

February 8, 2010

An Open Letter to the First Ministers of Canada

Today we urge all leaders in Canada to not neglect the role of 'natural solutions' to the climate change crisis. Responses to climate change must focus on reducing greenhouse gases emissions in order to avoid the runaway impacts of climate change and to address the impacts that are already with us.

We are concerned though that in the rush for 'new' solutions to climate change, we are in danger of neglecting a proven alternative-protected areas.

Protected areas are an essential part of the global response to climate change. It is as crucial to put in place a plan to permanently protect the carbon stores of the Boreal Forest and its peatlands, for example, as it is to reduce CO₂ emissions and fossil fuel consumption. Protected areas help prevent the loss of carbon that is already present in vegetation and soils and they sequester further carbon dioxide from the atmosphere in natural ecosystems. They help society cope with climate change impacts by maintaining essential services upon which people depend. Without them, the challenges would be even greater, and their strengthening will yield one of the most powerful natural solutions to the climate crisis.

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.

Managing natural ecosystems as carbon sinks and resources for adaptation is increasingly recognised as a necessary, efficient and relatively cost-effective strategy. And 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. 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. Our report titled *Natural Solutions: protected areas helping people cope with climate change* was released in Copenhagen in December. Today, we are promoting the findings of our report in Canada as part of a global tour.

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. We hope you consider and adopt our recommendations. The full report can be downloaded at: http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/natural_solutions.pdf

Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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