

The Nature Platform: Canada's Roadmap to Thriving with Nature





Protecting nature and all its benefits has always been a core Canadian value. [Recent polling](#) shows that 84% of Canadians believe the federal government must do more for nature. This is a strong mandate to ensure that current and future generations inherit a healthy natural world.

But our natural landscapes and the diversity of living things that call them home are at risk. While nature is an iconic part of Canada’s national identity, one in five species is under threat. Declining population trends indicate that we continue to accelerate toward biodiversity collapse. With our environment in jeopardy, our health and our economy are also at risk.

Since our founding in 1939, Nature Canada has helped Canadians discover, defend, and restore nature. We have built a broad and active network of nature allies. However, our network alone can’t address the scale of Canada’s ecosystem collapse.

One of our most critical roles is to bring the **voice of nature** to policy-makers at every level of government.

Putting nature at the centre of our decision-making as a country requires us to prioritize three core guiding calls to action. Canada’s next government must:

- ✓ **PROTECT AND CONSERVE NATURE**
- ✓ **RESTORE AND BETTER MANAGE NATURE**
- ✓ **BRING NATURE TO EVERYONE**

Nature Canada has created our Nature Platform: Canada’s Roadmap to Thriving with Nature. Here, we lay out nine essential ways Canada’s next government can build on existing environmental progress, make up ground where we have fallen behind, and help deliver a healthy natural world to current and future generations.

Canadians want to see their government take action.
This document provides the roadmap.

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PUTTING NATURE AT THE CENTRE OF CANADIAN VALUES AND DECISION-MAKING

Nature Canada is presenting the following policy solutions for candidates, parties, and voters to consider in the context of the coming election:

PROTECT AND CONSERVE NATURE

To meaningfully protect our remaining natural areas, Canada's next government must:

- ① Provide a pathway to protect 30% of land, water, and oceans by 2030
- ② Protect primary and old-growth forests from degradation and deforestation
- ③ Provide long-term funding for Indigenous Guardians Programs
- ④ Help species thrive naturally by protecting them from genetic pollution

RESTORE AND BETTER MANAGE NATURE

To better manage Canada's degraded ecosystems, Canada's next government must:

- ⑤ Restore 30% of degraded lands and waters by 2030
- ⑥ End federal government subsidies that harm nature by 2030
- ⑦ Mobilize an additional \$1 billion per year in nature-based solutions over the next five years (2025-2030)

BRING NATURE TO EVERYONE

To ensure that nature is accessible to all, Canada's next government must:

- ⑧ Establish a permanent, high-level Office of Environmental Justice
- ⑨ Create a dedicated stream in the Natural Infrastructure Fund to increase tree canopy and improve equitable access to urban green spaces



PROTECT AND CONSERVE NATURE

① Provide a pathway to protect 30% of land, water, and oceans by 2030

To connect and strengthen efforts to protect 30% of Canada's land, water and ocean by 2030, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Under Parks Canada's mandate, fund the creation and long-term management of 10 new national parks, 10 new national marine conservation areas, and 15 new national urban parks by 2030, focusing on underrepresented regions.
- b.** Support the establishment of 50 Indigenous-led Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) by 2030, introducing legislation that recognizes existing IPCAs Indigenous communities have established under their jurisdiction and authority.
- c.** Provide financial support for other levels of government to establish protected areas.
- d.** Ensure mandatory federal impact assessments for development projects in federally protected areas.

Canada's natural environment keeps Canadians healthy, supports our economy, and is deeply entrenched in our culture. That's why Canadians want their governments to protect nature. A [recent EKOS poll](#) found that more than eight in ten (84%) feel that the federal government should take stronger action to protect Canada's forests and wildlife.

Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy is an important first step to protecting and conserving nature. It builds on several important pieces of legislation, including the *Canada National Parks Act* (established in 2000), the *Oceans Act* (established in 1996), and the *Canadian Wildlife Act* (established in 1973).

Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy - A success story

Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy is the government's plan to achieve the country's 2030 nature commitments. In December 2022, Canada and 195 other countries signed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework during the COP15 Biodiversity Summit in Montreal. Each signatory country must implement this global framework as a federal policy. Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy was created with the input of a broad coalition of environmental NGOs, including Nature Canada.

