An open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau from 200 conservation, environmental and social justice groups with hundreds of thousands of supporters in Canada on the opening of the 44th Parliament

November 18, 2021

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister and Privy Council
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON K1P 5K9

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

Re: Call for action to deliver on election promises to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030

Together, as Canada’s leading nature organizations, we’d like to extend our congratulations on the re-election of your government and the appointment of cabinet.

The recent election underscored many issues of critical importance to people in Canada, including the urgency of addressing climate change, spurring nature’s recovery and ensuring greater equity. To do so, Canada must act boldly.

As the 44th Parliament prepares to open, nature supporters across the country and around the world are looking to Canada to take actions at home that show global leadership. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Convention on Biological Diversity need strong national examples as they are renewed and pursued over the next year. The joint report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change makes clear the imperative to solve the nature and climate crises together, or risk solving neither.¹

We must put in place stronger actions to cut greenhouse emissions. And we must deliver a comprehensive plan — with timelines and targets — to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030 and bring nature to full recovery by 2050.

¹ Hans-Otto et al, June 2021. IPBES-IPCC co-sponsored workshop outcomes on biodiversity and climate change
Your platform commitments to establish new protected areas, reverse nature loss, support Indigenous-led conservation, and restore and enhance wetlands, grasslands and peatlands offer a strong foundation, and resonate across the platforms of other major parties. To be effective and meaningful, implementation of these commitments needs to advance climate action, biodiversity conservation, Indigenous rights and social and racial equity.

Despite the historic nature investment in Budget 2021 and advancement of protected areas, studies show that Canadian laws and policies to safeguard biodiversity have fallen short and we continue to lose nature faster than we can recover it. To achieve the commitments to halt and reverse nature loss made in the G20 Rome Leaders’ Declaration and your platform, a whole-of-government approach to ensuring nature’s recovery is required. As with climate change, Canada needs a comprehensive biodiversity strategy, including a biodiversity lens and an action plan that sets strict new limits on land use and that measures, monitors and publicly reports progress toward halting biodiversity loss and enabling the full recovery of nature.

A bold strategy must be built with Indigenous Peoples and with full respect for their rights, title and knowledge systems. Provincial, territorial and municipal governments have a critical role to play and must be engaged, incentivised and, where possible, directed by federal action. The strategy must also be informed by an equitable and inclusive dialogue with voices from Black and other racialized communities, and across generations.

We’re committed to working with you and all members of Parliament to ensure action is taken to halt and reverse nature loss in Canada by 2030.

Government action will be required across many aspects of Canadian society, including these five areas:

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1. PROTECTING AT LEAST 30 PER CENT OF LAND AND OCEAN BY 2030

Habitat loss is the number one driver of nature’s decline. Creating protected areas is an essential tool to address this crisis. The commitment to establish 10 new national parks and 10 new national marine conservation areas, and co-managing them with Indigenous nations, is an ambitious and important goal as part of the commitment to protect 25 per cent of land and ocean by 2025 and 30 per cent by 2030. We urge government to formally implement minimum standards of protection, particularly in the marine context, to ensure every protected area achieves its conservation outcomes.

Expansion of protected areas should also support the federal commitment to recovery of at-risk species. Areas under threat of human-caused degradation and those critical for species recovery must be prioritized for protection. The national vision for protected areas should be aligned with habitat needs for at-risk species as identified in federal recovery strategies.

Protecting natural carbon storage from being destroyed is necessary alongside dramatic reductions in fossil fuel emissions to meet climate targets. Protected areas can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation while protecting biodiversity. Integrating climate change considerations into conservation planning will fundamentally improve land and ocean use decision-making and outcomes.

Achieving protected area goals will require strong engagement and collaboration with provinces, territories and Indigenous communities throughout the country. Building on the historic investments in Budget 2021, we also urge you to secure expanded and permanent funding to ensure permanent protection for nature in well-managed and connected networks of protected areas.

2. SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION AND RESPECTING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

The nature community was pleased to see every major federal party commit to supporting Indigenous-led conservation through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Guardians programs. These are essential elements of recognizing and respecting rights, title and treaties. Our expectation is that every Indigenous nation that wants to establish an IPCA or Guardian program to protect their territories will be supported by your government, including using all possible influence with provincial and territorial governments. Providing capacity-building resources and legal, regulatory and policy conditions for establishment and maintenance of IPCAs by First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities is a key part of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We further urge you to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and respect the inherent and constitutional rights of Indigenous Peoples in all conservation initiatives.
GETTING NATURE-BASED CLIMATE SOLUTIONS RIGHT

The Government of Canada has recognized that protecting and restoring forests, wetlands, grasslands and marine ecosystems like eelgrass and salt marsh, is critical to mitigating and adapting to climate change. We welcome the initial 10-year investment commitments in Budget 2021 and additional platform commitments to expand investment in nature-based solutions.

Now government must make sure that it gets nature-based solutions right. That means ensuring they are pursued in addition to, rather than as a substitute for, direct reductions in fossil fuel emissions. It means implementing nature-based solutions in places and ways that maximize climate and biodiversity benefits, while respecting and advancing Indigenous leadership, title and rights. And it means grounding nature-based solutions that claim to help meet climate mitigation targets in an accurate assessment of truly additive carbon sequestration and storage in land and seascapes. Government must urgently fix biases and shortcomings in Canada’s current approach to accounting for forest carbon.

The commitment to plant two billion trees through the Growing Canada’s Forests program has potential to help protect and restore nature, achieve climate targets and make communities more resilient to a changing climate and economy. To achieve these goals, GCF needs far greater transparency, so the public can monitor how the program will ensure a permanent increase in forest cover — not just new trees for commercial harvest in a few decades. Identifying priority planting areas for biodiversity, climate and community well-being will help achieve these objectives. This means focusing on restoring and connecting heavily impacted urban, peri-urban and agricultural landscapes in southern Canada, and northern landscapes damaged by seismic lines, intense forest fires or disease.
4. RESTORING DEGRADED ECOSYSTEMS

In addition to protecting intact landscapes such as old-growth forests, we must take stronger steps to repair the landscapes and ecosystems that have been degraded by our collective footprint. Restoration is a key part of the nature-based climate solution toolkit. Restoration of carbon-rich landscapes — many of which are at risk from development and also facing severe climate pressures — plays a critical long-term role in climate mitigation.

Your government has invested in a number of restoration projects across the country, such as well reclamation, restoration initiatives under conservation agreements with Indigenous nations and provinces, and the two billion tree program. However, a national vision for restoration is lacking.

As with implementation of the protected areas objective, restoration targets should, where possible, align with objectives to recover of at-risk species. There are many species at risk that will not recover in the absence of restoration initiatives to repair degraded habitat and support reoccupation and population growth. A national vision for restoration should be created to clearly delineate where restoration projects will facilitate species recovery.

Restoration not only benefits the climate, plants and wildlife, it has a key role to play in the just economic transition away from extraction-based economies toward a truly sustainable and nature-positive economy. Restoration projects can offer significant options for employment as we move toward a carbon-neutral future. A study on habitat restoration projects in the U.S. demonstrates that an average of 17 and up to 33 jobs can be created per million dollars invested in restoration initiatives, in addition to significant co-benefits such as flood prevention and recreation.3

5. SUPPORTING URBAN BIODIVERSITY AND ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of green space in and around urban areas as essential for sustainable cities and quality of life. Studies show that spending time in nature is strongly associated with good health and well-being. However, throughout Canada, low-income neighbourhoods and particularly communities of Black, Indigenous and people of colour experience highly unequal access to urban nature, often feel unwelcome or unsafe in nature spaces, and are disproportionately impacted by climate change, toxic pollution and degraded lands and waters.

