

ecobrief: *Making the Case for a **Better Earth.***



We at Ecojustice honour and celebrate the enduring leadership, resilience, and strength of the many distinct Indigenous Peoples and Nations who have protected the lands and waters of the territories we call Canada.

Colonization and colonialism cut across our nation in an attempt to extinguish Indigenous Peoples and their cultures, knowledge, and ways of being. Shamefully, racist policies and practices persist today that impact the mental, physical, and spiritual health of Indigenous Peoples and strip our society of the value of being a just, equitable and inclusive nation.

Today, 41 Indigenous communities across Canada have no access to clean water. In Sarnia, the Aamjiwnaang First Nation is subjected daily to the cumulative impact of thousands of tonnes of air pollution from nearby chemical plants. Across Canada, toxic dumps, polluting projects, risky pipelines, and tainted drinking water disproportionately hurt Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities.

These same communities are also more likely to experience the detrimental impacts of climate change — and sooner — than predominantly white communities. Environmental racism is a direct result

of Canada's historic and ongoing colonization. It impacts communities and people from coast to coast to coast. And it needs to stop.

Despite these structural barriers, Indigenous Peoples continue to organize, to rise, and to thrive in a profound act of resistance and resilience. Ecojustice gratefully acknowledges that Indigenous leadership directly informs our mission to defend nature, combat the climate emergency, and fight for a healthy environment for all.

Ecojustice has integrated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action into our forthcoming strategic plan, and we will endeavor to ensure our work is consistent with and advances reconciliation wherever possible. We are committed to doing the work to decolonize ourselves, and encourage members of the broader Ecojustice community to join us.

We are working with several Indigenous groups, clients, and taking time to learn and listen to how we can do better for the people we work to fight for. Every person in Canada has the right to a healthy environment and to get that we continue to dig deep within our own organization as well as our casework so that we can do better for Indigenous residents nation-wide.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Legislation is stalled in Ottawa, and political parties have resorted to blaming each other for the delay as they posture ahead of a possible federal election. By holding up the lawmaking that is the core business of Parliament, this political bickering has real consequences for Canadians.

That includes taking action against climate change. The federal government tabled the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act (Bill C-12) last November — legislation that promises to hold politicians accountable for reaching climate targets and emitting net-zero greenhouse gases (GHGs) by 2050.

In the last federal election, more than two-thirds of Canadians voted for parties that promised swift action against climate change. Recent polling suggests that, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change remains an important issue to Canadians. After decades of broken promises and missed targets, Canadians have been looking to political leaders to take their responsibility for climate action seriously. When the Liberal government kept its election promise by tabling Bill C-12 in November of last year, it gave us hope that MPs in this minority Parliament would work together to tackle the climate emergency.

The Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act is an important piece of legislation, because, for the first time ever, it holds political leaders accountable for reducing Canada's emissions. Despite signing on to every international climate agreement — from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the 2015 Paris Agreement — Canada has missed every emissions target it has ever set. Bill C-12 has the ability to change that, but only if the legislation undergoes some important amendments in committee, makes its way through Parliament, and becomes law.

Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change Jonathan Wilkinson announced all new

thermal coal mine projects and existing mine expansions will be required to undergo a federal impact assessment.

To pass an assessment, coal mining companies would have to demonstrate how a proposed project's benefits will outweigh its environmental harms — something nearly impossible to do given thermal coal's massive carbon footprint as the world's dirtiest fossil fuel.

Illustrating this, Minister Wilkinson also issued a notice to the proponents of the Vista coal mine expansion, saying that he considers the project to have unacceptable effects on the environment and that it cannot be in the public interest.

This indicates that the Vista project is unlikely to ever obtain the federal approval it needs to proceed.

This is a BIG victory for the environment, Canada's climate movement, and the thousands of Canadians — including Ecojustice supporters like you — who mobilized last year to successfully persuade the federal government to order an impact assessment for the Vista project.

While this news effectively signals the end of new thermal coal mines in Canada, we're not done with thermal coal quite yet. Canada still exports millions of tonnes of thermal coal overseas every year. A lot of that coal comes from American coal mines that rely on shuttling coal through Canadian ports to reach overseas markets.

The bottom line is that the emissions from this exported coal still hurts our shared climate. Once they are in the atmosphere, these climate emergency-fueling emissions do not respect borders.



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NO!
to
Coal

DONOR PROFILE

HELEN & GERRY



Gerry and Helen live in Regina, Saskatchewan. Here is their story of why they've decided to leave a legacy gift to Ecojustice in their Will, while also providing for their daughter:

“We have always cared deeply about the environment since we were children. Both of us had parents who loved to garden, and now we're avid gardeners ourselves. It makes you appreciate the changes in the seasons and fresh food - Gerry developed a strong taste for fresh raw veggies as a young child!”

“Ecojustice calls the attention of the court and public - they make a noise so critical problems that affect everyone are brought to light and can't be ignored. The choice is to either do nothing, or we can be a spur that's constantly bugging polluters. We feel good about supporting Ecojustice because it's a group of intelligent people effectively making change in the courts.”

“We decided to leave a gift in our Will to Ecojustice because we want Ecojustice's work to continue on, and we know our money will be put to good use. We're of course providing for our daughter in our estate plans, but our family is well off so it's easy for us to provide for both (and she'll benefit from the tax reductions with our charitable gifts too). Our view is that it's best for our family and future to support those who are working for everyone's best interest - without our land, water, and air, our great grandchildren won't have a future.”

