

Comments by Stephen Hazell at a reception honouring him on his upcoming retirement as Nature Canada's director of policy and general counsel.

Metropolitan Café, Ottawa, November 1, 2019

Thanks, Julie [Julie Gelfand, outgoing Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development] for your kind words. Thanks to the other executive directors at Nature Canada who put or kept me on the payroll despite my advancing years: Ian Davidson, Eleanor Fast and Graham Saul. Thanks to Bob Peart and Cliff Wallis and the current and former directors of Nature Canada for the countless hours you have donated in the cause of nature conservation.

Thanks also to Jodi Joy, Cheyanne Richardson and Martha Paiz for organizing this reception, and my wonderful colleagues at Nature Canada for their support.

Special thanks to Cheryl Witoski, my spouse and best friend, who can still kick my ass climbing Pink's Lake Hill on bike or skis. I can't imagine any worthwhile life that doesn't include following you up hills in the Gatineau.

Thanks to all of you for coming this evening. But the truth is that there isn't much to celebrate. The true horrors of climate change and human destruction of nature are no longer theoretical. This group fully understands how real these horrors are: wildfires threatening entire regions; hurricane-flattened islands; entire cities facing drowning by sea in coming years; global declines in wildlife populations; and ever-increasing numbers of species at risk.

So I cannot say that my career has been a success. But allow me to share this failure with the other folks of my generation.

Scientists knew what had to be done forty years ago when I was in law school and working as a summer student at the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

The 1980 *World Conservation Strategy* concluded that:

“[H]uman activities are progressively reducing the planet’s life-supporting capacity at a time when rising numbers and consumption are making increasingly heavy demands on it. “

That was forty years ago.

Neil Young had it figured out ten years before that in his 1970 song *After the Gold Rush*:

“Look at mother nature on the run in the 1970s”

And indigenous people have always understood that species and ecosystems must be utilized sustainably.

In the 40 years of my working life, can I truly say that globally we have made any serious progress towards sustainability? Global greenhouse gas emissions are much higher, and wildlife populations much lower this year than 40 years ago. 96% of the biomass of mammals on the planet are now humans and our cattle, pigs, and sheep. Wild mammals constitute just 4%. Mother nature on the run indeed.

That the earth’s life-supporting capacity has continued to deteriorate doesn’t mean that there haven’t been successes, or that personally I haven’t made contributions with non-governmental groups, governments and the private sector.

In the 1980s, I was proud to work with the James Bay Cree in the assessment hearings for the massive Great Whale hydro project, and ultimately stopping the project.

In 1989, I was proud to chair the *Greenprint for Canada Committee* of environmental and Indigenous groups that helped persuade Prime Minister Mulroney to put together a \$3 billion national environmental strategy he called the Green Plan. A key *Greenprint* recommendation was a carbon tax. Thirty years later, at last it looks like we now have a federal carbon pricing law that will stick.

In the 1980s at Canadian Wildlife Federation, I was proud to launch the successful *Rafferty-Alameda* lawsuit, which together with the Supreme Court's decision in *Oldman*, led directly to the 1992 *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*. This law required that adverse environmental effects be considered in federal decision-making.

In the 1990s, I joined government and was proud to work for Bob Connelly, Martin Green and Karen Brown at the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to develop the regulations to bring the law into force.

In the late 1990s, I was a principal at Marbek Resource Consultants working with George Matheson and Rebecca Aird on capacity development projects such as the Environmental Action Program in Jamaica.

In the early 2000s, I led CPAWS when we launched the boreal program to save Canada's boreal forests. Later that decade at Sierra Club of Canada, we intervened in hearings in opposition to the Mackenzie Gas Project alongside Deh Cho First Nation communities. Exxon Mobil, Shell and Imperial still haven't thanked us for saving them billions that they otherwise would have wasted building the pipelines. The Mackenzie Gas Project would have been a costlier white elephant than Montreal's Olympic Stadium, given the rise of inexpensive U.S. shale gas and plummeting natural gas prices over the past decade.

Sierra Club Canada also intervened unsuccessfully in joint panel hearings on oil sands projects in the 2000s at a time when Pembina Institute and Nature Canada were the only other national environmental groups raising concerns.

More recently, at Nature Canada, I was proud to co-chair the Green Budget Coalition, which in 2018 successfully advocated for a \$1.3 billion federal budget commitment to protected areas and species at risk. I was also proud of Nature Canada's contribution to the enactment this past June of the most important federal environmental law reforms in a generation. But let me give credit for these achievements where it is most due: Environmental and Climate Change Minister Catharine McKenna, her Cabinet colleagues, her team and officials.

So, I cannot say my career has been a success. But my conscience is clear. I did what I could within the limits of my abilities.

This is the point, in remarks such as these, when the retiree opines on his or her hopes for the future, in his or her confidence in the capacity of humankind to wriggle away from impending disasters. Those of you who know me will not expect any such happy talk.

I will say that a transformation of human values towards true respect for nature is essential for any serious wriggling to begin. New technologies deployed with the same consumerist, economic growth at any price, values that drive Canadian society today just will not do. Values and enterprises founded on recognition of the importance of global ecosystems to human prosperity, and the limitations of those ecosystems, are critical to that future prosperity.

I do want to share two insights from Nature Canada that may support this transformation towards ecosystem-based values. The first is that nature is nearby. Canadians tend to think of nature as far away in the mountains and Arctic, in our north and northwest, in the great parks of Banff or Nahanni. That thinking has tended to give our governments and corporations implicit social licence to trash our equally important southern ecosystems: prairie grasslands, Carolinian and Acadian forests, the southern Great Lakes, wetlands all across Canada.

Supported by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Nature Canada's NatureHood program instills the idea that nature is there to discover out the back door in your garden, schoolyard, or local wetland or ravine.

The other idea is nature restoration, which Graham Saul has written about during his Metcalfe Foundation fellowship. Most of my career, the focus was on the important work of saving important wild places threatened by industrial development. But opposing development that could harm nature created the impression that environmentalists are anti-progress or nabobs of negativity as Spiro Agnew used to say.

An agenda to restore nature especially to our cities is a constructive, positive agenda that has the potential to get urbanites interested in nature and nature conservation. Stop cutting the grass on our monoculture lawns, and instead grow native trees, milkweed and bird-friendly plants that can help restore biodiversity,

store carbon, and provide shade to reduce the heat island effect emanating from urban concrete and asphalt. Green roof our industrial and commercial areas or install solar power as the Ottawa Renewable Energy Coop does in this city.

I note with enthusiasm the Liberal Party's election platform takes us down part way along this path with a \$3 billion over 10-year commitment to nature-based climate solutions, including a major tree-planting program.

A final note on my post-retirement future. I hope to continue to work on implementing the new federal environmental laws enacted in June. I also plan to take advantage of an emeritus program for lawyers over 65 offered by the Law Society of Ontario. This program would allow me to provide free legal services to nature and environmental groups as well as Nature Canada. The focus will be to provide strategic legal advice on engaging the federal government on environmental issues. But I do plan to work less, so please don't come to me asking me to draft your group's bylaws!

I will conclude with an aphorism from Rabbi Tarphon from the second century common era. Rabbi Tarphon wasn't talking about nature, but rather God and Talmudic scholarship. Still, it works for me as an emerging retiree.

He said:

"You are not required to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it"

So that is my plan and my policy for my declining years: To subsist but not to desist.

Thank you.