

EOS Eco Energy - EOS éco-energie inc.

Réserve de biosphere de Fundy - Fundy
Biosphere Reserve

Georgian Bay Forever

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR:

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society -
Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter

Humber Natural History Society

Nature Newfoundland and Labrador

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES:

Alternatives North

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-
Northwest Territories Chapter

Watershed Watch Salmon Society

Wildsight

Nature Manitoba

Jacquet River Nature Group

Nashwaak Watershed Association Inc.

Nature New Brunswick

Nature Trust of New Brunswick

New Brunswick Anti-Shale Gas Alliance

New Brunswickers Against Frackin

Restigouche Naturalists' Club

Saint John Naturalists' Club

Saint Johns Citizens Coalition for Clean Air -
Coalition des Citoyens pour l'Air Pur

Water and Environmental Protection for
Albert County

The Green Rock

Whale Release and Strandings Program

Ecology North

NOVA SCOTIA:

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Nova Scotia Chapter

Flying Squirrel Adventures

Friends of the Pugwash Estuary

Nature Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia Bird Society

Nova Scotia Wild Flora Society

Sackville Rivers Association

St. Mary's River Association

The Halifax Field Naturalists

ONTARIO:

AWARE Simcoe

Biodiversity Institute of Ontario

Bruce Trail Conservancy

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Ottawa Valley Chapter

Carolinian Canada

Citizens Environmental Alliance of Southwestern Ontario

Conservation Ontario

Emerging Leaders for Biodiversity - leaders émergents pour la biodiversité

Environment North Board

Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy

Essex Field Naturalists Club

Essex Region Conservation Authority

Forests Ontario

Friends of Kingston Inner Harbour

Friends of Salmon River

Friends of the Napanee River

Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve Network

Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority

Grand(M)others Act to Save the Planet

Greater Sudbury Watershed Alliance

Green 13

Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition

Halton Environmental Network

Hamilton Naturalists' Club

High Park Nature

Ingersoll District Nature Club

Izaak Walton Fly Fishing Club

Junction Creek Stewardship Committee - comité d'intendance du ruisseau Junction

Kawartha Land Trust

Kensington Conservancy

Kingston Field Naturalists

Lake of Bays Heritage Foundation

Land Conservancy for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington

Land Over Landings

Lennox and Addington Stewardship Council

Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests

McKellar Island Bird Observatory

Minnow Lake Restoration Group

Muskoka Conservancy

Nature Guelph

Nature London

Northwatch

Oakvillegreen

Ontario BioBlitz

Ontario Biodiversity Council - Conseil de la biodiversité de l'Ontario

Ontario Farmland Trust

Ontario Headwaters Institute

Ontario Land Trust Alliance

Ontario Nature

Ontario Plant Restoration Alliance

Ontario Rivers Alliance

Owen Sound Field Naturalists

Pelee Island Bird Observatory

Pembina Institute

People's Climate Movement (Toronto and the GTA)

Pickering Naturalists

Pollination Guelph

rare Charitable Research Reserve

Redberry Lake (UNESCO) Biosphere Reserve

Royal Botanical Gardens

Saugeen Nature

Scalliwag Toys

Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition

Society for Ecological Restoration - Ontario Chapter

South Peel Naturalists' Club

South Shore Joint Initiative of Prince Edward County

Sustainability Network

Thames Talbot Land Trust

The Couchiching Conservancy

The Lake Clear Conservancy

The Land Between

The Thickson's Woods Land Trust

Thunder Bay Field Naturalists

Toronto Ravine Revitalization Science

TRACKS Youth Program

Turtles Kingston

Vermilion River Stewardship

Waterloo Region Nature

Watersheds Canada

York Simcoe Nature Club

Prince Edward County Field Naturalists

Trout River Environmental Committee

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND:

Ambioterra

Association forestière des deux rives (AF2R)

QUEBEC:

Aventure Écotourisme Québec

Le Regroupement national des conseils régionaux en environnement du Québec

Cercles des Jeunes Naturalistes

Nature Québec

Comité régional pour la protection des falaises

Parcs régionaux du Québec

Conseil Régional de l'environnement de Laval

Protec-Terre

Earth Values Institute and Sustainable

Réseau de milieux naturels protégés

Dawson College

Eau Secours

Sauvons la Falaise

Héritage Plein Air du Nord

Société pour la nature et les parcs du Canada - SNAP Québec

UrbaNature

SASKATCHEWAN:

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Saskatchewan Chapter

Nature Saskatchewan

Clean Green Regina

Saskatchewan Environmental Society

Nature Regina

YUKON:

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Yukon Chapter

Yukon Conservation Society