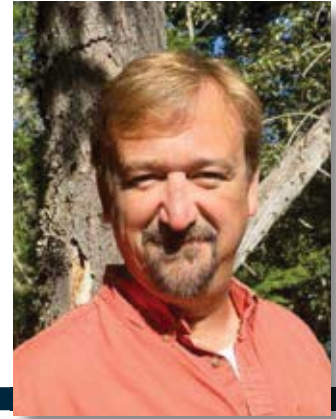


# There's Good News on the Nature Front



By Graham Saul, *Executive Director of Nature Canada*

**T**here's good news and bad news on the nature front. The bad news is fairly well-known: our world is facing a full scale crisis of species collapse that is being worsened by climate change. Nature is declining at rates unprecedented in human history - more than a million species are at risk globally.

In Canada, mammal populations have declined 43 percent since 1970, and grassland and shore birds numbers have fallen by half. Only about one-quarter of Canadian marine fish and invertebrate stocks are currently considered healthy. And habitats such as wetlands, Prairie grasslands and old-growth forests continue to lose ground every year.

But there is some good news too. People - and their governments - around the world are starting to recognize the existential scale of the biodiversity loss, and starting to take stronger action to prevent it.

Last year countries signed a number of international declarations focused on halting and reversing nature loss by 2030 and ensuring nature's full recovery by 2050, including the G7 Nature Compact, the G20 Rome Leaders' Declaration, and the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forest and Land Use.

Here at home, the Canadian government has committed to protect 25 percent of land and ocean by 2025, and 30 per cent by 2030. And last year, our government made a major investment to put those targets within reach.

Yet hundreds of thousands of hectares of forests, grasslands, wetlands and coastal areas continue to be destroyed or degraded in Canada each year.

So the Liberal Government's incorporation of a commitment to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030 in its election platform and recent mandate letters is important, and welcome.

Now the government needs to develop an effective action plan to deliver on this goal.

We have a lot to do to get there.

Canada's current biodiversity strategy is 26 years old. Few of the targets set out in the 2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada - approved by federal, provincial and territorial governments in 2015 - have been achieved. And, in 2018, Canada's Environment Commissioner reported that "the federal government had no plan for achieving Canada's biodiversity targets."

A comprehensive biodiversity strategy will require a whole of government approach that ensures a biodiversity lens on government decisions - all of them. It would include an action plan that sets strict new limits on land use and land use change. And clearly, given past policy failures, a core part of a new 10-year action plan to halt and reverse biodiversity must be enacting a legislative accountability

framework for measuring progress - just as Canada has a framework for monitoring carbon emissions under the Canada Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act.

Environmentalists and conservationists are leading the way in calling for a new strategy.

In November, 200 nature groups wrote to Prime Minister Trudeau urging him to set out in this Parliamentary term an action plan to deliver on his election promise to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030. In February, 75 nature groups from across the country met with dozens of parliamentarians to press for a halt and reverse action plan, as part of Nature on the Hill. In April, Nature Canada will be convening experts to spell out the key elements of an action plan.

The strategy to halt and reverse nature loss must be built with Indigenous Peoples and with full respect for their rights, title and knowledge systems. Provincial, territorial and municipal governments also have a critical role to play and must be engaged, incentivized 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.

The strategy needs to tackle all aspects of biodiversity loss from the perspectives of interdisciplinary science, data collection and management. It will require legislation, regulation and policy, programs and funding, the involvement of different levels of government, and strong accountability and reporting.

2022 is the right year for a halt and reverse plan.

Canada co-chairs the negotiations for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), expected to be signed in 2022 by the 197 countries that are parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, creating a new ten-year legally binding framework. Canada and other signatory countries will be obliged under the proposed GBF to implement mechanisms for planning, monitoring, reporting and review including establishing national targets and action plans.

The loss of nature - combined with climate change - threatens our survival. But nature also offers a way out of this crisis. If given a chance, nature can recover - and help us recover balance too.

By launching a comprehensive and science-based action plan to halt and reverse species loss by 2030, Canada can help set nature on the road to full recovery and fulfill its role as an international leader, providing hope for a more equitable, climate neutral and nature positive world for all.

And this would be some welcome good news.