



# CANADA: STAND UP for NATURE



**PROTECT  
50%**

## HEALTHY CLIMATE? IT'S IN OUR NATURE



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**T**oday more than ever we face an uncertain future.

Worldwide, more wild plants and animals are becoming endangered or disappearing altogether due to large-scale and poorly regulated development – logging, mining, fishing, agriculture, urban expansion and other forms of habitat destruction. Making matters worse, humans and wild species alike must now cope with an increasingly unstable climate caused by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas. Scientists now believe that Earth is undergoing a mass extinction period – the sixth in the planet's history, but the first caused by humans.<sup>1</sup>

Earth is home to as many as 8.7 million different types of living organisms.<sup>2</sup> This variety of plants and animals make up the Earth's biodiversity and across the planet it is under attack from human-

caused habitat and climate changes.

An essential way to address our global biodiversity and climate crisis lies right at our feet.

Governments at home and around the globe are attempting to curb the loss of wild nature and combat climate change. Canada is home to 20 per cent of the Earth's forests and 24 per cent of its wetlands.<sup>3</sup> We can help address the crisis if we protect enough nature.

In 2010, G7 countries signed the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, committing to protect 17 per cent of their territory within a decade. Since then, member nations have been

**...scientists believe the survival of the planet depends on protecting 50 per cent of wild nature...**



**Photo top:** Sunset at Duck Mountain Provincial Park, MB (Mike Grandmaison).  
**Photo above:** Northern leopard frog (Robert McCaw).

investing in new parks, protected areas and at the same time cutting carbon pollution from burning coal, oil and gas.

Canada, however, lags far behind. Since the declaration, the country has gone from 9.6 per cent to just 10.6 per cent protected area.<sup>4</sup> That is far from the 17 per cent goal.

That goal is just the tip of the iceberg. Scientists believe the survival of the planet depends on protecting 50 per cent of wild nature to halt human-caused species loss and slow climate disruption.<sup>5</sup> Bhutan and Venezuela are examples of two countries that have already protected

around half of their territories.<sup>6</sup>

Within Canada, Indigenous Peoples often lead the way. On the west coast, the Haida Nation have protected more than half of their territory on land. They continue to work towards conservation of their ocean territory by advocating marine protected areas and a ban on oil tankers.

Federal and provincial governments need to step up as the 2020 deadline looms and develop plans to get to 50 per cent. This is about the very survival of the human race. We depend on the Earth's biodiversity to provide the essentials – clean and reliable water, healthy forests, productive fisheries, abundant soil and a stable climate. It is also about the survival of species on the brink of extinction as habitat loss gives them no room to roam.

Read on to find out how Canada can catch-up in the global push to expand protected areas so nature gets enough habitat to survive in this dangerous era of climate change and habitat destruction.

# NATURE KNOWS NO BORDERS

by Peter McCartney, Climate Campaigner

**W**ilderness preservation means setting aside natural spaces from industrial development. However, that is no longer enough to keep them safe. Environmental consequences don't stop at a protected area boundary – these problems require us to do things differently.

What good is protecting the Peace-Athabasca Delta, the confluence of two great rivers, if the Site C dam blocks one and the tar sands poison the other? What if unchecked global warming leaves them dry as a bone?

It's a stark truth that the wondrous places we work so hard to protect will be lost unless humanity gets global warming under control. Setting aside a network of protected areas can give wilderness and wildlife a fighting chance, but it must be accompanied with radical cuts to carbon pollution.

Instead, our leaders are still



Photo: Least bittern (John Cornell).

approving fossil fuel export projects that will inevitably make the climate crisis worse. New tar sands pipelines, coal terminals and liquefied natural gas plants endanger natural places the world over and the countless people who rely on them.

Canada must get its act together by curbing carbon pollution and the fossil fuel exports that create it. Otherwise the important work we do to save endangered species and preserve wilderness won't be enough.



Photo: Peace Athabasca Delta, AB (Wayne Lynch).

# HONOURING INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

by Torrance Coste, Vancouver Island Campaigner

**C**anada is a country built on lands stolen from Indigenous peoples. Addressing this injustice by enshrining Indigenous rights is the right thing to do. Returning authority to Indigenous nations, who have a sacred responsibility to look after lands and waters, will help protect nature from industrial development that profits from its exploitation and destruction.

