

An open letter to Minister Steven Guilbeault on Canada's National Adaptation Strategy from more than 90 conservation, environmental and social justice groups representing hundreds of thousands of supporters in Canada.

July 13, 2022

The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON

Dear Minister Guilbeault,

Re: Put nature at the centre of Canada's Adaptation Strategy

As representatives of more than 90 organizations from across Canada, we are writing to urge you to put nature at the centre of Canada's forthcoming National Adaptation Strategy.

The impacts of climate change are already being felt across the country, and we must all work together to both reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilient communities and ecosystems.

Our key message to you is that we cannot protect Canadians from climate change, and build a resilient country, unless we halt and reverse the destruction of nature.

First, as the [Preparing for Climate Change](#) discussion paper recognizes, our survival depends on the food, water, soil, pollination and immense carbon storage capacity of our ecosystems. Biodiversity loss and species extinction is threatening our existence, and we cannot achieve resilience without halting and reversing these threats.

Second, the protection, restoration and better management of forests, wetlands, grasslands, and coastal and marine areas – so-called nature-based solutions – constitutes one of the most promising avenues for protecting communities against extreme climate impacts, such as heat, floods, fires, droughts, sea level rise. We are pleased that the discussion paper calls for the “mainstreaming” of nature-based solutions.



Third, above and beyond the critical benefits and services nature provides for human adaptation to climate change, humans, as prime drivers of ecological destruction, have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that adaptation plans address the survival needs of all species. In this regard, we applaud the discussion paper's acknowledgement of the "immeasurable intrinsic value of ecosystems", and the recognition that the strategy should aim to achieve both "natural and human adaptation."

Finally, as the discussion paper recognizes, "to achieve climate resilience...we must transform how we build our communities, the way we interact with nature, and how we look after each other" (emphasis added). We cannot build a resilient country without a transformation in our relationship with nature, which will also require better respect for, and incorporation of, Indigenous knowledge and understandings. Climate change and biodiversity loss are both largely driven by the overexploitation and destruction of nature. Until we return to balance with nature, resilience will remain elusive.

At present, the adaptation needs of non-human animals and other species are not adequately reflected in the current discussion paper. For example, its vision ("All of us living in Canada are resilient") appears only to refer to humans, ignoring the resilience of all other species. In addition, a clear recognition of the importance of protecting all species is missing from the core principles for the strategy. And finally, the goals and objectives of the economy, disaster resilience, and health and well-being sections of the framework do not acknowledge the critical importance of protecting and restoring nature and biodiversity for achieving these health, safety and economic well-being outcomes.

We therefore strongly recommend the following for Canada's National Adaptation Strategy.

1

1. Enshrine the commitment to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030 in the Strategy, and ensure that the resilience of all species, advanced with Indigenous leadership, is incorporated into the vision, principles, goals and objectives of all five thematic areas.

Specifically, we recommend that the Strategy adopt and advance all of the 2030 objectives outlined in the Natural Environment section of the discussion paper, including:

- Human activities are transformed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss while respecting Indigenous rights;
- Indigenous peoples, organizations and communities exercise self-determination on their lands and territories for ecosystem stewardship initiatives to adapt to climate change;
- Nature-based solutions are mainstreamed, underpinned by decision-making frameworks that take into account both the economic and non-economic values of ecosystem services;
- Conservation and restoration practices and plans are in place for ecosystems most affected by climate change; and
- Decisions on adaptation actions are informed by comprehensive and accessible information on the state of ecosystems.

2

2. Invest in and advance key short-term actions to protect and restore nature and advance nature-based solutions.

As indicated in the discussion paper, nature-based climate solutions represent a “win-win solution” for climate mitigation and adaptation.

Nature-based approaches to adaptation can deliver a wide range of social, environmental and economic co-benefits, and help to strengthen the adaptive capacity of communities and wildlife. They can reduce climate change risks to communities, and are often more cost-effective and flexible than engineered alternatives.

The discussion paper rightly calls for short-term action to “integrate and prioritize nature-based solutions in public spending on climate adaptation”.

