

An open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau from 200 conservation, environmental and social justice groups with hundreds of thousands of supporters in Canada on the opening of the 44th Parliament

November 18, 2021

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.

Prime Minister of Canada

Office of the Prime Minister and Privy Council

80 Wellington St.

Ottawa, ON K1P 5K9

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Re: Call for action to deliver on election promises to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030

Together, as Canada's leading nature organizations, we'd like to extend our congratulations on the re-election of your government and the appointment of cabinet.

The recent election underscored many issues of critical importance to people in Canada, including the urgency of addressing climate change, spurring nature's recovery and ensuring greater equity. To do so, Canada must act boldly.

As the 44th Parliament prepares to open, nature supporters across the country and around the world are looking to Canada to take actions at home that show global leadership. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Convention on Biological Diversity need strong national examples as they are renewed and pursued over the next year. The joint report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes clear the imperative to solve the nature and climate crises together, or risk solving neither.¹

We must put in place stronger actions to cut greenhouse emissions. **And we must deliver a comprehensive plan — with timelines and targets — to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030 and bring nature to full recovery by 2050.**

¹ [Hans-Otto et al.](#), June 2021. IPBES-IPCC co-sponsored workshop outcomes on biodiversity and climate change



Your platform commitments to establish new protected areas, reverse nature loss, support Indigenous-led conservation, and restore and enhance wetlands, grasslands and peatlands offer a strong foundation, and resonate across the platforms of other major parties. To be effective and meaningful, implementation of these commitments needs to advance climate action, biodiversity conservation, Indigenous rights and social and racial equity.

Despite the historic nature investment in Budget 2021 and advancement of protected areas, studies show that Canadian laws and policies to safeguard biodiversity have fallen short and we continue to lose nature faster than we can recover it.²

To achieve the commitments to halt and reverse nature loss made in the G20 Rome Leaders' Declaration and your platform, a whole-of-government approach to ensuring nature's recovery is required. As with climate change, Canada needs a comprehensive biodiversity strategy, including a biodiversity lens and an action plan that sets strict new limits on land use and that measures, monitors and publicly reports progress toward halting biodiversity loss and enabling the full recovery of nature.

A bold strategy must be built with Indigenous Peoples and with full respect for their rights, title and knowledge systems. Provincial, territorial and municipal governments have a critical role to play and must be engaged, incentivised and, where possible, directed by federal action. The strategy must also be informed by an equitable and inclusive dialogue with voices from Black and other racialized communities, and across generations.

We're committed to working with you and all members of Parliament to ensure action is taken to halt and reverse nature loss in Canada by 2030.

Government action will be required across many aspects of Canadian society, including these five areas:

2 Ray, Grimm and Olive, June 2021. Facets. The biodiversity crisis in Canada: failures and challenges of federal and sub-national strategic and legal frameworks

1

1. PROTECTING AT LEAST 30 PER CENT OF LAND AND OCEAN BY 2030

Habitat loss is the number one driver of nature's decline. Creating protected areas is an essential tool to address this crisis. The commitment to establish 10 new national parks and 10 new national marine conservation areas, and co-managing them with Indigenous nations, is an ambitious and important goal as part of the commitment to protect 25 per cent of land and ocean by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030. We urge government to formally implement minimum standards of protection, particularly in the marine context, to ensure every protected area achieves its conservation outcomes.

Expansion of protected areas should also support the federal commitment to recovery of at-risk species. Areas under threat of human-caused degradation and those critical for species recovery must be prioritized for protection. The national vision for protected areas should be aligned with habitat needs for at-risk species as identified in federal recovery strategies.

Protecting natural carbon storage from being destroyed is necessary alongside dramatic reductions in fossil fuel emissions to meet climate targets. Protected areas can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation while protecting biodiversity. Integrating climate change considerations into conservation planning will fundamentally improve land and ocean use decision-making and outcomes.

Achieving protected area goals will require strong engagement and collaboration with provinces, territories and Indigenous communities throughout the country. Building on the historic investments in Budget 2021, we also urge you to secure expanded and permanent funding to ensure permanent protection for nature in well-managed and connected networks of protected areas.