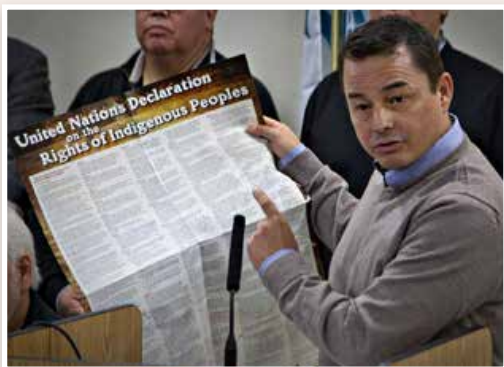


Photo: Signing United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Globe and Mail).

One of the biggest steps the federal government can take towards social and environmental justice is the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>10</sup> UNDRIP was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, with opposition from just four countries – one of them being Canada.

The declaration has been widely recognized as a key tool in protecting the rights and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples. A lot of research has been done on the challenges of implementing UNDRIP and how to overcome them.<sup>11</sup>

In May 2016, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett announced the Canadian government's intention to implement UNDRIP<sup>12</sup>, but just two months later Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould walked this back, calling the declaration "unworkable" with Canadian law.<sup>13</sup>

Prime Minister Trudeau campaigned on a promise to implement UNDRIP and his breaking of this promise is a giant step in the wrong direction for Canada. It's time he got back on track.

Indigenous rights, title and law must determine the way forward as Canada protects more lands and waters. First Nations leadership is critical in fighting and surviving climate change.

# SAVING WILDERNESS SAVES THE CLIMATE

by Peter McCartney, Climate Campaigner

**W**ildlife need a place to call home, nourish themselves and raise their young. Wilderness areas are also vital for human spirit and creativity, providing us with places to play, relax and soak in the scenery. Indigenous communities especially depend on the living world for physical, cultural and spiritual health.

A safe climate requires nature – forests, meadows and wetlands – to absorb the carbon pollution we've created. Protecting wilderness is as much a necessity to fight climate change as renewable energy.

As plants grow, the carbon they breathe in becomes their stems, stumps and eventually the soil. When an old-growth forest is logged, a meadow ploughed or a swamp paved over, this process stops and even reverses. That's bad news for the climate.

Start with forests like the Walbran Valley on Vancouver Island, BC. It's hard to fathom how much carbon dioxide goes into building a thousand-year-old tree. Research shows older trees absorb more carbon as they add more wood each year.<sup>7</sup> Think of it like painting a telephone poll versus a toothpick. Keeping forests standing – especially old-growth – is vital to maintaining their carbon storage.

Grasslands are another landscape best left undisturbed in the fight against climate change. Ecosystems like BC's South Okanagan-Similkameen store more carbon as more species call them home.<sup>8</sup> Because of their deep root systems, natural meadows add more plant matter than single crop fields where tilling and fertilizers spill carbon into the atmosphere.

Finally, wetlands are the unsung heroes in the fight against climate change. These ecosystems hold 20 to 30 per cent of the carbon on Earth despite only taking up five to eight per cent of its land.<sup>9</sup> One of the key reasons is the dead plants that collect underwater and don't fully decompose. Polar bear habitat in the Hudson Bay lowlands of Manitoba has a wealth of carbon under its surface.

Natural spaces are worth preserving in their own right. But as we look to tackle global warming, one of our solutions must be to leave more wilderness intact.



Photo: Mountain hemlock growing in snag of yellow cedar (Dean van't Schip).

# SPECIES NEED SPACE

by Eric Reder, Wilderness and Water Campaigner

**W**hen we guide people out to see threatened nature and wilderness, we talk of large mammals we might see and often about what used to be in the wild. Slowly, without realizing it, we have come to expect that there aren't animals on the land. We have accepted the loss of the most visible indicator of a functioning ecosystem.

