

Backgrounder

A Call to Action to Transformative Change to Address Biodiversity Loss

The [first global assessment by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#) and the COVID pandemic have placed biodiversity, and human connections to wildlife, on the public agenda worldwide. In the past 18 months alone, Canada has made significant commitments on the world stage, including most recently in the [G7 Climate, Energy and Environment Ministers' Communiqué](#) “to tackle... the triple global crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, recognising that these challenges are inextricably interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and that they are driven largely by human activity and by unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.”

Habitat loss and degradation as the primary cause of terrestrial biodiversity loss points both to the imperative of area-based conservation as a major anchor of action, complemented by effective sustainable development measures outside protected and conserved areas. Canada has made significant progress in the past few years delivering on its intent to meet its Aichi Target 11 for land and marine protection within its borders and committing to post-2020 increases. However, Article 8 of [the Convention on Biological Diversity](#) makes clear that there are many additional needs relevant to *in situ* protection of biodiversity, including (but not limited to) sustainable development outside protected areas.

Looking ahead, and particularly in view of the [post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (slated for completion in late 2022), more ambition will be necessary with the following actions:

Whole-of-government approach. The CBD envisions a whole-of-government approach that facilitates “biodiversity mainstreaming at all relevant levels within political, economic and social sectors”. In Canada, this approach has been recognized if imperfectly implemented, in federal actions on sustainable development (see [ENVI report from 2016](#)) and the so-called “climate lens” arising out of federal climate policy.

A whole-of-government approach would mean that biodiversity is addressed by all policy sectors, not only by environmental agencies through “institutional changes in various policy sectors towards taking biodiversity into the core agenda and objectives of their decision-making”. Achieving this will require recognition of biodiversity needs and integration across all sectors, such that the safeguarding of species and ecosystems does not remain a boutique issue for environmental agencies acting alone.

Federal Leadership - While federal authority to address biodiversity is limited compared to that of the provinces, cooperative federalism tends to be a pathway to lowest-common-denominator protection. It follows that along with a high degree of commitment, a federal government must skillfully use its limited authority to play an effective leadership role. For example, the federal government regularly deploys fiscal levers to stimulate action on policy priorities such as health, education and infrastructure, but infrequently for biodiversity protection. The recent [Pathway to Canada Target 1](#) process represents an exceptional use of a fiscal lever whereby a relatively small federal expenditure of less than \$200 million and coordinated ambition incentivised some provinces and territories and many Indigenous governments to undertake protected area projects.

Commit to Indigenous-led Conservation - Although Indigenous governments in Canada are not formally responsible for implementing the country's international commitments to biodiversity, consideration for the [resurgent role of Indigenous-led conservation](#) is nevertheless essential for confronting the crisis. In their recent landmark report [We Rise Together](#), the Indigenous Circle of Experts put forward a case for how Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) represent a long-term commitment to conservation while elevating Indigenous rights and responsibilities. Additional imperatives relate to the increasing recognition of inherent Indigenous rights and the need for Indigenous consent in land use decisions, thereby supporting meaningful reconciliation and enacting the principles of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#).

Decision-making processes shifting from growth-centered to acknowledging biophysical limits. - Effective biodiversity governance will require measures that build much greater awareness of natural limits into planning and decision-making processes and reverse the current approach of land use conversion being a foregone conclusion (possibly with mitigation). Instead, such governance would result in a system where all such conversion must be considered within the context of clear scientific limits (similar to the idea of a carbon budget for climate). Shifting to such a regime will require investment in biodiversity monitoring and cumulative effects assessment at appropriate planning scales.

Commit to a Biodiversity Strategy - The current [Biodiversity Strategy for Canada](#) is more than 25 years old. A comprehensive biodiversity strategy and action plan aimed at domestic implementation of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is much needed. This would identify the regulatory, legislative, enforcement, financing and accountability measures needed to deliver the strategy

Pursue law reforms - Building on a comprehensive biodiversity strategy, pursue the following law reforms:

- natural resource sector and development planning laws that have economic considerations as overriding factors built in; and
- comprehensive biodiversity legislation that addresses issues other than protected areas and species at risk.

For more information

See Ray JC, Grimm J, and Olive A. 2021. The biodiversity crisis in Canada: failures and challenges of federal and subnational strategic and legal frameworks. FACETS 6: 1044–1068. doi:10.1139/facets-2020-0075

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