

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the Upcoming 2021 Federal Budget**

By: The Nature Conservancy of Canada

List of Recommendations

Recommendation: To achieve Canada's conservation targets of 30 percent of our freshwater, oceans, and lands by 2030 and a net-zero emissions economy by 2050, Canada should expand the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) -- a key pillar of realizing these ambitious goals.

More specifically, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) recommends that the government expand the size and scope of the NHCP with a matching rate of 1:1 between the federal government and other conservation partners. This will require an additional \$375 million in federal funding between 2021-22 and 2025-26.

The Importance of Nature to a Resilient Recovery

As the world works collectively to mitigate the dual threats of climate change and biodiversity loss, nature conservation has become one of the key policy tools used by governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect two non-renewable assets: our land and our water. The federal government has put in place ambitious programming to maintain natural areas for the sake of the plants, animals and people that rely upon them, but more must be done to achieve Canada's needed and ambitious conservation goals.

While Canada recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, the mutual objectives of economic growth and environmental conservation are more important than ever. To build a resilient economy that is better able to withstand climate change and future pandemics, further conservation is essential.

Nature is at the very heart of Canada's resilient recovery. It is something often taken for granted but has become more appreciated by many Canadians during the pandemic. Nature is a respite for many amid this challenging and uncertain time – essential to our economic and emotional well-being.

In fact, a recent report from the Task Force for a Resilient Recovery (Task Force) deliberately included nature as part of its *5 Bold Moves* for a resilient recovery. The Task Force identified restoration and conservation of natural infrastructure as a top priority and called on the government to accelerate its global leadership in conservation. As key facilitators of conservation in Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is proud that we were identified by the Task Force as a potential partner and delivery agent for this important work.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is the country's leading national land conservation organization. A private, non-profit charitable organization, NCC partners with individuals, corporations, foundations, Indigenous communities, other non-profit organizations and governments at all levels to protect our most important natural treasures, the natural areas that sustain Canada's plants, wildlife, and people.

Long recognized for its work in private land conservation in southern Canada, today NCC is also a catalyst for large-scale, long-term conservation in the mid and northern reaches of the country, working with partners on Crown and Indigenous lands. NCC works where governments cannot, as a neutral third-party, uniquely able to remove roadblocks to large-scale conservation, while supporting others to achieve transformational projects. In recent years NCC:

- Supported the creation of **Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area (over 10 million hectares)**, by removing resource rights.
- Assisted the Ktunaxa Nation Council's plan for **Qat'muk Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area (62,500 hectares)**, by lifting development rights in BC's Jumbo Valley.

- Negotiated removal of timber quotas, to support the creation of the world's largest boreal forest protected area (**6.7 million hectares**), including creation of **Birch River Wildland Provincial Park in Alberta**.

The Road to 30 by 30 and Net-Zero by 2050

The government is pursuing two important environmental goals to ensure a cleaner environment and a sustainable economy for Canadians.

1. The conservation of 30 percent of Canada's freshwater, oceans and lands by 2030 (commonly known as '30 by 30' within the conservation community).
2. The pursuit of a net-zero emissions economy by 2050.

These are ambitious and necessary goals and it will take all Canadians working together to achieve them. Canada is at a critical point where we must accelerate and coordinate collective action to meet our national targets and protect important biodiversity and ecosystems.

Canada has currently protected 12.1 percent of its land and freshwater and 13.8 percent of oceans. There has been tremendous progress to achieve these percentages over a relatively short period of time. On the terrestrial side, for example, Canada has protected a land mass equivalent to three times the size of Nova Scotia, or the size of Greece, within the last 2 years. On the oceans side, Canada has surpassed our 10 percent target. The lesson of the past is that if we want to reach our targets, we need to invest early because protecting and conserving areas takes time and money.

We know that more must be done to leverage all of Canada's assets to match our ambitious nature conservation plan with dynamic action. Indigenous communities, provinces, municipalities, the agricultural sector, forestry sector, and industry all have important roles to play.

NCC has been working closely with the Government of Canada, private and public sector partners, and Indigenous communities to facilitate high-quality land conservation for decades. This work is a key part of our path forward and it must be supplemented and augmented by a greater framework for collective action to get Canada to 30 by 30.

Nature conservation also plays an essential role in the government's plan to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Globally, nature and nature conservation can provide over a third of our climate mitigation needs. Canada's wetlands, grasslands and forests are critical carbon storage areas that also protect biodiversity and provide vital ecosystem services. For example, it is estimated that Canada's peatlands alone hold 147 billion tons of carbon – the equivalent to more than 200 years of Canada's annual carbon emissions. Canada's natural endowment of peatlands and other ecosystems plays an outsized role in global carbon capture and sequestration.

Additionally, healthy natural systems protect communities from extreme weather events stemming from climate change. Natural infrastructure helps to mitigate threats from floods, droughts, and rising sea levels. It is imperative that carbon storage and climate adaption continue to be linked to Canada's nature conservation efforts on the road to net-zero emissions.