Scientists now believe that we are in the midst of a sixth mass extinction and this one is caused by people. A recent study pointed out that a loss of individual species is not the only measure, but the number of animals on Earth is lower – 50 per cent has been lost in recent decades.<sup>14</sup>

While there is a litany of reasons for species loss – including industrial development and overconsumption – a changing climate is a major threat to all animals. Another recent study showed that half of land animals and a quarter of bird species are already

negatively impacted by climate change.<sup>15</sup>

Defense against a warming world is difficult for species relying on specific environments, such as the polar bear, collared pika or barren ground shrew. These animals will need to be able to move into cooler areas further north and further into the alpine to find suitable habitats, and in some cases there just isn't anywhere cold enough left.<sup>16</sup>

For a majority of other animals, giving them more habitat to adapt is the answer. Habitat loss is a critical issue for species as half of the animals on Earth have lost 80 per cent of their range in the last century.<sup>17</sup> Protecting more lands and waters is a safeguard against an increasingly hostile world for animals.



Photo: Collared pika (Roberta Olenick).



Photo: Clearcut in Walbran Valley, BC (TJ Watt/Ancient Forest Alliance).

# PROTECTED LAND AND MARINE AREAS IN CANADA

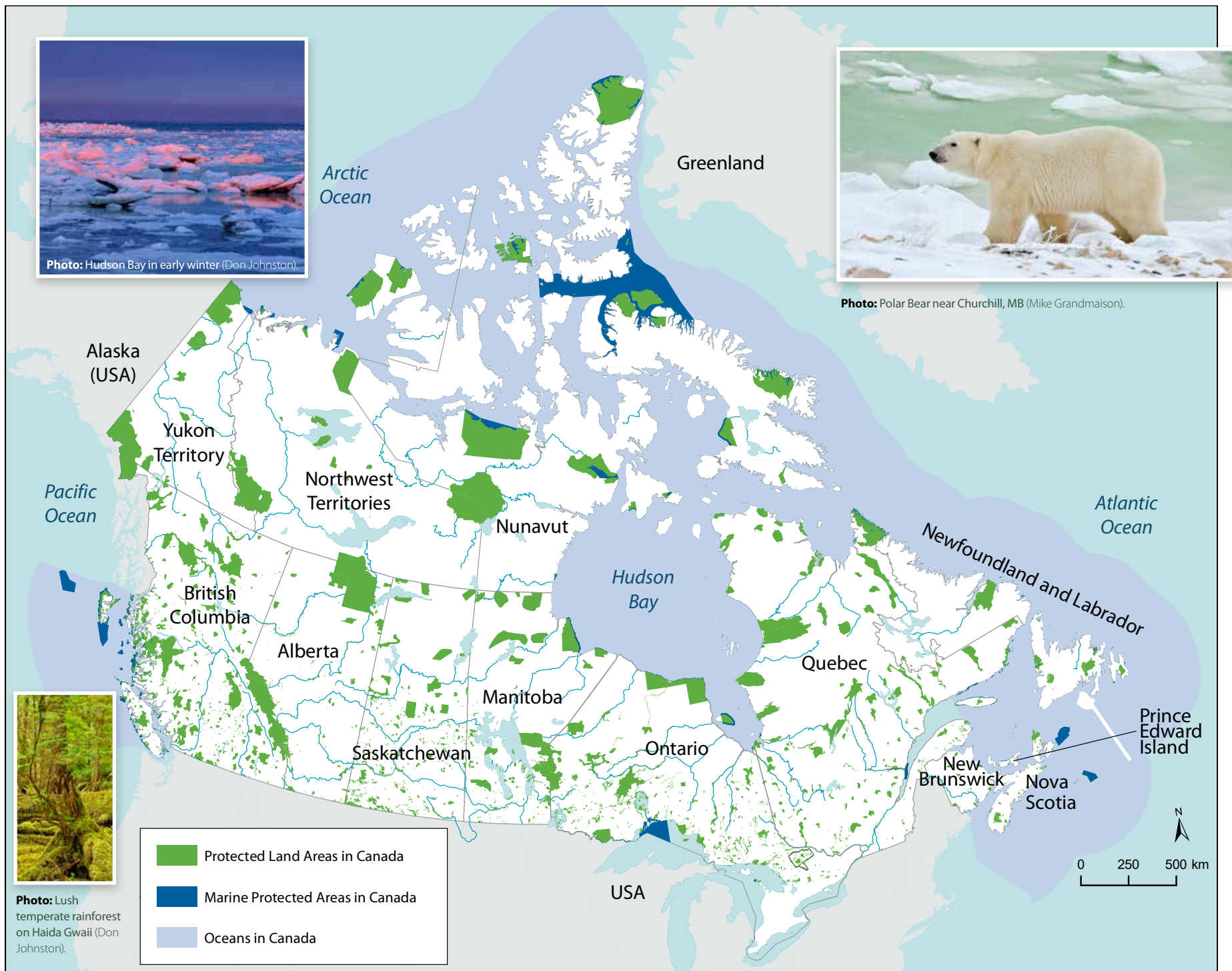


Photo: Hudson Bay in early winter (Don Johnston).



