



CEOs of Canada's largest environmental groups issue statement on national park management

(October 4, 2016) As leaders of Canada's environmental movement, we have gathered in Banff National Park to discuss solutions to key environmental challenges facing our country. We are moved by the magnificent wilderness, wildlife and ecosystems that surround us in Banff, and are grateful to our forebears who have protected this magnificent landscape – Indigenous peoples' who have been stewards of this land for millennia, and national park managers who have worked to protect its ecological integrity and pass it along unimpaired to future generations of Canadians.

Canada's national parks serve as cornerstones of our nature conservation efforts, providing safe sanctuary for wild plants and animals, as well as providing people with opportunities to experience and learn about the wonders of nature.

We note and support the commitment Canada has made to protect at least 17% of our landscape by 2020 in well-designed, well-managed and well-connected protected areas as an important next step towards what's needed to conserve nature, particularly in the face of climate change. Protected areas contribute to efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change, provide clean air and water, jobs and many other benefits to Canadians. An ambitious plan for new national parks and connectivity areas is essential to delivering on this commitment.

But as we expand our national park system, we must not take the well-being of wildlife and wilderness in and around our existing national parks for granted.

There is strong evidence that park ecosystems are struggling in the face of enormous and growing threats from inside and outside their boundaries. Parks Canada's last report on the state of national parks showed that fewer than half of park ecosystems measured were in good condition and more than one third were in declining health, while more than 40% of park ecosystems had not yet been assessed. There is an urgent need to scale up efforts to protect the ecological integrity of our national parks to fulfil the legislative mandate of maintaining or restoring their ecological integrity as a first management priority.

Yet, since 2012, Parks Canada's conservation capacity has been cut by almost one third, public consultations have been dramatically curtailed, and development proposals have been allowed to go



ahead within parks, even though they contravene policies specifically designed to limit development and protect precious wildlife habitat. Meanwhile, development pressures are continuing unchecked in areas around these protected areas.

As leaders of Canada's environmental movement, we are deeply concerned that the Government of Canada's management of our national parks has shifted dramatically in the wrong direction, putting our most treasured protected places at risk.

For example, concept approval has been granted for a massive expansion of the Lake Louise Ski Resort in Banff even though it would encroach on legally protected wilderness; for a resort development on the shores of Maligne Lake even though it directly contravenes the park management plan and other park policies; and for a new bike path corridor from Jasper to Banff right through critical valley bottom caribou and grizzly habitat, with no prior public discussion or assessment of its impacts.

Similarly, we are deeply concerned about the inadequate attention being paid by the Government of Canada to the cumulative impacts of developments outside our national parks on their ecological integrity. For example, the nation's largest national park – Wood Buffalo – is at risk of joining the list of world heritage sites in danger due to the cumulative impacts from intensive petroleum and hydro development upstream from its borders. If Parks Canada continues to focus on tourism, marketing and development at the expense of nature conservation, and if development pressures in areas around our parks continue unchecked, wildlife and wilderness in our national parks will be whittled away, and we will fail to deliver on our responsibility to pass along these special places unimpaired to future generations.

It is time to re-focus on conserving nature first and foremost in our national parks.

This does not mean keeping people out of parks. We recognize the critical role national parks play in providing opportunities for people to experience and learn about nature. However, it is critical that the collective impact of infrastructure and people enjoying our parks does not jeopardize the very wildlife and wilderness they are meant to protect.

We appreciate the commitments made by the current federal government to limit development in our national parks, re-focus on ecological integrity, restore science funding, work in partnership with Indigenous peoples, restore open, transparent decision-making processes and reform essential federal environment assessment legislation.



To deliver on these commitments, there is an urgent need for Parks Canada to refocus on nature conservation and stewardship, and to reverse the relentless focus on marketing, tourism and increasing visitation with little regard to the impacts on nature.

To ensure our national parks are passed along unimpaired to future generations of Canadians, as required by law, we specifically call on the Government of Canada to:

- Prohibit any further expansion of the development footprint in Banff and Jasper National Parks, starting with saying “no” to the proposed Lake Louise Ski Resort expansion as well as any other ski area expansions in Banff, to the proposed resort at Maligne Lake, and to any new recreational corridor through caribou and grizzly bear habitat in Jasper.
- Re-focus on protecting ecological integrity in our national parks as the overarching management priority, including re-investing in science, ecological monitoring and public reporting;
- Ensure that reforms of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* require the most stringent level of review in and around our national parks, including cumulative impacts.
- Ensure the current funding allocated for infrastructure in national parks is used to maintain and upgrade existing infrastructure, not to expand the development footprint in national parks, for example by building new or expanded roads.
- Ensure new national parks are created through nation-to-nation dialogue and support co-management with Indigenous peoples, and that existing parks are managed in ways that respect and support Indigenous rights and knowledge.
- Restore open, transparent decision-making and public accountability processes in our national parks.
- Focus investments in national park visitor experiences on nature interpretation and education programs with the explicit goal of nurturing nature stewards.

Canadians value unspoiled natural beauty and wildlife above all else in our national parks. We have a collective duty to pass along these special places unimpaired so future generations can share what we have the privilege of experiencing today. Fulfilling this promise requires urgent action to re-focus on conserving nature as the first priority in all aspects of national park management.

Signatories: *équiterre, ecojustice, Pembina Institute, Greenpeace, CPAWS, David Suzuki Foundation, Sierra Club of Canada Foundation, Ecology Action Centre, West Coast Environmental Law, Environmental Defence, Nature Canada, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada*