



## A DANGEROUS RETREAT ON CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY



**Eric Reder**  
Wilderness and  
Water Campaigner

Through actions and words, we're seeing the one-year-old government of Canada — led by our former Banker now prime minister — signal that nature care and climate stewardship are not important.<sup>1,2</sup> As a country and as part of the web of life on Earth, we can't afford to let more time pass before fully confronting the crises ahead of us.

When I was in Manning Park, B.C. in the depths of January, the outdoor skating rink was not frozen up, despite its high elevation in the mountains. Just like at countless winter destinations across Canada, the folks there were lamenting the loss of cold. The typically deep, soft snow was melted and refrozen, an icy disappointment on the ski tracks.

On the way up to Manning, I drove through the section of Highway 3 that was recently washed out in torrential rains. I saw old cutblocks in critical habitat for the endangered spotted owl — a reminder **the federal government also refuses to enforce the Species at Risk Act (SARA) on the provinces.**<sup>3,4</sup> This sojourn put a sharp focus on the lack of federal environmental work, emphasizing the glaring disconnect between our climate-affected reality and the federal government's new priorities.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Mark Carney gave his now-famous speech at the World

Economic Forum in Davos — and the world sat up to listen.<sup>5</sup> By many accounts, this was a formative speech destined

for the history books, which laid out abusive international relationships with the frank clarity not often heard diplomatically.

The security of people in Canada and the continent are at stake right now as a bully, who commands more than a hundred military bases around the planet, vindictively lashes out at countries for self-gain.<sup>6,7</sup> A dose of reality from our prime minister signalled the old order of power is changing and economic uncertainty is unavoidable.

Sending a signal matters, for our

security and so our international allies can coalesce with our values.

**But where are the signals about**

**the climate crisis, biodiversity crisis, and Indigenous rights?**

Where is the mention of our commitment to the global target to protect 30x30 — 30 per cent of lands and waters by 2030 — by adding Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas? The world listened while Carney called out

unjust relationships — yet these critical values didn't get a mention.

This wasn't just an unintentional oversight. In the face of tariff threats from Canada's largest trading partner, Carney's economic proposals focus on expensive "nation-building" projects, which he claims will help the affordability crisis. However, these projects come at the cost of rolling back hard-fought-for environmental protections and Indigenous consultation commitments.

The costs of climate change are already driving up our bills, whether

**We know there are ways to protect nature while investing in solutions that lower emissions and make life more affordable for so many of us pinched by a cost-of-living crisis.**

through health care costs or taxes going to climate-disaster clean up like the Highway 3 washout.<sup>8,9</sup> Yet the Carney government continues to pour money and energy towards fossil fuel projects that will only make the problem worse, and benefit very few people here.<sup>10,11</sup>

On the other hand, we know there are ways to protect nature while investing in solutions that lower emissions and make life more affordable for so many of us pinched by a cost-of-living crisis.<sup>12</sup> So why doesn't Mark Carney — our fiscally proficient prime minister who won on his much-touted banking credentials — see the lack of economic sense in his policies? Why can't the country's problems be solved without sacrificing our long-term health as a planet for short-term gains?

Read on to see how the math doesn't add up and learn how we can push our Banker prime minister to govern for the values we all need: nature, climate and Indigenous rights.



Photo top: Spotted owl habitat, old-growth forest near Manning Park, B.C. (Graham Osbourne).  
Photo bottom: Prime Minister Mark Carney speaking at the 2026 World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland (AP).



Photo: Ghost Pass, Skagit Valley, B.C. (Paul Morgan).