However, more needs to be done. Only 23% of our land habitats and 13% of our oceans remain intact. Recent estimates suggest that the average size of monitored animal populations has shrunk by 73% over the past 50 years, and Canada is no exception. Some regions of Canada are more vulnerable than others and require more protection, including the Interior Dry Plateau, Manitoba Lowlands, Great Lakes—St. Lawrence Precambrian region, Laurentian Boreal Highlands, Boreal Lake Plateau, Whale River, and Ungava Tundra Plateau. Additionally, approximately 80% of native prairie grasslands in Canada have already been cultivated, while the number of birds that live there has declined by 67% since 1970.

A national effort to protect Canada's natural environment requires collaboration between the federal government and provinces, territories, municipalities, and Indigenous peoples, many of which are stepping up with their own commitments. By establishing Indigenous-led area-based conservation and management by Indigenous Guardians, Canada is upholding its commitments to the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People \(UNDRIP\)](#) and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Such partnerships help integrate cultural perspectives into conservation strategies, contributing to more holistic and sustainable approaches to environmental protection. The federal government should play a connecting role and provide key financial tools to help ensure all government departments at all levels of government are moving in the same direction to protect our natural heritage for generations to come.

② Protect primary and old-growth forests from degradation and deforestation

To protect Canada's forests, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Develop an action plan to end deforestation and forest degradation in Canada and fully implement it by 2030.

One-fifth of global boreal and temperate forests are found in Canada. These primary and old-growth forests store and sequester vast amounts of carbon while providing critical habitats for threatened species and billions of migratory birds. However, unsustainable logging practices are degrading the boreal forest, and few large intact areas remain.

Degraded forests don't function as well as pristine forests in terms of ecosystem benefits like water filtration and carbon sequestration. They are also at higher risk of wildfires because they often have less tree diversity. The federal government does not transparently track the quality or extent of forests in Canada. It has no way to make accurate assessments of the impacts of activities like industrial logging.

By transparently monitoring and reporting deforestation and forest degradation, the federal government can support effective action at all levels of government to promote genuinely sustainable and competitive forest and wildfire management practices.

At the COP26 Climate Summit in 2022, Canada joined 144 other nations in committing to ending forest and land degradation by 2030. The 2030 Nature Strategy reiterated Canada's commitment to end deforestation and forest degradation, but we have yet to achieve this promise.



③ Provide long-term funding for Indigenous Guardians Programs

To support Indigenous nations as stewards of land, water, and ecosystems in their territories, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Increase and make permanent funding for Indigenous Guardians Programs.
- b.** Support Indigenous-led and co-led land use/land relationship planning initiatives.
- c.** Include long-term funding to meaningfully encourage and enable provincial and territorial governments, NGOs, and others to support Indigenous-led and co-led conservation initiatives.

Implementing Canada's commitment to effectively protect at least 30% of land and ocean by 2030 hinges on the recognition of Indigenous jurisdiction and title by federal and provincial governments. It also depends on effective co-governance and co-management of protected lands and oceans through cooperative federalism with Indigenous governments.

Indigenous peoples have been guardians of the land and waters since time immemorial.

The Government of Canada's recognition of this fact has led to support for Indigenous self-determined conservation and stewardship priorities; investments in Indigenous-led Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiatives that leverage non-governmental funds to support conservation; and the launch of the First Nations Guardians Network.

While these initiatives have been successful, current funding is not sufficient to provide the stability needed for long-term capacity building. National and regional Indigenous Governments and organizations should determine financing needs and allocate funds accordingly. Demand for the Guardians Program is growing and annual funding of \$1.5 billion to the Indigenous, Inuit, and Métis groups engaged in this work would be appropriate to meet the demand.

④ Help species thrive naturally by protecting them from genetic pollution

To keep consumers informed and species healthy, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Support the passing of strong regulations to protect species from unintended consequences of genetic engineering.
- b.** Require mandatory labelling of genetically engineered foods.
- c.** Phase out open net-pen fish farming on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts by 2029 to protect habitat and water quality while preventing genetic pollution of wild species.

For the last 20 years, [polls have consistently shown](#) that over 80% of Canadians want mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods. [Almost half of Canadians](#) have stated they would not eat salmon that humans have genetically modified.

Consumers want to know what's in their food and make their own decisions about what they eat.

However, scientists are increasingly changing the genetic makeup of plants and animals that are common in our diets through the use of rapidly advancing technologies that are moving faster than our regulations. The first genetically engineered food animal sold in Canada was a transgenic Atlantic salmon. Canadians bought and ate it without knowing it was genetically modified.