Photo: Polar Bear near Churchill, MB (Mike Grandmaison).



Photo: Lush temperate rainforest on Haida Gwaii (Don Johnston).

## PLANET IN HOT WATER

by Eric Reder, Wilderness and Water Campaigner

Oceans cover 71 per cent of the planet, so caring for this world means attending to our oceans.

Melting ice has long been held up as the greatest change resulting from a rapidly warming world. In 2017, an iceberg the size of Prince Edward Island broke off the Antarctic Ice Sheet. Sea levels are rising and our coastlines are under threat.

But changes to the ocean itself are far more troubling, as its health is such a great part of our planet's life support systems.



Photos: Whiteshell River, MB (Mike Karakas), Coastal British Columbia (Michael Wheatley).

Ocean acidification is caused by an excess of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and is a dangerous development for species in the ocean. Australia's Great Barrier Reef – the largest living thing on earth – has experienced several years of bleaching due to ocean warming and is under additional threat from acidification.<sup>18</sup>

Overfishing has cut ocean fish populations in half over the past 50 years.<sup>19</sup> Now our oceans face a total assault. As in any ecosystem, ocean health is maintained by a balance of predators and prey. Recycling of nutrients and oxygen in water occurs through the interconnected web of species. The alarming decline of fish in the ocean is a tremendous threat to oceans and to us.

The 2010 Convention on Biological Diversity only recommended that 10 per cent of oceans be designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). In 2014, the world's scientists and leaders gathered at the World Park Congress and called for an increase to 30 per cent protection in the form of 'no-take' MPAs that are protected from extractive activities to create a fully sustainable ocean.<sup>20</sup>

Freshwater warming presents additional challenges. As oceans warm, some species can migrate to deeper and cooler water to adapt. In inland

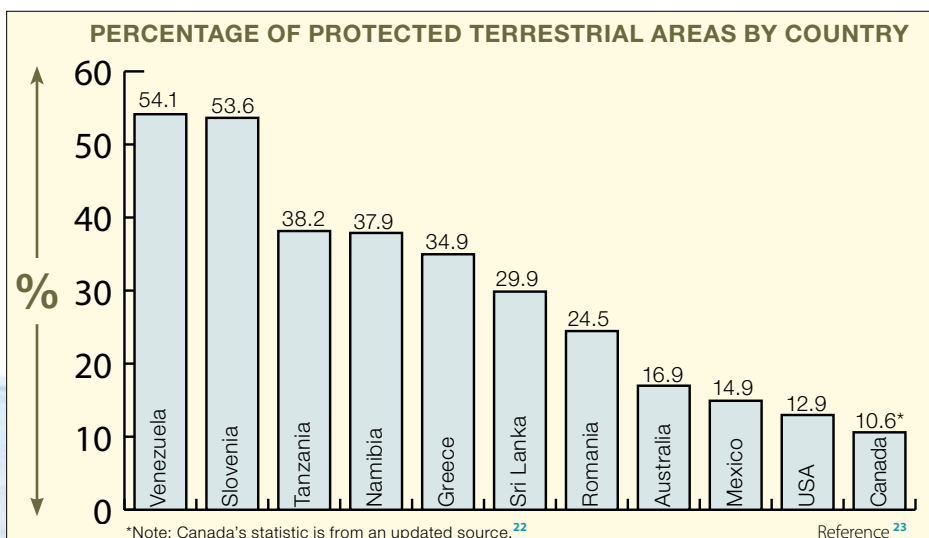
lakes, however, there is rarely that opportunity. A recent study on brook trout shows that higher summer air temperatures are having a negative impact on the fish.<sup>21</sup> Fish eggs and fry are the most sensitive in the middle of summer, when these temperature extremes are occurring. To adapt to this, more lakes and streams must be protected from disturbance, so that they may be used as waters warm.