## PATTERNS OF PROGRESS AND REVERSAL

Despite well over thirty years of scientific consensus about the need to care for nature — since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit — countries around the world have dragged their feet on environmental protection.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, collective commitments to reduce carbon emissions began when the Kyoto Protocol came into force.<sup>14</sup> And here in Canada, in 2008, the Liberal Party was campaigning on the Green Shift towards the polluter pays principle.<sup>15</sup> But beginning in 2011, the Conservatives — emboldened by their only majority government in three decades — unleashed massive cuts to the environmental

regulations that set Canada apart as a leader.<sup>16,17</sup> Within a few short years, people across the country rose up in support of Idle No More and Indigenous rights, recoiled at losing protection for freshwater and fisheries, and kicked the Conservatives to the curb.<sup>18</sup>

A new Liberal majority government in 2015 promised to recover our lost environmental protections and rebuild Indigenous relationships.<sup>19</sup> In November 2016, an extraordinary open meeting took place at Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng First Nation, Manitoba.<sup>20</sup> Indigenous leaders from across the country met and brought elected government officials into ceremony to talk about environmental regulations,

climate and Indigenous ways.<sup>21</sup> This was the new Liberal government listening and building the nation we as a country have to become. When government ministers showed up in ceremony, the right signal was sent.

In the same vein, Prime Minister Carney's book *Value(s): Building a Better World for All*, published ahead of running for office, led folks to believe climate and nature were on the agenda with him as leader of Canada.<sup>22</sup> He emphasized nature was part of our very identity and bold new approaches to protect the natural heritage in this country were necessary in this time of crisis.<sup>23</sup> He claimed an agenda that reduces emissions and

prioritizes Indigenous consent.<sup>24</sup> One year in, Carney has reversed Canada's promises... and progress.



Photo: Turtle Lodge International Centre for Indigenous Education and Wellness, MB (Sagkeeng First Nation).

## BUILD CANADA, BREAK NATURE

Three months after Prime Minister Carney took office, Bill C-5 became the Build Canada Act, part of which allows the federal cabinet to ignore environmental impacts when it wants.<sup>25</sup> If this new Act completely ignoring the biodiversity crisis wasn't enough, it was followed shortly after in July 2025 by the establishment of the Major Projects Office to fast-track destructive megaprojects.<sup>26</sup>

It took years of effort to build a federal impact assessment mechanism that would offer a more comprehensive look at how much damage a project will cause. The Conservatives in the Senate famously took hearings for Bill C-69 — which birthed the new Impact

Assessment Agency of Canada — on tour across the country, trying to gin up complaints.<sup>27</sup> Environmental and legal organizations, in addition to Indigenous communities, pushed to make sure there was time, resources and a process to examine impacts.<sup>28</sup> Now, the Major Projects Office is throwing this work out the door by shortening timelines, which will fail to safeguard our environment and trample Indigenous consent.<sup>29</sup>

Budget 2025 shows where the prime minister's values lie. Indigenous consultation only got an extra \$10 million for these fast-tracked projects.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, the major projects office got 20 times that amount.<sup>31</sup> The Impacts Assessment Agency itself took a

\$66 million hit, even though the government says more projects need to be built.<sup>32</sup> Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) lost \$1.3 billion in funding, which means not enough staff to look at the impacts to nature and climate.<sup>33</sup>



Photo: Redside dace, ON (Shutterstock).



Photo: Burning sour gas, northeast, B.C. (Will Koop).

## CLIMATE BETRAYAL

**"Climate change is the ultimate betrayal of intergenerational equity."**

— Mark Carney in his book, *Value(s): Building a Better World for All*

Six years before he became prime minister, Mark Carney was appointed the United Nations Special Envoy on Climate Change.<sup>34</sup> Two years after that he wrote a book, devoting considerable space to the climate crisis and responsible investment.<sup>35</sup> That's why it's so disappointing to see his about-face now. Values espoused before being elected seem like an act when we see how progressive climate action has disappeared from nation building for the next generation.

Selling Canada on another fossil fuel pipeline is one of the biggest betrayals we've seen from the new prime minister so

far. Brokering a deal with big oil in Alberta has embittered much of the rest of the country.<sup>36,37</sup> The agreement caused such a rift inside government that the former ECCC minister stepped down.<sup>38</sup> Every fossil fuel project pushes us further from the livable planet we need to nurture.

