



COMPLEMENTARY NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS



Federal Habitat Restoration Program

The Green Budget Coalition recommends that the federal government invest in a new and scaled-up national restoration program managed by ECCC focused on wetlands, riparian areas and native grasslands in cooperation with AAFC and DFO as part of a green recovery strategy. This program would build on the current commitment to plant trees and restore forest ecosystems managed by NRCan and ECCC.

Canada loses more critical habitat than it conserves every year. We are facing staggering losses of over 75% of native grasslands and 70% of wetlands in settled regions. Habitat degradation and loss, including in aquatic ecosystems, continue to put species at risk of extirpation, with hundreds already listed under the *Species at Risk Act*. Linear disturbances threaten many forest mammals and aquatic life. Native meadow habitats and native grasslands on many rights-of-way (e.g., roadsides, hydro corridors, pipelines, railway lines) have been taken over by invasive grasses, contributing to pollinator species decline. The approaches taken by all levels of government in response to these unsustainable trajectories have been inadequate.

Habitat loss is the main driver of species decline, also causing the loss of critical climate resilience services, while increasing GHG emissions through the release of ecosystem emissions and reductions in landscape carbon storage capacity. These impacts are fundamentally undermining Canada's response to the biodiversity crisis and are limiting our ability to leverage nature-based solutions to help meet our conservation and climate commitments. As we

approach the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030,⁶⁴ Canada also has an international responsibility to replace its lost and degraded natural habitats across the country.

To move from unsustainable habitat loss towards net habitat gains, we must take decisive actions to **restore** our lost and degraded habitats in the short and medium terms (particularly in highly impacted or fragile ecosystems), and protect those restored habitats and their ecological functions over the long-term (*this section*). Further, we must simultaneously **protect** the residual base of natural habitat across the Canadian landscape (*see the Protected Areas section, earlier in this document*), as we implement habitat loss and **land-use mitigation** actions (*see the Nature-based Climate Solutions section, earlier in this document*). Simultaneous protection and management actions are essential to maximize the return on restoration investments and ensure that the associated climate and biodiversity benefits are additive and long-term.

Habitat restoration activities are effective at generating jobs and economic returns: as many as 33 jobs per \$1 million invested, most of which result in localized employment benefits with higher-than-average wages; similar to the construction industry at large. As noted above, investments in habitat restoration projects have been found to result in 15 jobs per \$1 million invested in restoration projects, and 30 jobs per \$1 million invested in labour intensive restoration projects. This is higher than the 8.9 jobs created for every \$1 million invested in oil and gas development⁶⁵ and even of some of the other

64 <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>

65 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2017). Socioeconomic Benefits of Habitat Restoration. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/habitat-restoration-supports-jobs-stewardship>

energy-focused options cited by the Task Force on Resilient Recovery.⁶⁶

Through habitat restoration, Canada has a critical opportunity to bolster our economy and meet biodiversity and climate goals that it cannot afford to bypass. There are hundreds of ‘shovel ready’ ecosystem restoration projects across all habitat types in Canada that can provide these win-win solutions. The key will be to invest in restoration initiatives that maximize both socio-economic and ecological returns, advancing the government’s vision for transformative change toward a healthy, nature-centered and low-carbon economy.⁶⁷

Photo: Lachlan Cruickshank

In addition to the federal government’s commitment to invest **as much as \$2 billion over ten years** in planting 2 billion trees, the Green Budget Coalition recommends investing an additional **\$450 million over five years** (or about \$90 million per year after an initial ramp up period) for a **Federal Habitat Restoration Program**, which would restore wetland, native grassland and meadowland habitat [ECCC]. The tree planting program would be included in this federal restoration program for a total of \$2.6 billion. Examples of benefits include:

- \$50 million per year over five years would result in approximately 30,000 acres of restored inland wetlands and 20 person-years of employment per \$1 million invested in wetland restoration through planning, permitting, new construction and management work that requires diverse skilled labour and goods and services from many small businesses.
- \$100 million per year for ten years (from tree planting funds) could restore about 10,000 km/year of linear disturbances in northern forests and create 80 five-person teams or 400 direct forest restoration jobs a year in northern communities, including Indigenous communities.

See later in this document for the GBC’s recommendation for Ecological Goods and Services Programming for farmers and ranchers that could help support and advance the above investment.

For more detailed information on GBC recommended investments in restoration for wetlands, forests, grasslands, and meadowlands on rights of way, please see www.greenbudget.ca/2021restoration

CONTACTS

James Brennan – j_brennan@ducks.ca
 Florence Daviet – fdaviet@cpaws.org
 Jay Ritchlin – jritchlin@davidsuzuki.org



⁶⁶ <https://www.recoverytaskforce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TFRR-Preliminary-Report-Jul-2020.pdf>

⁶⁷ The Canada Nature-Based Climate Solutions Consortium (Canadian NGOs that organized the February 2020 Nature-Based Climate Solutions Summit in Ottawa). Technical and Policy Recommendations to Natural Resources and Environment and Climate Change Canada on the Two Billion Trees Program. July 30, 2020. Available from jritchlin@davidsuzuki.org