



Opinion

Why the world needs a little less Canada in 2018

Canadians and our governments should focus less on patting ourselves on the back and more on doing better for nature.



Stephen Hazell

Environment

Barack Obama, then United States president, told Parliament in 2016 that: "The world needs more Canada." Banners in Chapters bookstores proclaimed the same message in 2017, by way of celebrating Canada's 150th anniversary.

But considering the harm to nature that Canadians cause, the inconvenient truth is that the world needs *less* Canada. Indeed, if the world's other species could vote on which humans should be voted off Turtle Island, Canadians would be near the top of their list.

Here are a few reasons why Canadians and our governments should focus less on patting ourselves on the back and more on doing better for nature in 2018:

Canada protects less of its land and ocean than any other developed country. With only 10.6 per cent of our land and inland water protected from development, Canada ranks last among G7 countries, and behind other large countries such as Australia (17 per cent) and Brazil (29 per cent).

Even worse, Canada protects only one per cent of our ocean.

In 2010, Canada committed internationally to protecting 17 per cent of our land and inland water, and 10 per cent of our ocean by 2020. But on the prairies, the federal government is actually eliminating protection for endangered grasslands by transferring 800,000 hectares of mainly native prairie to Saskatchewan without requiring any conservation measures.

The result of Canada's inactivity? Half of

the 903 species monitored by WWF Canada between 1970 and 2014 are in decline, and of those, the average population decline was 83 per cent. Environment Minister Catherine McKenna valiantly launched a process with provinces and territories last year to meet the 17 per cent target, but achievement demands a serious investment in the 2018 budget.

Canada produces more greenhouse gas emissions per capita than other OECD countries, aside from the U.S. and Australia. In 2015, Canada's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were 722 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent—18 per cent higher than in 1990. The GHGs emitted per Canadian was 20.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent—more than other developed countries, aside from the United States and Australia.

The Liberal government deserves kudos for the Paris Agreement and the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change. But Canada's actual GHG emissions are still down only slightly from their peak, and that is mainly due to Ontario's decision to phase out coal-fired electricity.

In 1989, then-prime minister Brian Mulroney met with environmentalists (myself included) to talk about a plan for federal action on climate change and other environmental issues. To his credit, Mulroney delivered the \$3-billion Green Plan in 1990, but without the carbon taxes we demanded.

Nearly 30 years later, neither Canadians nor their governments have truly embraced the low-carbon economy. This year, Canadians understand the gravity of the climate change challenge need to get serious about reducing our personal carbon footprints as well as demanding action from governments and industry.

Canada produces more garbage per capita than any other country. Canada produced 777 kilograms of garbage per citizen in 2009, more than any other country, according to the Conference Board of Canada. The total trash tossed by Canadian households continues to grow, by almost 30 per cent between 2002 and 2014, according to the OECD.

Canadians are addicted more than ever to products with disposable packaging such as plastic clamshells and coffee pods. Let's resolve to reuse, compost, and recycle more in 2018 and urge industry and government to take concerted action to reduce disposable packaging.

Obama and Chapters are of course partially correct in celebrating Cana-



Science Minister Kirsty Duncan and Environment Minister Catherine McKenna speak to reporters Nov. 8. Canada protects less of its land and ocean than any other developed country, writes Stephen Hazell. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

da's achievements. Through some good management and some good luck, we have built a prosperous, open, and democratic society.

But Canadians and our governments now need to embrace sustainability as a value as fundamental as protection of human rights and the rule of law. As the 15,000 world scientists concluded in their November 2017 warning to humanity: "To prevent widespread misery and catastrophic biodiversity loss, humanity must practice a more environmentally sustainable alternative to business as usual. ...Soon it will be too late to shift course away from our failing trajectory, and time is running out."

Quick starts for the federal government to shift Canada to a more sustainable course in our 151st year? First, invest in nature protection in Budget 2018, as proposed by the Green Budget Coalition, so that Canada can achieve our international biodiversity commitments. Bill Morneau could become Canada's greenest finance minister (in the other sense of that adjective!).

Second, five environmental laws are expected to be introduced into Parliament this session, including laws to assess resource development projects and entrench carbon-pricing rules. They need to be strong but also innovative. The overriding question that Parliamentarians should ask as these bills are introduced into Parliament: will they move Canada towards environmental, economic, and social sustainability or perpetuate the business-as-usual destruction of Canada's nature?

My hope for 2018? Less destruction of Canadian nature, fewer Canadian GHG emissions, and less Canadian garbage. Get that done, and perhaps we can more honestly say at the end of the year: "The world needs more Canada."

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