

## LEADERSHIP, NATIONAL PARKS AND NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREAS

The Green Budget Coalition recommends that the Government of Canada invest \$68 million starting in Budget 2016, increasing to \$90 million per year on-going by 2018, to Parks Canada and the Department of Environment and Climate Change to:

- lead nation-wide efforts to protect at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020;
- create at least six new national parks and three new national wildlife areas by 2020, and identify additional new areas for protection through science-based plans; and
- strengthen management of all national parks, national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries to protect their ecological integrity.

### Investment required

For 2016/2017: \$68 million

For ongoing: \$90 million per year

### Summary

The mandate letter for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change includes commitments to: “develop Canada’s National Parks system as well as manage and expand National Wildlife Areas and Migratory Bird Sanctuaries”, and “protect our National Parks by limiting development within them and where possible, work with nearby communities to help grow local eco-tourism industries and create jobs.”

Under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Canada has committed to protecting at least 17% of our land and inland waters by 2020, and to ensuring these protected areas are well-managed, well-connected, and integrated into the broader landscape.<sup>1</sup> Currently, only 10% of Canada’s landscape is protected.

In addition to the mandate letter, the Liberal election platform<sup>2</sup> commits the federal government to “rapidly develop a road map to meet Canada’s international commitment to protect 17% of our land and inland waters by 2020,” to invest “\$50 million per year in Canada’s parks system and manage and expand national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries,” and to “increase science spending in National Parks by \$25M per year to allow for early identification of ecological stresses and avoid permanent degradation.”<sup>3</sup> The Green Budget Coalition budget recommendations build on these mandate letter and platform commitments.

Given the shared jurisdiction over land in Canada, the federal government also has an important role to play in leading a nation-wide effort by all jurisdictions to deliver on the 2020 commitments, and in putting Canada on the path toward the longer term goal of protecting at least half of Canada’s land and inland water by 2030.

1 See Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020: <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

2 Liberal Party of Canada, A New Plan for Canada’s Environment and Economy, retrieved at: <https://www.liberal.ca/files/2015/08/A-new-plan-for-Canadas-environment-and-economy.pdf>

3 Liberal Party of Canada, A New Plan for Canada’s Environment and Economy, pg. 10 retrieved at: <https://www.liberal.ca/files/2015/08/A-new-plan-for-Canadas-environment-and-economy.pdf>

## Background and Rationale

Parks and protected areas are the cornerstone of nature conservation strategies because they protect habitat that species need to survive and thrive.<sup>1</sup> Since 90% of Canada's landscape is in the public domain, managed by federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous and regional governments, coordinated government action is critical to achieve conservation goals.

To stem the tide of biodiversity loss, in 2010 Canada joined other countries in endorsing a 10-year strategic plan under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The plan includes 20 biodiversity targets to be achieved by 2020, covering a range of actions needed to reverse the decline of biodiversity and advance towards the 2050 vision of "living in harmony with nature."

Target 11 commits countries to protect at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020, and to improve the quality of protected areas systems by ensuring they are well-designed, well-managed, well-connected and well-integrated into broader landscapes.<sup>2</sup> Currently, Canada is lagging well behind most other countries with only 10% of our landscape protected, versus the global average of over 15%.

Protecting at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020 is now embedded in Canadian policy through Canada's Biodiversity Goals and Targets which were formally adopted by the federal, provincial and territorial governments in 2015.<sup>3</sup> Now federal leadership and investment is needed to ensure Canada achieves this important commitment.

## Recommendations

### Leadership and Science Support

The Government of Canada should invest \$5 million per year to:

- convene federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous governments to create and implement an action plan to protect at least 17% of Canada's land and freshwater by 2020; and
- support systematic nation-wide conservation planning to identify priority areas for protection to safeguard Canada's biodiversity.

### National Parks

**Creating New National Parks:** The federal government should ramp up investment from \$10 million in 2016 to \$25 million per year, ongoing, by 2018 to create and manage new national parks, including a \$50 million investment over 3 years to support land acquisition and other park establishment costs.

This would enable the creation of six new parks by 2020, including Thaidene Nene, NWT; South Okanagan Similkameen, BC; Manitoba Lowlands, MB; northern BC/southern Yukon (Parks Canada region 7); Flathead Valley, BC.

Looking ahead, the longstanding National Park System Plan needs updating to expand parks where needed to protect their ecological integrity, create new parks to improve representation of natural regions, and work with partners to improve ecological connectivity between national parks and other protected areas, which is particularly important in the face of climate change.

1 The World Bank. 2010. Valuing Protected Areas. Washington DC. 62 pp.

2 See [Green Budget Coalition Budget 2016 Conserving our Oceans](#) to achieve the coastal and marine component of this target.

3 <http://biodivcanada.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=9B5793F6-1>

**Strengthening protection of National Parks:** The federal government should invest \$25 million per year, ongoing, to restore science capacity for ecological monitoring and public reporting, research, and restoration, to achieve the legislative responsibility to maintain or restore national park ecological integrity.