2

2. SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION AND RESPECTING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

The nature community was pleased to see every major federal party commit to supporting Indigenous-led conservation through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Guardians programs. These are essential elements of recognizing and respecting rights, title and treaties. Our expectation is that every Indigenous nation that wants to establish an IPCA or Guardian program to protect their territories will be supported by your government, including using all possible influence with provincial and territorial governments. Providing capacity-building resources and legal, regulatory and policy conditions for establishment and maintenance of IPCAs by First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities is a key part of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We further urge you to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and respect the inherent and constitutional rights of Indigenous Peoples in all conservation initiatives.

3

3. GETTING NATURE-BASED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS RIGHT

The Government of Canada has recognized that protecting and restoring forests, wetlands, grasslands and marine ecosystems like eelgrass and salt marsh, is critical to mitigating and adapting to climate change. We welcome the initial 10-year investment commitments in Budget 2021 and additional platform commitments to expand investment in nature-based solutions.

Now government must make sure that it gets nature-based solutions right. That means ensuring they are pursued in addition to, rather than as a substitute for, direct reductions in fossil fuel emissions. It means implementing nature-based solutions in places and ways that maximize climate and biodiversity benefits, while respecting and advancing Indigenous leadership, title and rights. And it means grounding nature-based solutions that claim to help meet climate mitigation targets in an accurate assessment of truly additive carbon sequestration and storage in land and seascapes. Government must urgently fix biases and shortcomings in Canada's current approach to accounting for forest carbon.

The commitment to plant two billion trees through the Growing Canada's Forests program has potential to help protect and restore nature, achieve climate targets and make communities more resilient to a changing climate and economy. To achieve these goals, GCF needs far greater transparency, so the public can monitor how the program will ensure a permanent increase in forest cover — not just new trees for commercial harvest in a few decades. Identifying priority planting areas for biodiversity, climate and community well-being will help achieve these objectives. This means focusing on restoring and connecting heavily impacted urban, peri-urban and agricultural landscapes in southern Canada, and northern landscapes damaged by seismic lines, intense forest fires or disease.



4

4. RESTORING DEGRADED ECOSYSTEMS

In addition to protecting intact landscapes such as old-growth forests, we must take stronger steps to repair the landscapes and ecosystems that have been degraded by our collective footprint. Restoration is a key part of the nature-based climate solution toolkit. Restoration of carbon-rich landscapes — many of which are at risk from development and also facing severe climate pressures — plays a critical long-term role in climate mitigation.

Your government has invested in a number of restoration projects across the country, such as well reclamation, restoration initiatives under conservation agreements with Indigenous nations and provinces, and the two billion tree program. However, a national vision for restoration is lacking.

As with implementation of the protected areas objective, restoration targets should, where possible, align with objectives to recover of at-risk species. There are many species at risk that will not recover in the absence of restoration initiatives to repair degraded habitat and support reoccupation and population growth. A national vision for restoration should be created to clearly delineate where restoration projects will facilitate species recovery.

Restoration not only benefits the climate, plants and wildlife, it has a key role to play in the just economic transition away from extraction-based economies toward a truly sustainable and nature-positive economy. Restoration projects can offer significant options for employment as we move toward a carbon-neutral future. A study on habitat restoration projects in the U.S. demonstrates that an average of 17 and up to 33 jobs can be created per million dollars invested in restoration initiatives, in addition to significant co-benefits such as flood prevention and recreation.³

5

5. SUPPORTING URBAN BIODIVERSITY AND ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of green space in and around urban areas as essential for sustainable cities and quality of life. Studies show that spending time in nature is strongly associated with good health and well-being. However, throughout Canada, low-income neighbourhoods and particularly communities of Black, Indigenous and people of colour experience highly unequal access to urban nature, often feel unwelcome or unsafe in nature spaces, and are disproportionately impacted by climate change, toxic pollution and degraded lands and waters.

As advocates for nature, anti-racism and environmental justice, we welcome your platform commitment to table legislation to examine the link between race,

3 Edwards P.E.T., et al. 2012. Investing in nature: Restoring Coastal Habitat, Blue Infrastructure and Green Job Creation. Marine Policy, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2012.05.020>

socio-economic status and environmental risk, develop a national environmental justice strategy and recognize the right to a healthy environment. We urge the government to re-introduce Bill C-230, the National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, and work across party lines to ensure it proceeds to third reading before the end of 2021. We further recommend that your government establish an office of environmental justice and equity to support the national strategy's development and implementation. Institutional capacity is needed to support a whole-of-government approach to integrating equity and human rights considerations into environmental policy and decision-making, including the nature agenda.