As advocates for nature, anti-racism and environmental justice, we welcome your platform commitment to table legislation to examine the link between race,

socio-economic status and environmental risk, develop a national environmental justice strategy and recognize the right to a healthy environment. We urge the government to re-introduce Bill C-230, the National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, and work across party lines to ensure it proceeds to third reading before the end of 2021. We further recommend that your government establish an office of environmental justice and equity to support the national strategy’s development and implementation. Institutional capacity is needed to support a whole-of-government approach to integrating equity and human rights considerations into environmental policy and decision-making, including the nature agenda.

We welcome the commitment to establish 15 new national urban parks by 2030, including at least one in every province and territory. The strategy should focus on protecting, restoring and connecting private and public urban and peri-urban natural landscapes facing significant biodiversity and climate pressures and must include action to make green space accessible and welcoming for everyone. Indigenous nations must be fully engaged in this work from the beginning. And consultation and collaborative partnerships with historically marginalized communities will be essential to ensure that the new parks — and their visitor programs and infrastructure — meet the needs of underserved communities facing systemic barriers.

As noted above, reforestation efforts should also help cities expand and diversify urban forest cover, including addressing equity goals. We therefore urge you to work with provincial and municipal partners to ensure every neighbourhood in Canada has at least a 30 per cent tree canopy cover and every person in Canada lives within 300 metres of a green space.4

All of Canada’s urban areas are also traditional Indigenous territory. Indigenous rights and title holders must be included in urban-level decision-making, and urban Indigenous populations must have greater say on decisions that affect them. We recognize this is a complex federal-provincial jurisdictional issue, but urge your government to play a role advocating for constitutional Indigenous rights to be respected throughout Canada.

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4 Konijnendijk 2021. Promoting health and wellbeing through urban forests – introducing the 3-30-300 rule
CONCLUSION

We want to underscore the urgency and timeliness of this moment for our country and the planet.

What Canada does matters. We have globally significant freshwater, coastal, forest, grassland and peatland ecosystems. Our country acknowledges these ecosystems and the species that depend on them are threatened and that it’s essential they be recovered.

We’re striving for reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. And we’ve learned from our strong response to the COVID-19 pandemic that our government and society can take co-ordinated, evidence-based actions that change business as usual for the benefit of the whole.

Canada can exhibit leadership in these areas if it takes immediate, bold, measurable actions that directly improve the health and extent of our natural ecosystems.

The nature community is mobilized and committed to see election promises to nature, climate and environmental justice realized.

We look forward to working with you and with all parliamentarians to implement your conservation commitments and ensure Canada has a comprehensive biodiversity strategy and action plan with targets and timelines that will allow us to do our part to build a nature-positive, carbon neutral and equitable Canada for all.

Sincerely,
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<td>Against Port Expansion in the Fraser Estuary BC</td>
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<td>Alberta Wilderness Association</td>
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<td>Conservancy Hornby Island</td>
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SIGNATORIES

Conservation Council of New Brunswick
Cowichan Valley Naturalists Society
David Suzuki Foundation
East Coast Environmental Law
Eastern Shore Forest Watch
Ecology Action Centre
EcoSikh Canada Inc.
Edmonton Native Plant Society
Edmonton Nature Club
EnviroMuslims
ENvironnement JEUnesse
EOS Eco Energy
Équiterre
Essex Field Naturalists Club
Faith & the Common Good
Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) Canada
Flying Squirrel Adventures
Fort Saskatchewan Naturalist Society
Friends of Clayoquot Sound
Friends of Kingston Inner Harbour
Friends of McIntyre Creek
Friends of Salmon River
Friends of Semiahmoo Bay Society
Friends of Shoal Harbour
Friends of the Massasauga Park
Friends of the Napanee River
Friends of the Tay Watershed
Galiano Conservancy Association
Garden City Conservation Society
Georgia Strait Alliance
Grand Riverkeeper Labrador
Grand Valley Trails Association
Grand(M)others Act to Save the Planet
Green 13
Green Communities Canada
Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition
Green Teams of Canada
Green Venture
GreenUP
Halton Environmental Network
High Park Nature Centre
High Park Stewards
Hobbitstee Wildlife Refuge
Humber Natural History Society
Ingersoll District Nature Club
IUCN/World Commission on Protected Areas
Jane Goodall Institute of Canada
Junction Creek Stewardship Committee
SIGNATORIES