But this is not simply a consumer rights issue. Genetic engineering poses a real risk to nature, given the potential for genetically engineered organisms to escape and breed with their natural counterparts. Once something like this happens, the DNA of wild species changes forever because it becomes virtually impossible to revert a species' DNA to its natural state.

Despite recognizing these concerns, successive governments have bowed instead to corporate pressure and done little to protect nature from the unintended consequences of genetic engineering or to increase transparency for consumers.



RESTORE AND BETTER MANAGE NATURE

⑤ Restore 30% of degraded lands and waters by 2030

To restore 30% of degraded land and water by 2030, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Create a body to define baselines and targets, engage with stewards responsible for restoration efforts, and support the development of an adequate workforce.
- b.** Define, identify, and map degraded areas while establishing restoration priorities with timelines and targets.
- c.** Improve tree planting programs by implementing minimum biodiversity standards for planting projects and ensuring that planted trees are permanently protected.

Half of global GDP – some \$44 trillion in US dollars – is estimated to be highly or moderately dependent upon nature. Protecting the nature that we have left is vital, but we also need to undo the damage that has already been done. Over 80% of Canadian prairie grasslands, Carolinian forests, and urban wetlands have already been lost. Our remaining natural spaces, especially in urban and suburban areas in southern Canada, are increasingly impacted by ill-conceived plans for urbanization and development.

We must work to restore our degraded and damaged ecosystems so that they can once again support biodiversity, help sustain our economy, and protect us from the worsening effects of climate change.

Canada has committed to ensuring the effective restoration of at least 30% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, coastal, and marine ecosystem areas by 2030 to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Under the Bonn Challenge, Canada has also committed to restoring 19 million hectares of terrestrial ecosystems. Tree planting is key to realizing Canada's restoration potential and achieving its restoration goals. However, effective restoration requires that the right native trees be planted in the right places for the right reason. Permanently.

Achieving Canada's restoration goals will require significant steps, including:

- Committing funds and establishing targets to restore degraded lands, coastal areas, and freshwater habitats
- Mobilizing land and water stewards with jurisdiction and authority over degraded habitats (for example, Indigenous Peoples, federal, provincial and municipal land stewards, and private landowners)
- Policies and programs ensuring benefit sharing with Indigenous Peoples in the restoration economy
- Increasing the number of trained restoration professionals working to identify and apply approaches necessary to achieve targets for specific regions and habitats
- Determining the regional demand for restoration materials (primarily seeds and trees) to build an appropriate supply of materials over time

Acknowledging that this is no small feat, leading Canadian environmental organizations that regularly provide recommendations for the annual federal budget, the Green Budget Coalition, recently [called for the expenditure of \\$10 million over five years to establish a working group to coordinate restoration efforts](#) across government departments and different levels of government.



⑥ End federal government subsidies that harm nature by 2030

To reduce industrial harm to nature, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Identify all government subsidies that harm nature by 2025 and phase out, eliminate, or redirect them by 2030.
- b.** Starting in 2025, establish transparent and comprehensive accounting and reporting of the impacts of industrial logging practices on nature, including climate and biodiversity impacts.

A [recent EKOS poll](#) indicates that two-thirds of Canadians support the phase-out of government subsidies that harm nature. The same poll found that 92% of Canadians want transparent reporting of the environmental impacts of logging. Two-thirds of Canadians say it is essential that Canada accurately report emissions from all economic sectors.

Globally, about \$7 trillion in funding per year is having a direct negative impact on nature. In Canada, the federal government distributes over \$5 billion annually in subsidies to the fishing, farming, forestry and mining sectors. By ensuring these subsidies align with best management practices that safeguard land, freshwater, and ocean, the government can take critical action to address biodiversity loss and climate change. Additionally, increasing royalties from resource extraction could be used to fund restoration work.

Transparent reporting of greenhouse gas emissions from all economic sectors is fundamental to ensuring that policies do not inadvertently and indirectly subsidize polluting practices.

There is growing concern that Canada is failing to report all greenhouse gas emissions created by logging. Health and environment groups, scientists, United Nations expert panels in 2021 and 2023, and Canada's Auditor General have all called for more transparent reporting of logging emissions.

By ignoring logging's significant climate impact, Canada is distorting economic and environmental policy decisions, undermining climate progress, and risking access to global markets that increasingly demand sustainable wood products.



7 Mobilize an additional \$1 billion per year in nature-based solutions over the next five years (2025-2030)

To bolster nature-based solutions, Canada's next government must:

- a. Mobilize an additional \$1 billion per year in nature-based solutions over the next five years (2025-2030).