We welcome the commitment to establish 15 new national urban parks by 2030, including at least one in every province and territory. The strategy should focus on protecting, restoring and connecting private and public urban and peri-urban natural landscapes facing significant biodiversity and climate pressures and must include action to make green space accessible and welcoming for everyone. Indigenous nations must be fully engaged in this work from the beginning. And consultation and collaborative partnerships with historically marginalized communities will be essential to ensure that the new parks — and their visitor programs and infrastructure — meet the needs of underserved communities facing systemic barriers.

As noted above, reforestation efforts should also help cities expand and diversify urban forest cover, including addressing equity goals. We therefore urge you to work with provincial and municipal partners to ensure every neighbourhood in Canada has at least a 30 per cent tree canopy cover and every person in Canada lives within 300 metres of a green space.⁴

All of Canada's urban areas are also traditional Indigenous territory. Indigenous rights and title holders must be included in urban-level decision-making, and urban Indigenous populations must have greater say on decisions that affect them. We recognize this is a complex federal-provincial jurisdictional issue, but urge your government to play a role advocating for constitutional Indigenous rights to be respected throughout Canada.

4 [Konijnendijk 2021](#). Promoting health and wellbeing through urban forests – introducing the 3-30-300 rule





CONCLUSION

We want to underscore the urgency and timeliness of this moment for our country and the planet.

What Canada does matters. We have globally significant freshwater, coastal, forest, grassland and peatland ecosystems. Our country acknowledges these ecosystems and the species that depend on them are threatened and that it's essential they be recovered.

We're striving for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. And we've learned from our strong response to the COVID-19 pandemic that our government and society can take co-ordinated, evidence-based actions that change business as usual for the benefit of the whole.

Canada can exhibit leadership in these areas if it takes immediate, bold, measurable actions that directly improve the health and extent of our natural ecosystems.

The nature community is mobilized and committed to see election promises to nature, climate and environmental justice realized.

We look forward to working with you and with all parliamentarians to implement your conservation commitments and ensure Canada has a comprehensive biodiversity strategy and action plan with targets and timelines that will allow us to do our part to build a nature-positive, carbon neutral and equitable Canada for all.

Sincerely,

SIGNATORIES



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Against Port Expansion in the Fraser
Estuary BC

Alberta Wilderness Association

Ambioterra

Arrowsmith Naturalists

Ashbridges Bay Nature Stewards

Association pour la protection du lac
Taureau

Aventure Écotourisme Québec

BC Nature

Biodiversity and Climate Action Niagara

Bird Safe Guelph

Birds Canada

Blomidon Naturalists Society

Boundary Bay Conservation Committee

Bruce Trail Conservancy

Burke Mountain Naturalists

Burlington Green

Camp Kawartha and the Kawartha Outdoor
Education Centre

Canadian Biosphere Reserves Association

Canadian Chestnut Council

Canadian Environmental Law Association

Canadian Freshwater Alliance

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society -
Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society -
Nova Scotia Chapter

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society -
Ottawa Valley Chapter

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society -
Québec Chapter

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society -
Saskatchewan Chapter

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society -
Yukon Chapter

Canadian Wildlife Federation

Cariboo Heights Forest Society

Clean Green Regina

Climate Action Network Canada

Climate Action Timiskaming

Climate Caucus

Climate Network Lanark

Climate Reality Project Canada

Comité de Sauvegarde de la rivière
Péribonka

Community Forests International

Comox Valley Council of Canadians

Conseil régional de l'environnement du
Bas-Saint-Laurent (CREBSL)

Conservancy Hornby Island

SIGNATORIES

Conservation Council of New Brunswick	Friends of the Massasauga Park
Cowichan Valley Naturalists Society	Friends of the Napanee River
David Suzuki Foundation	Friends of the Tay Watershed
East Coast Environmental Law	Galiano Conservancy Association
Eastern Shore Forest Watch	Garden City Conservation Society
Ecology Action Centre	Georgia Strait Alliance
EcoSikh Canada Inc.	Grand Riverkeeper Labrador
Edmonton Native Plant Society	Grand Valley Trails Association
Edmonton Nature Club	Grand(M)others Act to Save the Planet
EnviroMuslims	Green 13
ENvironnement JEUnesse	Green Communities Canada
EOS Eco Energy	Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition
Équiterre	Green Teams of Canada
Essex Field Naturalists Club	Green Venture
Faith & the Common Good	GreenUP
Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) Canada	Halton Environmental Network
Flying Squirrel Adventures	High Park Nature Centre
Fort Saskatchewan Naturalist Society	High Park Stewards
Friends of Clayoquot Sound	Hobbitstee Wildlife Refuge
Friends of Kingston Inner Harbour	Humber Natural History Society
Friends of McIntyre Creek	Ingersoll District Nature Club
Friends of Salmon River	IUCN/World Commission on Protected Areas
Friends of Semiahmoo Bay Society	Jane Goodall Institute of Canada
Friends of Shoal Harbour	Junction Creek Stewardship Committee