The Build Canada Act's exemptions from environmental assessments for major projects is brutal. But if a major project itself is a colossal fossil fuel expansion, we are failing on climate. Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) continues to be a climate-wrecking carbon bomb masquerading as progress for weak-willed politicians.<sup>39</sup> An intergenerational crime is being committed by a prime minister who knows better.

We're told critical minerals may assist our society's green transition, yet no government in the country has demonstrated the direct path from critical mineral mining to reduced carbon emissions. What we have is blow-hard prospectors speculating on striking the mother lode and demanding environmental concessions to do it.<sup>40</sup> Losing nature to save the climate is less than a zero-sum transaction. Yet Budget 2025 offers up \$2 billion for this critical mineral speculation.<sup>41</sup>

This new mining rush, framed as climate action for materials in "clean" technologies, further misses a core truth. Real climate solutions won't be achieved by individuals simply swapping fossil fuel products for "cleaner" or electric ones. The \$2

billion going to critical minerals could easily be going to nation-building projects that don't sacrifice nature in the process. Expanding public transportation systems or improving energy efficiency in homes and communities with heat pumps and retrofit programs not only systemically lowers emissions, but also lowers costs and creates jobs for the public.<sup>42</sup>

According to the very conservative World Economic Forum, climate change is costing the world \$16 million per hour.<sup>43</sup> In Canada we have seen at least a billion dollars in climate catastrophes in the year since Carney was elected.<sup>44</sup> These costs borne by the public would be minimized if we were investing in systemic transformation and not the dead-end resource extraction and fossil-fuel ways of the past.



Photo: Woodfibre LNG, B.C. (Peter McCartney).



Photo: Mount Polley copper mine spill, B.C. (ClayoquotAction.org).



## INDIGENOUS RIGHTS ARE NATION BUILDING

A decade ago, Murray Sinclair, Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) taught us what a true nation-building project looks like. The release of the commission's Final Report gave us 94 calls to action to reform our abusive, colonial system.<sup>45,46</sup> These recommendations provide the chance to transform this country to be more inclusive and reflective, growing the human values needed in the world.

Carney's Build Canada Act casts a shadow over the goodwill TRC activities generated. Across the Indigenous territories that make up what's now known as Canada, anger and disillusionment flowed due to the Banker's antiquated resource development rush.<sup>47</sup>

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami President Natan Obed it clearly: "It has been Canada's weakness that it pats itself on the back for being a great champion of Indigenous peoples, an upholder of the rule of law and respect for Indigenous peoples' rights, while at the same time acting very differently through its legislation and practices."<sup>48</sup>

The timelines and lack of legally-required consultation built into the Build Canada Act are a major blow to progress on reconciliation in Canada. Yet Budget 2025 followed this up with more bad signals. The Assembly of First Nations rightly called out the lack of funding for TRC in the budget.<sup>49</sup> And unsurprisingly, the budget didn't have an Indigenous chapter.<sup>50</sup>

The recognition of Indigenous reconciliation as central to us growing as a nation has wide public support.<sup>51</sup> The next generation — the children

the late Honourable Murray Sinclair always directed our thoughts to — is learning we'll walk stronger centring Indigenous values. Carney's Davos speech about international power and abusive relationships mirrors Indigenous-Crown relations in Canada, an irony that appears lost on him.<sup>52</sup>

**"The powerful have their power. But we have something too — the capacity to stop pretending, to name reality, to build our strength at home, and to act together."**

— Prime Minister Carney, Davos.<sup>53</sup>

These same words can apply to building shared values together at home. This means implementing all TRC recommendations, committing to free, prior and informed consent from Indigenous peoples for any project, and taking economic decisions that will increase equity and get our nation-to-nation relations right.



Photo: Gwaii Haanas National Park, B.C. (Russell Markel).

## PUTTING MONEY WHERE OUR VALUES ARE

We've seen the path Carney is laying out in his first year in office — and he's missing the mark. Here are four specific nature initiatives that must be built up for Canada to succeed.

