

Don't neglect natural solutions to climate change crisis, experts tell Canada *More and larger protected areas are needed in addition to emissions cuts*

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Toronto, Ontario – Today international experts are urging all governments in Canada to not to neglect the role of 'natural solutions' to the climate change crisis. As stated in an Open Letter to the First Ministers released today:

"We are writing you today to seriously consider expanding and strengthening your respective protected areas systems. Without taking such steps you risk exacerbating the problem of climate change. Right now Canada has just under 10% of its land base protected. We urge you to significantly increase this amount as part of your respective climate change strategies."

"Without protected areas, the challenges would be even greater, and their strengthening will yield one of the most powerful solutions to the climate crisis," said Nigel Dudley, ecologist and industrial fellow at the University of Queensland. Protected areas help prevent the loss of carbon that is already present in vegetation, peat, and soils. They also help society cope with climate change impacts by maintaining essential services upon which people depend.

The experts, in Toronto for one day only, are promoting the findings of their new report called *Natural Solutions: protected areas helping people cope with climate change*. The report was authored by a team of trained ecologists, economists, and other experts.

"In the rush for 'new' solutions to climate change, we are in danger of neglecting a proven alternative," says Nik Lopoukhine, formerly Director General Parks Canada, a Canadian and Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas. "Protected areas are an investment which societies have made for a millennia, using traditional approaches which have proven their potential and effectiveness in modern times," added Lopoukhine.

"Actually, expanding protected area coverage and involving indigenous and local communities in these efforts could be one of the most effective ways to reinforce nature and peoples resilience to climate change" said The Nature Conservancy's Trevor Sandwith, a co-author from South Africa, who is also Deputy Chair of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas.

With 2010 being the International Year of Biodiversity, maintaining and expanding protected areas needs to be recognized as a powerful tool against climate change and should be a component of national and sub-national climate change strategies. Protected areas play a major role in reducing climate changing carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere. In Canada, over 4 billion tons of carbon dioxide is sequestered in 39 national parks, estimated to be worth \$39-87 billion in carbon credits. Two provinces have recently made significant commitments to protect the massive carbon stores of the Boreal Forest.

"We certainly want to encourage full implementation of Premier McGuinty's global leading announcement from July 2008 to permanently protect more than half of its northern Boreal Forest with local indigenous communities," added Lopoukhine. The Premier highlighted the important role protecting these natural carbon sinks have in helping to stave off the worst impacts of climate change. Ontario's Boreal Forest including the Hudson Bay Lowlands is one of the richest carbon reserves in the world.

The *Natural Solutions* report was commissioned by the IUCN WCPA and funded and supported by The Nature Conservancy, the United Nations Development Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, the World Bank and WWF. It can be downloaded at: http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/natural_solutions.pdf

A summary in French, English and Spanish is also available.

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