Nature is our greatest ally against the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity collapse.

Nature-based solutions to these crises have the potential to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems while simultaneously benefiting human well-being, biodiversity, and climate progress.

Nature-based solutions can support more resilient communities amid more frequent and intense extreme weather events, thereby mitigating or avoiding future costs. When developed and implemented in direct partnership with governments, Indigenous and local communities, and industry, nature-based solutions can contribute to cleaner water, air, and food production; protect against wildfires, droughts, and flooding; provide recreational spaces that support better physical and mental health; and deliver air, water, and soil benefits that conserve biodiversity by protecting and restoring habitat for species.

Nature-based solutions are an essential complement to efforts to reduce fossil fuel-related emissions and enable successful global efforts to address climate change challenges. Farmers adopting nature—and climate-positive agricultural practices can increase their profit margins by as much as 30%. However, they require at least two years of financial support to transition their operations.

With much of the growing demand for carbon offsets expected to be met by nature-based sequestration and avoided nature loss, investments in nature-based solutions can play a critical role in orienting private investment towards natural assets and ecosystems while supporting the evolution of Canada's carbon markets.





BRING NATURE TO EVERYONE



Establish a permanent, high-level Office of Environmental Justice

To advance environmental justice for all communities, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Establish a permanent, high-level Office of Environmental Justice.
- b.** Develop and implement Canada's first National Strategy on Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice.
- c.** Ensure that environmental protection programs, policies, investments and laws account for community and population-level inequities and advance environmental justice by investing \$355 million in institutional capacity over the next five years (2025-2030).

Too often in Canada, racialized and disadvantaged communities bear a disproportionate burden from environmental degradation and preventable environmental health hazards, such as pollution and toxic substances in consumer products.

While Canada has committed to implementing the UNDRIP, we are not yet living up to our obligations. Many Indigenous communities across the country remain under long-term drinking water advisories, leading to a disproportionately high incidence of gastrointestinal infections. Industrial pollution concentrated around Indigenous communities has led, in some cases, to triple the rates of leukemia seen in the general population, such as in the Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Sarnia's Chemical Valley.

Similarly, decades of dumping in primarily black communities such as Shelburne and Guysborough, Nova Scotia, has resulted in higher rates of cancer than in surrounding areas. Environmental injustice exacerbates climate change impacts and other inequities that these communities experience.

The creation of a high-level Office of Environmental Justice will help hold polluters accountable and direct resources to support overburdened communities. Funding for this office should include the necessary resources to continue community consultations, finalize the National Strategy on Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice, and support its ongoing implementation.

The office should also enforce environmental laws, as uneven enforcement often leads to more significant harm in Indigenous, BIPOC, and low-income communities. Funds from enforcement actions should be invested in community projects that advance environmental justice.

By prioritizing these initiatives, Canada can more effectively address the environmental injustices that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, enhancing both accountability and equity.



9 Create a dedicated stream in the Natural Infrastructure Fund to increase tree canopy and improve equitable access to urban green spaces

To advance tree equity and support cities in reaching 30% tree canopy cover in all neighbourhoods, Canada's next government must:

- a.** Expand the Natural Infrastructure Fund through a new dedicated investment of \$400 million over the next three years to improve access to nature in marginalized communities across Canada.
- b.** Allocate a minimum of 10% of the Natural Infrastructure Fund program envelope towards projects that address tree equity by expanding access to nature in marginalized neighbourhoods.
- c.** Expand the existing 70% cost share currently offered to Indigenous-led tree planting projects to other projects that advance tree equity for marginalized groups and neighbourhoods.

Urban forests are essential to more liveable, healthy, and resilient cities.

Urban forests sequester and store carbon, keep cities cool, serve as habitats for species, and shield people from extreme weather like floods and landslides – all while supporting our mental and physical well-being.



Unfortunately, evidence suggests that only some enjoy the benefits of the urban forest. As Canada continues to urbanize, many Canadians are being pushed further away from nature. People living in racialized and marginalized neighbourhoods have less access to urban trees and green spaces compared to those in more affluent neighbourhoods.

This inequity contributes to worse outcomes for Canadians who live in marginalized neighbourhoods. Fortunately, many cities across Canada have set targets of achieving a minimum of 30% canopy cover and are slowly working towards closing the gap in tree equity.

Should you have any questions or require any clarification, please don't hesitate to contact us.

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