### 30x30 needs nature agreements

The cornerstone of new nature preservation in Canada is the protected areas goal in the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits us to 30x30.<sup>64</sup> In the summer of 2025, the federal government reaffirmed this pledge.<sup>65</sup> Much of the work towards 30x30 requires provincial and territorial government efforts, and will only be achieved if funding initiatives like the nature agreements signed with B.C. and Manitoba are expanded across all jurisdictions.<sup>66,67</sup>

### Staffing nature care

Days after Carney's Davos speech, staff at ECCC and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans started getting layoff letters.<sup>68</sup> Scientists working on the species at risk act are being let go, at a time when biodiversity loss is reaching crisis levels. This is an ominous signal of values, showing the disconnect between the prime minister's words and actions.



Photo: Piping plover, ON (Robert McCaw).

### Species legislation

For years, the strongest environmental law we have in Canada has been federal SARA. Enforcing SARA would grow our protected areas and assist endangered biodiversity. Boreal caribou habitat in Manitoba requires protection under SARA, but mining companies are still bulldozing it with impunity.<sup>69</sup> Similar stories can be told about Ontario's highway 413 monstrosity destroying red-sided dace habitat or the sell-off of piping plover habitat in Wasaga Beach Provincial Park.<sup>70</sup>

### National Urban Park initiative

In 2021, the feds started an initiative to establish new national urban parks across Canada by investing up to \$131 million.<sup>71</sup> The signal is strong but the commitment of six new national urban parks by 2025 was not realized.<sup>72</sup> The Enhanced Nature Legacy initiative that funded national urban parks ends in 2026, with no guarantees of extension.<sup>73</sup>



Photo: Proposed Little Forks National Urban Park, Winnipeg, MB (Eric Reder).

## COSTS OF PROTECTING NATURE — AND LOSING IT

**"Contemporary economic thinking does not acknowledge that the human economy is embedded in nature."<sup>74</sup>**

— Partha Dasgupta and Simon Levin in "Economic Factors Underlying Biodiversity Loss"

Nature is our life support system — it underpins our economy and our wellness. Yet it simply isn't a calculation for businesses or governments. That is the disconnect between caring for nature and the economic reports on the six o'clock news. While it might feel transactional to put a price on the fundamental conditions humans need to survive, here are four different analyses of the costs of not protecting nature...and losing nature.

**1** Economists have estimated what the loss of nature will cost us. The dire reality globally is that unsustainable food, land and ocean use practices are estimated to cost US\$12 trillion over 10 years, exceeding their contribution to the global GDP.<sup>55</sup>

**2** When we consider increased health care costs due to the loss of nature, the number grows: the World Health Organization estimates "the global economic impact of biodiversity loss amounts to US\$10 trillion annually, including healthcare costs from increased disease transmission and agricultural losses from pollinator declines."<sup>56</sup>

### The \$10 Trillion Annual Cost of Biodiversity Loss

Ruining ecosystems drains \$10 trillion annually from global health and food security.<sup>57,58,59,60</sup> We are losing the equivalent of:



**3** The World Bank reported in 2021 that for a US\$1 investment in protected areas and nature-based tourism, the economic return was US\$6.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, an extensive 2020 report on the economic implications of the proposed 30x30 target concluded expanding protected areas to 30 per cent will grow global economic output by US\$64 billion to \$454 billion per year by 2050.<sup>62</sup>

**4** For every US\$1 we spend on nature protection, US\$30 is spent on nature-destroying activities, including fossil fuel subsidies. This depressing snapshot came from the 2026 UN State of Finance for Nature report.<sup>63</sup>

**The math is staring us in the face. The Banker just needs to add things up.**



Photo: Algonquin Provincial Park, ON (Eric Reder).



## WHERE'S OUR TRANSITION?

Caribou don't make money. Fresh water doesn't turn a profit. Clean air doesn't pay taxes. But we know they have massive inherent value. This shows we can't allow our decision-making to be based on financial metrics. Until we accept that **the measure of our world isn't economic growth**, we'll continue our descent towards an unliveable planet.