Functioning healthy ecosystems are complex, and it is rare for us to fully understand them. As species populations are depleted by harvest or reduced due to changing climate, new species will move in. Accidental transmission of invasive species into a new ecosystem, like the threat of zebra mussels in Lake Winnipeg, may cause



Photo: Sockeye salmon (Dale Sanders).

changes we cannot predict. It is more important now than ever to protect ecosystems from human impacts, so they are stronger and more resilient in the face of climate chaos.



# INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREAS ARE BEACONS OF HOPE

by Torrance Coste, Vancouver Island Campaigner

Setting land off-limits to industrial development is critical to preserving biodiversity, protecting key species and ensuring clean air and water over the long term. But creating protected areas that leave out Indigenous peoples and other communities is not a just way forward.

Fortunately, there's an answer: conservation and land management visions developed and led by Indigenous peoples.

From Clayoquot Sound, BC to Nunatsiavut, Labrador, examples of bottom-up land use planning by and for Indigenous communities are emerging.

In the mid-1980's, west coast nations like the Haida and the Tla-o-qui-aht began declaring their intentions to protect parts of their

territories. The Tla-o-qui-aht Nation has now designated its entire territory as tribal parks, to be managed in accordance with traditional teachings and natural law.<sup>24</sup> K'ihl saa'dze Tribal Park<sup>25</sup> declared by the Doig River First Nation and Dasiqox Tribal Park<sup>26</sup> by the Xenigwet'in and Yunesit'in communities of the Tsilhqot'in Nations are two more BC examples.

To the north, the proposed Thaidene Nëné National Park Reserve on the east arm of Great Slave Lake is the community of Lutsel K'e's vision to protect 33,000 square kilometres in the heart of their territory.<sup>27</sup> On the east coast, the newly-established Mealy Mountains National Park

Reserve is co-managed by the Innu who develop Indigenous programming to showcase their homeland.<sup>28</sup>

In early 2017, the Ahousaht Nation in Clayoquot Sound unveiled its land use vision, an ambitious blueprint that sets most of the nation's territory off-limits to

industrial development and prioritizes sustainable economic activity for its people.<sup>29</sup>

Canada's most recent federal budget included \$25 million in seed funding to help Indigenous communities create Guardians programs, where First Nations people act as park rangers and environmental monitors to protect their own territory.<sup>30</sup>

Returning more power to the peoples who have managed their territories respectfully and sustainably for millennia is a key step to protecting life-supporting ecosystems across the continent and around the world. Here in Canada, it is time for provincial and federal governments to encourage and support Indigenous-led conservation visions.



Photo: Dasiqox Tribal Park (Jeremy Sean Williams).



Photo: Gathering of canoes to protect the Salish Sea (Michael Wheatley).

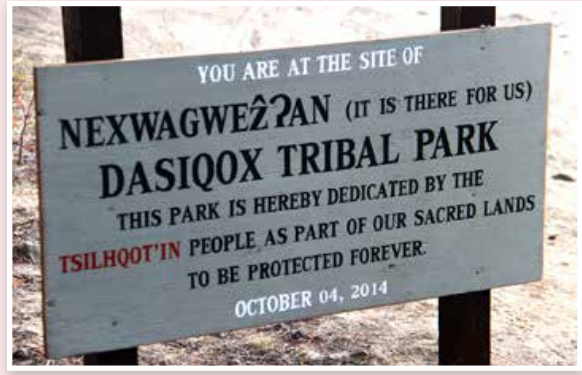


Photo: Dasiqox Tribal Park (Jeremy Sean Williams).

## TAKE ACTION

**Dear, Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna:**

Habitat destruction and climate disruption are happening world-wide. We need fast, decisive action from all nations to stop catastrophic biodiversity loss.

**Thank you** for committing to increase Canada's protected area network to 17 per cent of our land and 10 per cent of our oceans by 2020.

Please continue to work with provinces and Indigenous Peoples to bring the protected area network on land and ocean to 50 per cent of Canada's total area as soon as possible.

### WRITE NOW!

Email:

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Photo: Aurora borealis, NWT (Valerie Courtois).

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