



December 09, 2020

The Honourable Seamus O'Regan P.C., M.P.
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The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change
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Dear Ministers O'Regan and Wilkinson,

Our organizations would like to extend our congratulations and appreciation for the significant new investments in nature-based climate solutions announced in the recent fiscal update, including \$3.19B to plant two billion trees (2BT) over 10 years. A well designed, thoughtfully implemented and monitored tree planting program can advance the restoration and protection of key ecosystems and make a meaningful contribution to Canada's ambitious climate and nature commitments, notably the commitments to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and protect 25% of land and ocean by 2025 and 30% by 2030.

These goals have been welcomed by the public and by stakeholders working on climate mitigation and adaptation as well as biodiversity protection and recovery. To reach them, it is critical that the biodiversity and climate focus of the 2BT initiative be clearly articulated in the design and implementation of the program. We are encouraged by recent informal briefings and conversations with your staff and with the Prime Minister's Office. We are writing to highlight recommendations that will support the desired outcomes and to request a meeting with you to discuss these issues as soon as possible.

We urge the government to move swiftly to confirm publicly that the overarching goal of the 2BT program is to maximize combined climate and biodiversity outcomes, and to set clear ensuing objectives. We recommend the following as core objectives:

- a) **Climate**: Protect and expand tree cover to restore and grow Canada's land-based carbon sink and support the achievement of net-zero emissions by 2050.
- b) **Biodiversity**: Restore and connect degraded ecosystems to expand protected areas and support the recovery of species at risk.
- c) **Resilience**: Support near term health, resilience and climate adaptation of settled areas, in particular Indigenous communities, by maximizing co-benefits for human well-being.

The government should also clarify that the 2BT will be truly additive, ensuring a net increase in forest cover and sequestration over time relative to tree planting already planned under existing legislative or regulatory requirements.

The rigorous application of the preceding objectives to the selection of tree planting opportunities will assure the public that the 2BT program is a credible investment in long-term climate and biodiversity solutions, and not a short-term

measure in which trees remain vulnerable to clear cutting in the foreseeable future negating their true potential for climate and nature benefits.

Achieving these objectives will require planting the right trees, in the right places, for the right reasons. Tree planting will need to meet ecological criteria and must go hand-in-hand with increased reductions in produced CO2 emissions across society. Tree planting cannot be used in programs where the trees are claimed to offset increased fossil fuel production and use.

If the above objectives drive the program, we believe tree planting would be prioritized in sites not already under requirement to replant in two key areas:

- i) private and public urban, peri-urban and agricultural landscapes in populous southern Canada where ecosystems are fragmented, under protected, and facing significant biodiversity and climate pressures.
- ii) targeted public northern landscapes that are damaged (e.g., by seismic lines, intense forest fires or disease).

Ministers, our organizations have applauded the funding of the 2BT initiative. Properly implemented, it has the potential to ignite the hope and imagination of Canadians from coast to coast to coast as an example of a concrete action we can take together to tackle climate change and address species loss, while creating jobs and spurring economic recovery. We strongly support the creation of a technical advisory body to guide implementation and monitoring of the program informed by science and Indigenous knowledge.

Our organizations are ready to help ensure the program can be the national success and permanent legacy it was intended to be. We look forward to an opportunity to discuss our recommendations and appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ian Bruce
Acting Executive Director
David Suzuki Foundation

Tim Gray
Executive Director
Environmental Defence

Megan Leslie
President and CEO
World Wildlife Fund Canada

Graham Saul
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Steve Hounsell
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Janet Sumner
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Risa Smith
Chair, Protected Areas Climate Change Specialist Group
IUNC/ World Commission on Protected Areas

Cc: Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
Hon. Catherine McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities
Sarah Goodman, Policy Director, Prime Minister's Office