

MEETING CANADA'S COMMITMENTS ON TERRESTRIAL PROTECTED AREAS

Recommendation Summary

The GBC recommends that the federal government invest \$10 million per year for five years for Parks Canada to lead the development, and coordinate implementation, of a pan-Canadian action plan to protect at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020, and to identify long-term priorities for protection beyond 2020. This initiative should be conducted in collaboration with Canadian Wildlife Service, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments, and non-governmental organizations.

The GBC also recommends a further investment of \$85 million per year, on-going, plus a one-time \$50 million investment to Parks Canada and Environment Canada to:

- Create at least six new national parks and three new national wildlife areas by 2020, and identify additional new areas for protection through science and traditional knowledge-based plans; and
- Strengthen management of all national parks, national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries to better protect their ecological integrity.

Investment Required:

For 2017/18:	\$145 million/year
From 2018/19 to 2021/22:	\$95 million/year
Ongoing, from 2022/23:	\$85 million/year

Background and Rationale

In 2010, Canada endorsed a 10-year strategic plan under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to achieve 20 biodiversity targets by 2020 (the Aichi Targets) as a next step towards the much larger-scale protection needed to achieve the goal of living in harmony with nature. Target 11 commits countries to protect at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020, and improve the quality of protected areas systems by ensuring they are well-designed, well-managed, well-connected and well-integrated into broader landscapes.⁴⁸ Currently, Canada is lagging well behind most other countries, with only 10% of our landscape protected, versus the global average of 15%. To make matters worse, the transfer of federally managed grasslands in Saskatchewan initiated in 2012 will likely reduce Canada's protected areas by 800,000 hectares. Canada urgently needs a roadmap and action plan to achieve this 2020 target.

The target of 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 2015.⁴⁹ The current government's 2015 election platform supported achieving the Aichi Targets, and Environment and Climate Change Minister McKenna re-affirmed the government's

commitment to the targets earlier this year. The federal Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development is currently examining this issue, and a federal-provincial-territorial working group has recently been established by the Canadian Parks Council to coordinate work towards the targets.

To deliver on Canada's commitment to achieve the Aichi Targets, the GBC recommends that the federal government support the immediate development of a pan-Canadian action plan, with Parks Canada as the lead federal agency, that engages provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments and non-governmental organizations to expand Canada's protected areas system to include at least 17% of Canada's landscape by 2020, focusing on protecting areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services. The federal government should contribute directly to this goal by creating new national parks and national wildlife areas, and strengthening protection of existing ones.

The federal government also has a tremendous opportunity to enable and support the creation of protected areas controlled and managed by Indigenous governments and communities, or co-managed, as partnerships with Indigenous peoples and through nation-to-nation discussions. One immediate opportunity to support Indigenous-led conservation initiatives is to invest in a National Indigenous Guardians Network (see *recommendation later in this document*).⁵⁰

⁴⁸ see Conserving Our Oceans recommendation, later in this document, regarding the marine component of this target.

⁴⁹ <http://biodivcanada.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=9B5793F6-1>

⁵⁰ <https://edgenorth.ca/article/1341-the-guardian-project>

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 successfully conserve nature in this country. Privately owned lands can also make an important contribution to achieving the 2020 target, particularly in southern Canadian landscapes, where they qualify as protected areas or "other effective area-based conservation measures" (OECMs) according to standards currently being finalized by the international community and Canadian governments⁵¹ (see *Working Landscapes recommendation, later in this document.*)

It is still possible for Canada to achieve the target of at least 17% protection of land and freshwater by 2020, with renewed political will and coordinated action by all governments, civil society and the private sector.⁵² To start, all jurisdictions should complete existing protected area proposals and commitments by 2020, while at the same time identifying additional areas that need protection by 2020, and beyond through science and traditional knowledge-based conservation planning.

Recommendations

A Pan-Canadian Protected Areas Action Plan

The federal government should invest **\$10 million per year** for five years for Parks Canada to lead development and coordinate implementation of a pan-Canadian action plan to protect at least 17% of land and inland waters by 2020, and identify science-based post-2020 targets and plans based on what's needed to effectively conserve nature. This work should be done in collaboration with the Canadian Wildlife Service, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments and non-governmental organizations; and should include systematic conservation planning to identify priority areas for protection by 2020 and beyond to safeguard Canada's biodiversity.