More than half of all national park ecosystems that have been assessed are in fair or poor condition, and ecological integrity is declining in one third of park ecosystems. Yet recent federal budget cuts resulted in the loss of one third of the Agency's science capacity. The impact of these cuts was highlighted in the Fall 2013 Report from the Commissioner on Environment and Sustainable Development, who noted that:

"There is a significant risk that the Agency could fall further behind in its efforts to maintain or restore ecological integrity in Canada's national parks."<sup>4</sup>

The Commissioner's report concluded that the Agency has developed a solid framework to manage for ecological integrity, but has failed to complete a fully functional and scientifically credible monitoring and reporting system.

Through direct support and partnerships with universities and other science-based institutions we recommend that this increased funding support:

- full implementation of the ecological integrity monitoring and public reporting program, including reporting every five years on the state of each of Canada's national parks and the system as a whole (\$10M per yr);
- increased research capacity, including for rapid assessment of emerging issues (\$2M per yr);
- integrating climate change considerations into park policy and management (\$1M per yr); and
- increasing support for ecological restoration (\$12M per yr).

## Environment Canada Protected Areas

**Creating new National Wildlife Areas (NWAs):** The federal government should invest \$3 million in 2016, increasing to \$5 million per year, on-going by 2017 to create and manage at least three new national wildlife areas, and develop a clear plan for the future of the NWA system.

Environment Canada's protected area system currently includes 54 national wildlife areas (NWAs) and 92 migratory bird sanctuaries (MBS's). No new Environment Canada protected areas have been created since 2010, in spite of the urgent need to protect more wildlife habitat in Canada.

There are three immediate opportunities to establish new NWAs: a vast boreal area called Edézhíe, NWT, partnering with Dehcho First Nations; and two large areas of endangered prairie grassland -- Antelope Coulee, SK and OneFour Research Farm, AB,<sup>5</sup> partnering with ranchers. There are also potential opportunities to create up to four more large NWA's in the Northwest Territories, in collaboration with local Indigenous communities and the Government of the Northwest Territories.

NWAs are federal tools that could be used to protect much more habitat in Canada, particularly for

<sup>4</sup> Auditor General of Canada. 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Chapter 7 retrieved at: [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_cesd\\_201311\\_07\\_e\\_38677.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_201311_07_e_38677.html)

<sup>5</sup> The Antelope Coulee proposal includes over 700 sq km of federally owned endangered native grassland on the former Govenlock, Naslyn and Battle Creek Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Area (PFRA) community pastures in southwest Saskatchewan. The OneFour Research Farm proposal in southeast Alberta covers 170 sq km of dry mixed grass prairie that is leased from Alberta by the federal government.

species at risk and migratory birds. Fulfilling this potential, however, requires the federal government to strengthen and better support this protected area program, including creating a clear plan for expanding and managing the system.

**Better protect existing NWAs and MBSs:** The federal government should invest \$10 million in 2016, ramping up to \$30 million per year, on-going, by 2019 to better manage the existing system of NWAs and MBSs, including up-to-date management plans, science-based ecological monitoring and public reporting, enforcement, and public education. Complementary investment needed to conserve migratory birds is included in the Green Budget Coalition's Budget 2016 recommendation on [Migratory Bird Conservation](#).

While the current system of NWAs and MBSs encompasses vital habitats across the country, including for many endangered species and migratory birds, these sites have been woefully under-resourced for over two decades, which is jeopardizing their conservation effectiveness and their accessibility to Canadians. As of 2011, 90% of NWAs did not have adequate management plans. As of 2013, more than 70% of NWAs and 55% of MBSs had less than adequate ecological integrity. A 2014 internal audit found that enforcement staff only visited some sites once or twice a year, and some not at all.

## Considerations:

Expanding and better protecting Canada's parks and protected areas will:

- safeguard Canada's amazing natural heritage, which is at the heart of our national identity;<sup>6</sup>
- provide clean air and water, pollinators for crops, and spaces for healthy outdoor activities;
- prevent natural disasters by stabilizing soils, reducing flooding, and storing carbon;
- sustain cultural and spiritual values of Indigenous peoples; and
- support resilient ecosystems and people in the face of a destabilizing climate.

Parks and protected areas deliver significant economic benefits to Canadians. Canada's federal, provincial and territorial parks support 64,000 full time equivalent jobs across Canada, many of them in rural and remote communities. Every dollar spent by parks agencies generates \$6 for Canada's GDP, and 44% of government expenditures on parks returns to governments through tax revenue.<sup>7</sup>

6 Public opinion polling consistently shows that national parks are among the top four symbols of national identity in Canada. See Environics "Focus Canada" polling at: <http://www.environicsinstitute.org/uploads/institute-projects/environics%20institute%20-%20focus%20canada%202012%20final%20report.pdf>

7 The Outspan Group Inc. (2011) The Economic Impact of Canada's National, Provincial and Territorial Parks in 2009. A technical report prepared for the Canadian Parks Council. Available at [http://www.parks-parcs.ca/english/pdf/econ\\_impact\\_2009\\_part1.pdf](http://www.parks-parcs.ca/english/pdf/econ_impact_2009_part1.pdf)

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