The federal government can still course correct. The scientific community is screaming for change on climate and biodiversity. Valuing their advice will bring us out of the slide we're in. Already 16 million people work in renewable energy across the globe.<sup>74</sup> We must ramp

that number up to replace fossil fuels.

**What we need is Carney's transition plan.** The scale of action needed requires systemic change. A climate test and a nature care test must be incorporated into all decision making, in all levels of government. From this recognition will come ideas to solve multiple crises at once.

In a country the size of Canada, we'll need to put more into civil society.



Photo: Walbran Valley trail, B.C. (WC files).

This means a larger tax contribution for those who can afford it, as seen in European countries like Denmark.<sup>75,76</sup> Having people ready to respond to climate catastrophes and assist communities across the country can come from a youth climate corps, or a mandatory civil service like Finland.<sup>77</sup> We can lower health care costs by connecting transportation and nature within, and to, communities; prioritize food security by incentivizing local production rather than industrial agriculture exports; and build efficient public housing with sustainable materials, where lower heating and cooling costs becomes the norm, not an aspiration.

When we attend to our responsibility as a watchdog for wild spaces, wild species and healthy communities, we're also laying out necessary actions for

the future. **This report asks you to be part of the conversations in your communities about the importance of action on nature and climate.** We also need to counter the loud culture of climate defeatism that pervades social circles and society. A majority of people support nature care and climate action.

The job of every elected official for the foreseeable future is to ensure we have a livable planet. We can demand elected officials like Prime Minister Carney legislate protections for our planet — it's their responsibility. Let's unite around our responsibilities to the next generations, aligning with Indigenous values that hold up the earth as a sacred duty to protect. This is the right thing to do — and it's how we'll win.

## COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

The real world we live in is a place full of good people looking to care for each other and support their community. But there are also loud "boos" online exhibiting screamingly bad behaviour to skew our online and public conversations with disinformation.<sup>78</sup> We have to deal with censorship from billionaires as they control how and what messages we see.<sup>79</sup>

In all of that, the reality is we know we need nature, that it makes our bodies healthy and our minds clearer. We know we need to act on climate, despite the big oil disinformation that has been polluting our public discourse — just as surely as their carbon emissions pollute our planet.<sup>80</sup>

The folks protesting U.S. immigration policy in Minneapolis are heroically demonstrating the power of collective action, showing first hand that a majority of people are good and we can stand for what's right, together. Don't let disinformation and doom waste our public brain power. We can solve the climate and biodiversity crises.



Photo: Waterfall near Harrison Hot Springs, B.C. (Graham Osbourne).

# TAKE ACTION

**We need to tell our elected officials OUR values. Tell Prime Minister Mark Carney and his colleagues that nature and climate action are valued in Canada and will support our society economically. Let them know we need to see climate and nature in every budget and every public comment. Tell them to:**

- ▶ grow both nature and climate budget expenditures to at least two per cent of GDP annually for the next decade;
- ▶ enforce the Species at Risk Act in all jurisdictions across the country;
- ▶ remove the Impact Assessment exemption from the Build Canada Act;
- ▶ establish a climate test that examines cumulative and downstream emissions for every Major Project and Impact Assessment, relating to our international emissions reduction commitments; and
- ▶ strengthen Impacts Assessment and waste regulations for all mining projects.



Photo: Boreal caribou, ON (Hidehiro Otake).

[WildernessCommittee.org/BankOnNature](https://WildernessCommittee.org/BankOnNature)

## REFERENCES

References are available on the [Wilderness Committee website](https://WildernessCommittee.org) at:

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## CREDITS

**Writing:** Eric Reder  
**Editing:** Pallavi Rao and Geoff Senichenko  
**Research:** Isabel Siu-Zmuidzinias  
**Art Director:** Sue Fox  
**Graphic Design:** Kelvin Yip

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 46 E. 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5T 1J4  
 Unceded x'maŋk'ayam, Skwxwú7mesh and səlilwata1 Territories  
 ☎ 604-683-8220 or 1-800-661-9453 📠 604-683-8229  
 @info@wildernesscommittee.org

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