We recommend that the National Adaptation Strategy include the following five short-term actions to advance nature protection and climate adaptation:

- Expand funding for Indigenous-led conservation and Indigenous Guardians programs;
- Prioritize natural infrastructure over gray infrastructure and increase support

for nature-based solutions for adaptation;

- Expand funding for connected networks of protected areas and make this funding permanent;
- Expand and further invest in the restoration, protection and expansion of forests, wetlands, rivers, riparian areas, grasslands, meadows and coastal and marine ecosystems;
- Advance and complete a comprehensive mapping of the state of ecosystems and the services they provide in order to inform decision-making and monitor progress.

3. **Commit to a transformation and return to balance in our relationship with nature.**

We won't address or survive climate change and the extinction crisis without rethinking the political, economic and social aspects of our relationship with the lands, waters, and all the life support systems of planet Earth.

To build resilience, the National Adaptation Strategy needs to help advance a social and cultural transformation that ends the overexploitation of natural resources and brings humanity back into balance with nature. Achieving Canada's goal of halting and reversing nature loss by 2030 will depend on this broader social transformation.

At its core, this transformation will require listening to and learning from Indigenous communities and their worldviews, advancing the rights and title of Indigenous people, and expanding opportunities for Indigenous-led conservation and restoration initiatives in communities across Canada, including in Indigenous communities, who are often at the frontlines of the impact of climate change

Thank you for considering our recommendations and for your efforts to advance the resilience to climate change of communities and ecosystems across the country.

Sincerely,



SIGNATORIES



SIGNATORIES



SIGNATORIES

Adventure Canada	Climate Action Sarnia Lambton
Against Port Expansion	Climate Caucus
Alberta Wilderness Association	Climate Network Lanark
Alliance fo Intergenerational Resilience	Conservancy Hornby Island
Anarres Natural Health	Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)
Bert Miller Nature Club	David Suzuki Foundation
BFC Regina	Echo Ecological Enterprises LTD
Biodiversity and Climate Action Collective Niagara	Ecology Action Centre
Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington	Endangered Ecosystems Alliance
Burke Mountain Naturalists	EnviroMuslims
BurlingtonGreen Environmental Association	ENvironnement JEUnesse
Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment	FLAP Canada
Canadian Environmental Law Association	For Peat's Sake - Protecting Northern Saskatchewan Muskegs
Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society (CPAWS Yukon)	Friends of Semiahmoo Bay Society
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society of BC	Georgia Strait Alliance
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Northern Alberta	Green 13
Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation	Green Communities Canada
	Green Teams of Canada
	Green Ummah
	GreenUP
	High Park Nature

SIGNATORIES

Hike Nova Scotia	Ocean Park Beautification Committee
Hope for Wildlife Society	Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
Imaginons la Péninsule acadienne autrement	One School One Farm Shelterbelt Project
Kawartha Wildlife Centre	Ontario Biodiversity Council
Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia LTABC	Ontario Nature
LEAF (Local Enhancement & Appreciation of Forests)	Ontario Rivers Alliance
Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation, Inc.	Ontariogreen Conservation Association
London Environmental Network	Ottawa Valley Wild Bird Care Centre
Mayne Island Conservancy Society	Owen Sound Field Naturalists
Mind Your Plastic	Pelee Island Bird Observatory
Nature NB	Public Pastures Public Interest (PPPI)
Nature Newfoundland and Labrador	Réseau de milieux naturels protégés
Nature Nova Scotia	Saugeen Nature
Nature Québec	Sea Smart
Nature Regina	Seedlings Forest Education
Nature Saskatchewan	SEIZE
Nature Vancouver	Sky Harvest Inc.
Neighbours United	SNAP Québec
New Brunswick Anti-Shale Gas Alliance	Society for the Protection of Sargeant Bay
North American Megadam Resistance Alliance	Society of Ecological Restoration - Ontario
	South Peel Naturalists' Club

SIGNATORIES

Sustainable Orillia

Target Climate

The Couchiching Conservancy

The Starfish Canada

Toronto Wildlife Centre

Trees Please Winnipeg Coalition

Trumpeter Swan Coalition

Vancouver Avian Research Centre

Vermilion River Stewardship

Water Watchers

Waterloo Region Nature

Wildsight Creston Valley Branch

WWF-Canada

Yukon Conservation Society