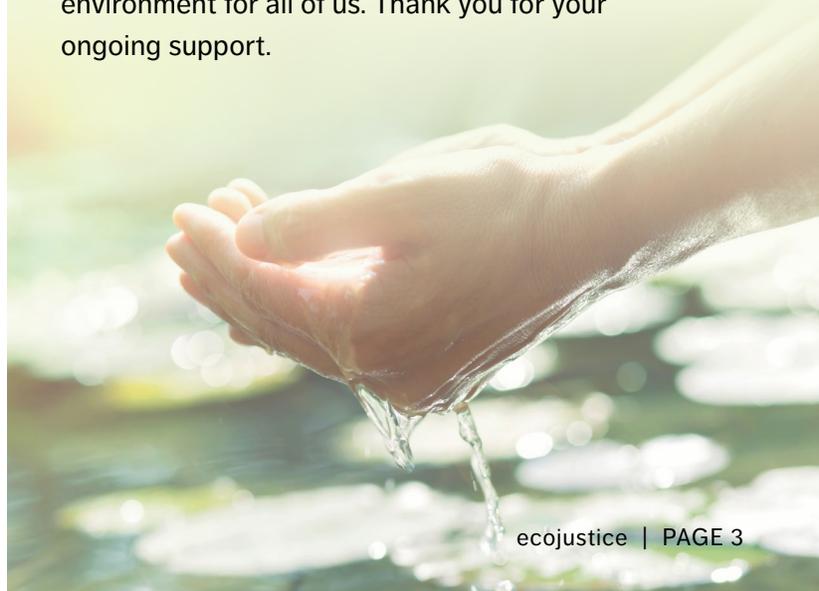
OUR RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Canada is poised — at long last — to recognize the human right to a healthy environment in federal law.

In April, after sustained campaigning by Ecojustice, our partners, and supporters like you, the federal government introduced a bill to revamp the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). CEPA is the law that is intended to protect our bodies and the environment from dangerous pollution and toxic chemicals. If passed, Bill C-28 would also become the first federal law to recognize your right to a healthy environment.

When the Liberals were returned to office in the fall of 2019, they committed to strengthen CEPA to better protect people and the environment from toxic substances and other pollution. That commitment came as a result of a years-long effort by Ecojustice and our partners at the David Suzuki Foundation, Environmental Defence and MakeWay to ensure the government updates CEPA into the strongest possible legislation.

Your donations have helped Ecojustice work on behalf of the public to suggest well-founded edits to CEPA in order to provide the right to a healthy environment for all of us. Thank you for your ongoing support.



CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY

British Columbia is blessed with the richest biodiversity in Canada but also has the greatest number of species at risk.

In the face of this biodiversity crisis, the province must take immediate action to protect nature, uphold strong conservation values, and respect Indigenous self-determination over their territories.

Logging is wiping out entire stands of trees hundreds or thousands of years old, leaving species without homes. Monumental mega-dams sever animal migration corridors, and mining disasters of epic proportions flood entire regions with toxic waste. These tragedies point to a biodiversity crisis resulting from the failure of B.C. governments, past and present.

A decade after the international community committed to the Aichi Targets to conserve wildlife and ecosystems by 2020, Ecojustice and the Wilderness Committee measured B.C.'s progress toward reaching Canada's goals. The results are alarming.

One of the terrible ironies about long-running failures to address the biodiversity loss crisis — here in B.C. and elsewhere in the world — is that progressive solutions have had plenty of time to emerge, be debated, implemented and proven to work.

The first crucial step is to prioritize ecosystems and biodiversity conservation over economic interests. All environmental decisions, including the size, quality, and location of protected areas, must be based on the latest conservation science and Indigenous knowledge, and respect Indigenous Title and Rights, territories, and governance.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

By choosing 100 per cent post-consumer recycled fibre instead of virgin paper for this printed material, the following natural resources will be saved or reduced this year: 41 trees; 10,698 kg of wood; 131,312 litres of water; 1,668 kg of landfill; 3,236 kg of net greenhouse emissions; 47 million Btu energy. SOURCE: UNISOURCE.CA

Next, we need new laws with the sole purpose of preventing short-term political and economic decision-making from doing permanent harm to our environment. This starts with an overarching biodiversity law that establishes ecosystem health and biodiversity as top priorities across all resource sectors.

Besides creating new laws, B.C. must fix existing ones, updating regulations and ensuring the same level of protection from all types of industry. The current patchwork of industry-specific laws is inefficient and will never give nature the protection it needs.

All these efforts must centre on traditional Indigenous knowledge and governance. Recent research in Canada shows biodiversity is highest on lands managed by Indigenous Peoples — higher even than in parks. Indigenous Peoples have stewarded the lands and biodiversity found in B.C. since time immemorial, and comprehensive funding, supports, and resources must be made available to First Nations to ensure they can keep protecting the environment for many more generations to come.

These efforts must start now. The 2020 WWF Living Planet Index shows an average 68 per cent global decline in mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and fish since the early 1970s. We are running out of time to protect B.C.'s biodiversity, yet there is still a small, ever-narrowing window of opportunity before us. It's up to this provincial government to choose one of two paths.

This opinion piece originally appeared in the Victoria Times Colonist on May 26, 2021. It was written by Ecojustice lawyer Sean Nixon, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, and Chartotte Dawe, conservation and policy campaigner at the Wilderness Committee.

DONOR INQUIRIES

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