Creating National Parks

The federal government should invest **\$25 million per year**, ongoing, to create and manage new national parks, plus a **one-time \$50 million investment** to support land acquisition and other park establishment costs. This funding would enable the creation of five new parks by 2020, including Thaidene Nene, NWT; South Okanagan Similkameen, BC; Manitoba Lowlands, MB; northern BC/southern Yukon (Parks Canada region 7); and Flathead Valley, BC.

In addition, the long-standing National Park System Plan requires updating to reflect current scientific

51 At the international level there is an IUCN Task Force developing guidance on OECMs, while in Canada the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas has developed guidance.

52 See list of existing protected area proposals on p. 91 of Woodley et al (2015) *Protecting Canada: Is it in our nature?* CPAWS. 96 pp. http://cpaws.org/uploads/CPAWS_Parks_Report_2015-Single_Page.pdf

understanding. This update should include expanding or creating parks where needed to protect their ecological integrity or improve representation of natural regions, and working with partners to improve ecological connectivity between national parks and other protected areas to address the needs of nature in the face of climate change.

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, all focused on maintaining and restoring national park ecological integrity.

According to Parks Canada's most recent "state of protected areas report", more than half of all national park ecosystems that have been assessed are in fair or poor condition, while ecological integrity is declining in one third of these ecosystems⁵³. The *Canada National Parks Act* mandates that maintaining or restoring ecological integrity is the first priority for national park management, yet Parks Canada's science and conservation capacity has been reduced by one third in recent years⁵⁴. The impact of these cuts was highlighted in the Fall 2013 Report from the Commissioner on Environment and Sustainable Development, which 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.*

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, including basic inventories of park ecosystems.

The federal platform commitment to "increase science spending in our National Parks by \$25 million per year to allow for early identification of ecological stresses and avoid permanent degradation" is critically important to enable Parks Canada to deliver on their mandate.

Creating new National Wildlife Areas

The federal government should invest \$5 million per year to create at least three new national wildlife areas, and to create a clear plan for further expanding and managing Environment and Climate Change Canada's protected area system.

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

53 2013 Fall Report of the Commissioner on Environment and Sustainable Development, Chapter 7: Ecological Integrity in National Parks, page 25. http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_cesd_201311_07_e_38677.html

54 Ibid and CPAWS (2016) *Protecting Canada's National Parks: A Call for Renewed Commitment to Nature Conservation.* <http://cpaws.org/uploads/CPAWS-Parks-Report-2016.pdf>

There are three immediate opportunities to establish new NWAs: a vast boreal area called Edézhíe, NWT, in partnership with Dehcho First Nations; and two large areas of endangered prairie grassland -- Antelope Coulee, SK and OneFour Research Farm, AB⁵⁵, both in partnership with ranchers.

NWAs and MBS's are federal tools that could be used to protect much more habitat in Canada, particularly for species at risk. 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 \$30 million per year, ongoing, to better manage the existing system of NWAs and MBS's, including up-to-date management plans, science-based ecological monitoring and public reporting, enforcement, and public education.

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 percent of NWAs did not have adequate management plans. As of 2013, more than 70 percent of NWAs and 55% of MBS's 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.

This program urgently requires attention and capacity. Upgrading management and protection for NWAs and MBS's is an important way the federal government can contribute to delivering on our 2020 commitment to strengthen protected area management.

Benefits

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;⁵⁶
- Provide clean air and water, pollinators for crops, and spaces for healthy outdoor activities;

⁵⁵ 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.

⁵⁶ Public opinion polling shows 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>

- Help to prevent natural disasters by stabilizing soils, reducing flooding and storing carbon;
- Support Indigenous peoples' efforts to sustain their cultural and spiritual values; and
- Support resilient ecosystems and people in the face of a destabilizing climate.

Parks and protected areas also 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, generate \$6 for Canada's GDP for every dollar spent by parks agencies, and return 44% of total government expenditures on parks back to governments through tax revenue.⁵⁷

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⁵⁷ 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