

A resilient, just & sustainable future for all

Ecojustice platform proposals for BC Election 2020

The focus of the 2020 BC election will necessarily centre on policies and programs to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is critical that political parties not lose sight of the climate and biodiversity crises that continue to impact people's health, livelihoods, and communities. The next Government of British Columbia must deal not only with the immediate crisis posed by the pandemic, and look forward to laws, policies and programs needed to set the province on course to a resilient, just, and sustainable future for all.

Importantly, it must do so in a manner that respects the rights of Indigenous peoples and continues to advance reconciliation and implementation of the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). To that end, we urge that the next government to publish its promised action plan to implement the Province's UNDRIP legislation by the end of 2020.

Ecojustice proposes three environmental priorities for the next Government of BC:

1. **Accelerating climate ambition** by eliminating fossil fuel subsidies by 2025, detailing a clear plan to achieve the legislated 2030 target, and committing to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.
2. **Safeguarding BC's biodiversity** with the Province's first ever Species at Risk Act, and by modernizing forestry laws, protecting coastal ecosystems, and implementing the *Water Sustainability Act*.
3. **Empowering people to protect their environment** with a made-in-BC Environmental Bill of Rights that legally recognizes all peoples' right to live in a healthy environment.

About Ecojustice

Ecojustice uses the power of the law to defend nature, combat climate change, and fight for a healthy environment. Its strategic, innovative public interest lawsuits and law reform advocacy deliver lasting solutions to Canada's most urgent environmental problems. As Canada's largest environmental law charity, Ecojustice operates offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, and Halifax.

For more information, visit www.ecojustice.ca.

Contact information

Devon Page, Executive Director

Ecojustice

dpage@ecojustice.ca

604-685-5618 x 233

Detailed platform proposals

British Columbia's natural beauty, ecological diversity, and vibrant communities and cultures are vital to our prosperity and well-being. Yet, like so many places, the Province is confronted with multiple, intersecting crises that threaten the very basis of life as we know it: climate breakdown, accelerating species extinction, large-scale ecosystem transformation, food and water insecurity, and build-up of toxic pollution in our bodies and the environment.

Policy commitments made during the 2020 BC election must necessarily focus on the immediate crisis posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. But this election is also an opportunity to look forward. It is an opportunity to act on persistent and systemic weaknesses in the Province's existing policy regime, to emerge from the pandemic stronger and more united, and to set BC on course to a resilient, just, and sustainable future for all.

Below, are three policy proposals Ecojustice believes should be central to all party platforms in the 2020 BC election.

1. Accelerating climate ambition

BC has set a target of reducing GHG emissions by 40 per cent below 2007 levels by 2030 under the *Climate Change Accountability Act*. With the deadline to achieve that target now less than a decade away, the Province's climate strategy – CleanBC – still falls 21 per cent short of delivering on that target. Meanwhile, the science tells us much more action is needed – and quickly – to keep global temperature rise to below the 2°C level needed to stave off the worst impacts of climate change.

From droughts and floods to creeping sea level rise and forest fires within and beyond our borders, British Columbians are experiencing the real impacts of climate change now. BC must ensure we meet our 2030 target and join the growing number of governments around the world that have committed to net-zero GHG emissions by 2050. Doing so will position the Province as a leader in achieving Canada's soon-to-be legislated net-zero by 2050 target, grow its competitive economic advantage in a world where global consumers and investors expect aggressive climate action, and ensure a safe and stable climate for generations to come.

The good news is that these targets are well within reach. Ecojustice has commissioned expert economic and climate modelling that shows BC can meet our 2030 target and achieve net-zero GHG emissions by 2050 – all while growing GDP and jobs across all sectors of the economy. BC must ensure we do not derail our progress towards these targets with continued subsidies for the fossil fuel industry, which keep heavy polluters in business and slow market penetration of renewable energy solutions.

Proposed platform language

We commit to accelerating ambition on climate change by:

- Delivering on the promise to publish a plan to achieve the province's current 2030 GHG emissions reduction target by the end of 2020;
- Amending the *Climate Change Accountability Act* to align BC's targets with the national and global movement toward net-zero GHG emissions by 2050; and
- Phasing out all fossil fuel subsidies by 2025 and investing in a just transition for fossil fuel workers into the renewable energy economy to align BC with the direction of the federal government.

2. Safeguarding BC's biodiversity

When it comes to nature and wild spaces, BC is the place to be. Yet despite the exceptional biodiversity in the province, BC is also home to the greatest number of species at risk in Canada. The Province must take action to safeguard nature in a world that is facing a biodiversity crisis. Troublingly, B.C. is one of a few remaining jurisdictions in the industrialized world with no endangered species law.

Passing a new species at risk law, and at the same time modernizing forestry laws to restore and maintain forest ecosystems, would fill long-standing legal gaps in BC. However, truly safeguarding biodiversity in BC will also require modernization and implementation of laws and policies designed to protect and conserve our non-timber lands, rivers, watersheds and coastal ecosystems.

Proposed platform language

We commit to safeguarding BC's biodiversity by:

- Enacting a robust Species at Risk Act that establishes legal protection of species and enough of their habitat to ensure their recovery and survival;
- Implementing the actions in the report: *A new future for old forests* (Merkel and Gorley), starting with the recommendation to enact legislation that establishes conservation of ecosystem health and biodiversity of BC's forests as an overarching priority.
- Withholding fish farm tenures anywhere in BC unless affected First Nation communities offer consent, and demanding that Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) support the transfer of ocean-based open-net fish farms to land-based closed containment systems in a just and equitable way that maximizes benefit to local communities.
- Fully implementing the provisions in the *Water Sustainability Act* designed to secure the volume and timing of water flow (i.e., environmental flows) needed to sustain healthy and functioning rivers, lakes and watersheds.

3. Empowering people to protect their environment

People are increasingly concerned about the connection between the state of the environment and the health of their families and communities. They are looking to governments to affirm that everyone has the right to live in a healthy environment, and to create new tools that empower them to protect the environment and stand up for one another – particularly those experiencing environment injustice, in vulnerable situations, or who bear a disproportionate burden of pollution and other environmental hazards.

The human right to a healthy environment has spread around the world more quickly than any other human right over the past 40 years. A majority of the world's countries have recognized a legal right to a healthy environment and evidence shows that doing so leads to a host of benefits, including improved environmental and economic performance. Five Canadian provinces and territories have some form of environmental rights legislation, and more than 170 municipalities across Canada – including more than 50 municipalities in BC – have signed declarations supporting the right to a healthy environment. Public opinion surveys indicate that legally recognizing the right to a healthy environment enjoys near-universal support in BC and across the country.

Proposed platform language

We commit to empowering people to protect their environment by:

- Enacting legislation to establish a made-in-BC Environmental Bill of Rights that includes legal recognition of a human right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment and tools to enhance transparency and strengthen public participation in environmental decision-making.