Building on the Success of the Natural Heritage Conservation Program to Reach 30 by 30

Canada's strong conservation community is ready to meet our 30 by 30 goals. NCC has a longstanding record of partnering with governments to deliver high quality, high impact conservation programs that maintain Canada's natural heritage and exceptional biodiversity. Our work is guided by the best science and evidence to inform how every dollar is spent and to measure the impact of the investment.

Since 2007, through the Natural Heritage Conservation Program (NHCP) and its predecessor, the Natural Areas Conservation Program (NACP), NCC and our partners have leveraged a Government of Canada investment of about \$370 million and raised more than \$750 million in matching funds and contributions. As a result, we have delivered more than \$1 billion in conservation outcomes over 13 years. We have a proven track record of administering and delivering this program and achieving tangible results.

The government's 2019 announcement launching the NHCP was a major milestone for Canadian conservation. The NHCP supports privately protected areas in ecologically sensitive landscapes from forests and endangered grasslands to wetlands and coastal regions. NCC is an important delivery partner for the NHCP and works to conserve the most valuable, sensitive, and at-risk lands. Our science-based conservation process guides securement, stewardship, and restoration of the most threatened lands and species in Canada. Consequently, every federal dollar accessed through the NHCP goes towards high-value conservation areas that benefit nature, reduce Canada's carbon footprint and support rich ecosystems and biodiversity.

The Government of Canada's 2019, \$100 million-dollar investment over four years in the NHCP is being matched with contributions from private and other donors at a ratio of 2:1, demonstrating that government, environmental non-profits (ENGOS), and civil society can work together to achieve big goals. However, Canada's 30 by 30 goal is ambitious, and more must be done, faster, to ensure we achieve the target within the decade. Reducing the matching ratio from 2:1 to 1:1 will accelerate the time to impact and enable both NCC and government to deliver larger projects at greater speed.

Recommendation: To achieve Canada's conservation goals of 30 percent of our freshwater, oceans, and lands by 2030 and a net-zero emissions economy by 2050, Canada should expand the Natural Heritage Conservation Program -- a key pillar of realizing these ambitious goals.

More specifically, NCC recommends that the government:

- Build on the momentum of the program to date, by expanding the timeline to the end of F2025-2026
- Increase investment in the program, ramping up to \$100 million/year from 2023-2026, at a matching ratio of 1:1
- Including funds already allocated to the NHCP in 2019 and 2020, an additional \$375 million of federal investment is required over 5-years (see chart below).

Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
Committed federal funds	\$25M	\$25M	\$25M	\$25M	-	-	-	\$100M
New federal investment	-	-	\$25M	\$50M	\$100M	\$100M	\$100M	\$375M
Total federal contribution	\$25M	\$25M	\$50M	\$75M	\$100M	\$100M	\$100M	\$475M

This funding will enable NCC to continue to make critical investments in southern Canada where we work with local land trusts and others to conduct fee simple land securement and conservation easements to connect critical lands and protect species at risk and species of conservation concern. Critically, for our 30 by 30 goals, it will also enable NCC to continue its work in the middle and northern parts of Canada where we have demonstrated an ability to create large-scale conservation solutions.

Why NCC?

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is consistently named as a top environmental charity for funding efficiency, impact, social results and transparency. Our track record speaks for itself.

- Since 1962, we have facilitated the conservation of more than 14 million hectares from coast to coast to coast. This is equivalent to conserving about 3,300 NHL hockey rinks a day.
- NCC works in communities across southern Canada to secure conservation outcomes of a significant scale. As a neutral, third-party, we often succeed where governments cannot, connecting Canadians through partnerships with regional land trusts, corporations, and others to create newly protected areas. Recent examples include the Darkwoods Conservation Area in BC, the Waldron Ranch in Alberta, the Norfolk Forests and Wetlands in Ontario and the Green Mountains in Quebec.
- NCC also facilitates large-scale conservation in middle and northern Canada, bringing partners and resources together to remove roadblocks and to achieve change.
- Continuously, since 2007, through the NHCP and its predecessor the NACP, NCC and its partners have leveraged Government of Canada investments to achieve tangible conservation results.

Canada's 30 by 30 conservation goals will need to build upon the success of the NACP while utilizing new, large-scale approaches enabled by the NHCP, which include Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures, such as forestry set-asides and conserved ranchlands.

Conclusion

Canada can reach its 30 by 30 conservation goals and help create the foundation to achieve a net-zero emissions economy by 2050, if we start **now**. Working with partners from coast to coast to coast, NCC has demonstrated our ability to achieve real conservation targets while protecting species at risk and species of conservation concern.

However, increased investment from government is required to accelerate the effort to achieve 30 by 30. The good news is that the government does not have to act on its own. Government investment can be leveraged to achieve results. We are confident that the proposed changes to the Natural Heritage Conservation Program will help position Canada for success and achieve our ambitious conservation goals.