Kamloops Naturalist Club
Kawartha Wildlife Centre
Kingston Field Naturalists
La Planète s’invite en santé
Lake of Bays Heritage Foundation
Lambton Wildlife Inc.
Lanark County Stewardship Council
Land Conservancy for Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington
Land Over Landings
Lasqueti Island Nature Conservancy
Le Nichoir
Le regroupement des citoyens de Saraguay
Le regroupement national des conseils régionaux en environnement du Québec
Lennox and Addington Stewardship Council
Lillooet Naturalists Society
Little Forests Kingston
Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation
Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests
London Environmental Network
Long Point Biosphere Region
Maitland Trail Association
Mayne Island Conservancy
Miramichi Naturalists Club

Nashwaak Watershed Association Inc.
Nature Barrie
Nature Calgary
Nature Canada
Nature Chilliwack
Nature Guelph
Nature Nanaimo
Nature New Brunswick
Nature Nova Scotia
Nature Quebec
Nature Regina
Nature Saskatchewan
Nature Trust of New Brunswick
Nature London
New Brunswick Anti-Shale Gas Alliance
North American Megadam Resistance Alliance (NAMRA)
Ocean Park Beautification Committee
Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
Oliver-Osoyoos Naturalists
Ontario Biodiversity Council
Ontario Land Trust Alliance
Ontario Nature
Ontario Public Interest Research Group-Guelph
SIGNATORIES

Ontario Rivers Alliance
Ontariogreen Conservation Association
Ottawa River Institute
Ottawa Riverkeeper
Owen Sound Field Naturalists
Park People
Pelee Island Bird Observatory
Peterborough Field Naturalists
Pickering Naturalists
Plastic Oceans Canada
Pollination Guelph
Prince Edward County Field Naturalists
Public Pasture Public Interest
Raincoast Conservation Foundation
rare Charitable Research Reserve
ReForest London
Reseau de milieux naturels proteges
Réserve Naturelle de la Pointe Daly
Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs
Rivershed Society of BC
Safe Wings Ottawa
Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds Inc.
Saskatoon Young Naturalists
Saugeen Nature
Sauvons la Falaise
Shake Up The Establishment
Sierra Club Canada Foundation
Society for Ecological Restoration - Ontario Chapter
Society for the Protection of Sargeant Bay
SOS Trees Coalition
South End Environmental Injustice Society
Southern Alberta Group for the Environment (SAGE)
Stewards of Albertas Protected Areas Association (SAAA)
Sudbury Naturalists
Sustainable Milton
Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Society
Thames Talbot Land Trust
The Couchiching Conservancy
The Dogs Run Farm
The Elgin Stewardship Council
The Hamilton Aviary
The Kensington Conservancy
The Miistakis Institute
The Thickson’s Woods Land Trust
Toronto Field Naturalists
SIGNATORIES

Toronto Ornithological Club
Trees Please Winnipeg Coalition
Trumpeter Swan Coalition
Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
UrbaNature
Vancouver Avian Research Centre
Vancouver Botanical Gardens Association
Vancouver Natural History Society
Vermilion Forks Field Naturalists
Vermilion River Stewardship
Water Watchers
Waterloo Region Nature
Watersheds Canada
West Coast Environmental Law
West Kootenay EcoSociety
Wild Ontario, University of Guelph
Wilderness Committee
Wildsight Creston Valley Branch
World Wildlife Fund - Canada
Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative
Yukon Conservation Society
CC.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
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Hon. Joyce Murray, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard
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Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Elizabeth May, Parliamentary Leader of the Green Party