

18 July, 2019

Dear Minister McKenna,

As scientists who have studied and worked around the globe on conservation issues for many decades, we appreciate the leadership that you and others in government have shown over the last year in moving forward conservation and environmental initiatives. Biodiversity losses are mounting as was summarized in the recently released report of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and in testimony to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainability on June 17. Canada itself is struggling as demonstrated in last month's State of Canada's Birds report, the continued decline of Woodland Caribou, slow recovery of listed species at risk, and many new additions to that list each year. Changes to the world's climate, its environment, and our social systems as a result of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are increasingly alarming as we see so vividly in Canada when large fires and floods linked to changing climate dominate the news.

Your government's positive vision for achieving ambitious biodiversity, ecological, and climate change goals has been an important beacon to the world to show that nations can achieve great things even in today's troubled times.

Now, as we approach the year 2020 and the deadline for achieving the Convention on Biodiversity goal of protecting at least 17% of Canada's lands, it is vital that the implementation of a world leading conservation vision be carried out with unwavering commitment to achieving truly ground breaking results.

In particular, it will be crucial for Canada to demonstrate a clear path to 17% -- and beyond -- through the Nature Fund and other measures. The historic investments made possible through the Canada Nature Fund provide a unique and critical opportunity to support ambitious action towards Canada's current and future biodiversity protection goals.

Clearly, reaching the 17% goal will only be possible through your government's support of the many Indigenous government and community proposals for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), especially those that encompass very large landscapes across the boreal forest region. We applaud your support for Indigenous leadership in conservation to date and urge you to give high priority to these forward-thinking efforts.

IPCAs represent extraordinary opportunities to not only meet Canada's international biodiversity commitments but also protect key carbon stores while at the same time contributing to renewed relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Placing these areas at the heart of Canada's plan to meeting its current and future commitments is a key step forward for Canada and the global community.

In addition, ensuring that all areas considered under the 17% goal (including Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures) provide long-term effective and enduring protection of Canada's biodiversity and ecosystem services will be crucial to demonstrating international leadership. Areas that are currently undeveloped because of regulations, policy or as a result of voluntary measures or standards as in wetland and riparian buffer strips on lands managed for forestry or agriculture, should not be added to the tally of protected areas. While such conservation-minded land use practices are especially valuable in developed areas, reliance on such practices in undeveloped landscapes would distort the protected areas concept, leading potentially to decline of fish, wildlife, and plant populations and

ecosystem functions. Such areas could, on the other hand, be legally established as protected areas and made off limits to all industrial activity including sub-surface activity in order to make meaningful progress to protecting and enhancing biodiversity.

As you know, Canada is steward to some of the world's most significant ecological and biodiversity features including one of the world's largest areas of ecologically intact forests—the Boreal Forest. This region supports billions of migratory birds including threatened species like the Whooping Crane and the Canada Warbler that connect the landscapes across the Western Hemisphere as they make their migratory journeys to wintering grounds that stretch from southern Canada and the U.S. to southern Chile and Argentina. The Boreal Forest is also one of the last strongholds for many species of large mammals including both Woodland and Migratory Caribou, Grizzly Bear, Timber Wolf, and Wolverine. The region encompasses some of the world's largest lakes, largest wetlands, and the longest undammed river systems left in North America. Held within its peatlands and soils are over 200 billion tonnes of carbon, equivalent to decades of the world's current greenhouse gas emissions. Ecosystem functions and services across the Boreal Forest region are also intact over most of its extent.

Significant support of IPCAs and other strong conservation measures will be crucial to ensuring that these values are maintained into the future. Such an outcome will be a sign of hope for all the people of Canada and of the world.

Sincerely,

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