SIGNATORIES

Kamloops Naturalist Club	Nashwaak Watershed Association Inc.
Kawartha Wildlife Centre	Nature Barrie
Kingston Field Naturalists	Nature Calgary
La Planète s'invite en santé	Nature Canada
Lake of Bays Heritage Foundation	Nature Chilliwack
Lambton Wildlife Inc.	Nature Guelph
Lanark County Stewardship Council	Nature Nanaimo
Land Conservancy for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington	Nature New Brunswick
Land Over Landings	Nature Nova Scotia
Lasqueti Island Nature Conservancy	Nature Quebec
Le Nichoir	Nature Regina
Le regroupement des citoyens de Saraguay	Nature Saskatchewan
Le regroupement national des conseils régionaux en environnement du Québec	Nature Trust of New Brunswick
Lennox and Addington Stewardship Council	Nature London
Lillooet Naturalists Society	New Brunswick Anti-Shale Gas Alliance
Little Forests Kingston	North American Megadam Resistance Alliance (NAMRA)
Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation	Ocean Park Beautification Committee
Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests	Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
London Environmental Network	Oliver-Osoyoos Naturalists
Long Point Biosphere Region	Ontario Biodiversity Council
Maitland Trail Association	Ontario Land Trust Alliance
Mayne Island Conservancy	Ontario Nature
Miramichi Naturalists Club	Ontario Public Interest Research Group-Guelph

SIGNATORIES

Ontario Rivers Alliance	Saugeen Nature
Ontariogreen Conservation Association	Sauvons la Falaise
Ottawa River Institute	Shake Up The Establishment
Ottawa Riverkeeper	Sierra Club Canada Foundation
Owen Sound Field Naturalists	Society for Ecological Restoration - Ontario Chapter
Park People	Society for the Protection of Sargeant Bay
Pelee Island Bird Observatory	SOS Trees Coalition
Peterborough Field Naturalists	South End Environmental Injustice Society
Pickering Naturalists	Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)
Plastic Oceans Canada	Stewards of Albertas Protected Areas Association (SAAA)
Pollination Guelph	Sudbury Naturalists
Prince Edward County Field Naturalists	Sustainable Milton
Public Pasture Public Interest	Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Society
Raincoast Conservation Foundation	Thames Talbot Land Trust
rare Charitable Research Reserve	The Couchiching Conservancy
ReForest London	The Dogs Run Farm
Reseau de milieux naturels proteges	The Elgin Stewardship Council
Réserve Naturelle de la Pointe Daly	The Hamilton Aviary
Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs	The Kensington Conservancy
Rivershed Society of BC	The Miistakis Institute
Safe Wings Ottawa	The Thicksen's Woods Land Trust
Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds Inc.	Toronto Field Naturalists
Saskatoon Young Naturalists	

SIGNATORIES

Toronto Ornithological Club

Trees Please Winnipeg Coalition

Trumpeter Swan Coalition

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

UrbaNature

Vancouver Avian Research Centre

Vancouver Botanical Gardens Association

Vancouver Natural History Society

Vermilion Forks Field Naturalists

Vermilion River Stewardship

Water Watchers

Waterloo Region Nature

Watersheds Canada

West Coast Environmental Law

West Kootenay EcoSociety

Wild Ontario, University of Guelph

Wilderness Committee

Wildsight Creston Valley Branch

World Wildlife Fund - Canada

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation
Initiative

Yukon Conservation Society

CC.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance

Hon. Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Natural Resource

Hon. Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard

Hon. Dominic Leblanc, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and Intergovernmental Affairs

Hon. Erin O' Toole, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada

Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois

Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party

Elizabeth May, Parliamentary Leader of the Green Party

