



CANADIAN
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INITIATIVE



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Dear Premier Charest,

In a letter sent in May 2007, 1,500 scientists from more than 50 countries around the world, including 71 from Quebec, asked Canadian government leaders to ensure the protection of at least 50% of Canada's Boreal forest. We were delighted to hear that on May 9, 2011 with the adoption of the Plan Nord, this became the official policy of Quebec.

It is our understanding that the Government of Quebec has recently published a Consultation Document seeking public input on its commitment "...to set aside 50% of Plan Nord territory for environmental protection, safeguarding biodiversity, promoting our natural heritage as well as for various types of development that do not rely on industrial activities" in order to develop an implementation strategy to be enshrined in law.

While most of us are not from Quebec, as members of the international scientific community we strongly believe that this undertaking deserves our public support. In protecting northern Quebec's natural environment in fifty percent of the Plan Nord territory and ensuring responsible development in the rest of the area, as articulated by the Plan Nord, your government has set in motion one of the most ambitious sustainable development and environmental conservation projects in North America, and one that could serve as a model for the rest of the world.

Scientists have already catalogued some of the natural resources that constitute the natural heritage of northern Quebec. In terms of wildlife, northern Quebec provides habitat for hundreds of millions of nesting birds(i), significant herds of migratory tundra caribou(ii) and healthy populations of sea-run fish like Atlantic Salmon whose migrations are still unimpeded by dams(iii). However, the populations of some species are too low: the sedentary woodland caribou, the wolverine and the golden eagle are all on Quebec's threatened or vulnerable species lists. In terms of the region's ecological benefits to society, including water filtration and carbon storage, their value is estimated at 13.8 times the value of the natural resources extracted from it each year(iv).

In addition to the considerable biodiversity of this region, climate change is a major concern that influences our vision for the conservation planning of northern Quebec. Every day, new factors indicate that environmental degradation is fundamentally affecting our natural heritage, and the reduction of industrial carbon emissions is a top priority. While it is tempting to rely on costly unproven technological solutions, a responsible and sustainable approach fits within our current frame of knowledge. Our Boreal ecosystems already efficiently store more carbon in their trees, soils and peat than any other terrestrial environment(v). It is our responsibility to be the stewards of these vast northern carbon reserves(vi).

In the context of the Plan Nord, it is important that our conservation and development decisions be guided by and based upon sound science.

The field of conservation biology identifies four objectives that must be achieved to ensure the long-term viability of an ecosystem(vii):

1. all native ecosystem types must be represented in protected areas;
2. populations of all native species must be maintained in natural patterns of abundance and distribution;
3. ecological processes such as hydrological processes must be maintained; and
4. the resilience to short-term and long-term environmental change must be maintained.

In order to achieve these objectives, it will be necessary for the conservation process being developed to:

- Accelerate identifying and protecting unique and irreplaceable ecological areas and critical habitats for species at risk at appropriate large landscape scales;
- Conduct ecological planning across the entire landscape in advance of development, taking into account socio-economic and cultural considerations, to ensure balance between conservation and sustainable development;
- Pursue the efforts to create a network of large protected areas that are capable of conserving the full range of native biodiversity and ecological processes. By providing examples of natural ecosystem function, these areas will act as ecological benchmarks and inform adaptive management of the region's resources;
- Recognize the industrial nature of large-scale commercial forestry. In special management zones, allow for small-scale community forestry that does not adversely affect biodiversity;
- Assess and mitigate cumulative impacts of development on the landscape and natural ecosystem function;
- Develop guidelines for flexibility and adaptive management that give priority to the maintenance of ecosystem services and processes; and
- Resolve challenges presented by the current supremacy of subsurface rights, and the overlooked, high cumulative effects of mining exploration and extraction on ecosystems

It is our firm hope that by incorporating these principles and criteria, northern Quebec's natural heritage can be maintained intact for future generations, ensuring socio-economic opportunities in perpetuity. We ask that this be done in a manner that fully engages the communities in these regions, especially Aboriginal Peoples, whose knowledge, relationships, interests, aspirations and rights must be respected.

Finally, we feel certain that, in taking this action, Quebec will emerge as a world leader in sustainable development, biodiversity conservation and climate change, while creating a new ecosystem management model for the 21st century that will set the standard for countries around the world.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. ii. iii. iv. v. vi. vii. | <p>Unpublished estimates of the Partners in Flight Program based on methodology described in: Blancher, P., and J. V. Wells. 2005. <i>The Boreal Forest Region: North America's Bird Nursery</i>. <i>American Birds</i> 59:30-39.</p> <p>Bergerud, A.T., S.N. Luttich, and L. Camps. 2008. <i>The Return of Caribou to Ungava</i>. McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, QC, and Kingston, ON.</p> <p>Wells, J., D. Roberts, P. Lee, R. Cheng, and M. Darveau. 2010. <i>A Forest of Blue—Canada's Boreal Forest: The World's Water Keeper</i>. International Boreal Conservation Campaign, Seattle, WA.</p> <p>Anielski, M., and S. Wilson, 2009. <i>Counting Canada's Natural Capital: Assessing the Real Value of Canada's Boreal Ecosystems</i>, Canadian Boreal Initiative and The Pembina Institute, p. 61.</p> <p>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2000. <i>Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry</i>. Rt. Watson, I.R. Noble, B. Bolin, N.H. Ravindranath, D.J. Verardo, and D.J. Dokken (eds.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.</p> <p>This responsibility was expressed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which has recommended that Canada and Russia ensure the protection of their Boreal regions.</p> <p>Noss, R.F., and A.Y. Cooperrider. 1994. <i>Saving nature's legacy: Protecting and restoring biodiversity</i>. Island Press, Washington.</p> |
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