



JUN 16 2017

Ms. Deborah Schulte
Chair
Committee on Environment and
Sustainable Development
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Ms. Schulte:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development for its report *Taking Action Today: Establishing Protected Areas for Canada's Future*. I am pleased to receive the Committee's recommendations. Please accept this letter as the Government's response to your report.

The majority of the report's recommendations are consistent with initiatives currently being advanced by the Parks Canada Agency, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Natural Resources Canada and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. Given the breadth of the Committee's recommendations, this response focuses on the key elements of your study: efforts by governments to achieve our international and domestic targets; Indigenous protected areas; and the *Species at Risk Act*.

The Government shares the Committee's urgency to achieve our nation's protected area and conservation goals. Success in making quantitative and, just as importantly, qualitative gains to conserve at least 17 percent of Canada's terrestrial areas and inland waters and 10 percent of its coastal and marine areas by 2020 will require leadership, collaboration, reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and partnerships.

This is a view that is shared by federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for parks, protected areas and biodiversity conservation. In February 2017, these ministers, recognizing the importance of protected and conserved areas for maintaining biodiversity, issued a Commitment to Building a Natural Legacy through the Pathway to Canada Target 1. The ministers agreed to work with Indigenous Peoples, local governments, non-government and natural resource industry sectors, and private land owners to acknowledge their existing biodiversity conservation work and find innovative

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ways to improve Canada's network of protected and conserved areas. In short, ministers indicated they remain committed to working together, in accordance with each government's jurisdiction and priorities, to achieve the 2020 biodiversity goals and targets.

Two key initiatives are contributing to conserving Canada's natural legacy: the Pathway to Canada Target 1 initiative, focused on the 17 percent terrestrial goal; and the Marine Conservation Target initiative focused on increasing marine and coastal protection to five percent by 2017 and to 10 percent by 2020. As there is a strong alignment between the Committee's report and the design of work under the terrestrial and marine initiatives, we expect to receive advice that will address many of the recommendations raised by the Committee.

Pathway to Canada Target 1

The goal of the Pathway work is to produce guidance that will enable Canada to meet its biodiversity terrestrial target by 2020. The guidance will be grounded in science and traditional knowledge, and lead to the establishment of a coordinated network of terrestrial protected areas, Indigenous conservation areas, and other effective area-based conservation measures (OEABCMs) across Canada. The guidance will also inform Canadian jurisdictions how to develop these networks so that they are effectively and equitably managed, well-connected and integrated into the wider landscape, include areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, and that together achieve ecological representation.

Recognizing that achieving Target 1 requires collaboration with and collective action by many communities and stakeholders, the Pathway process will seek advice from a national advisory panel, comprised of Canadians representing a broad spectrum of perspectives. Panel members have been appointed and will serve for a term lasting until fall of 2018. The Panel is to submit by October 2017, a public report to ministers responsible for protected areas and biodiversity conservation. Ministers and Indigenous leaders are expected to confirm their direction on Canada's approach early in 2018.

As part of the Pathway work, an Indigenous circle of experts has been established as the primary body to provide Indigenous expert advice on various Pathway elements, including advice on the proposed term and definition for a spectrum of Canadian Indigenous conservation areas, along with defining principles, criteria, and indicators. The Pathway work will also be informed by several expert task teams, each providing information to help the National Advisory Panel develop recommendations for federal, provincial and territorial ministers. All task teams have a copy of your report as they prepare their discussion papers.

The task teams are as follows:

- Defining Protected Areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OEABCMs)
- Local Communities and Equitable Management of Protected Areas
- Assessing Ecological Representation
- Connected and Integrated Protected Areas and Other Conservation Measures
- Measuring Effective Management
- Identifying Areas Important for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

I would encourage members of your committee to follow the work of the Pathway to Canada Target 1 at www.conservation2020canada.ca.

Marine Conservation Targets

On June 8, 2016, World Oceans Day, the Government announced a five-point plan to achieve its marine conservation targets by 2017 and 2020. The five elements are: (1) complete the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) already under development; (2) advance the contribution of OEABCMs; (3) protect additional areas under pressure from human activities; (4) protect large offshore areas; and (5) examine how the *Oceans Act* can be updated to facilitate the designation process for MPAs.

Work is underway to complete several MPAs in 2017, including: *Oceans Act* MPAs (St. Anns Bank and Laurentian Channel), the Scott Islands Marine National Wildlife Area and a national marine conservation area (NMCA) in Lancaster Sound. Additional MPAs are expected by 2020, including an *Oceans Act* MPA in Banc des Américains located in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. DFO is also advancing work to establish two large offshore MPAs, one in the Pacific to protect seamounts and hydrothermal vents that are sites for high biodiversity and one in the Labrador Sea where there are significant sensitive corals and sponges that also provide important habitat for marine species.

Meeting the marine conservation targets will include the important contributions made by OEABCMs. Selection of measures that may qualify, such as some fishery area closures, is subject to criteria that were developed based on peer-reviewed science advice to determine the nature and extent to which biodiversity conservation benefits are realized.

Under the auspices of the Canadian Council of Fisheries and Aquaculture Ministers (CCFAM), the Oceans Task Group is leading cooperation among provinces, territories and lead federal departments and agencies (i.e., DFO, ECCC, and Parks Canada) to work collaboratively under the 2011 CCFAM National Framework for Canada's Network

of Marine Protected Areas to advance the national network and collaborate on activities to meet the 2017 and 2020 marine targets.

As announced in Federal Budget 2016, the Government has provided \$81.3 million over five years, starting in 2016–2017, and \$13.7 million ongoing per year to support meeting the 2017 and 2020 marine conservation targets (e.g., *Oceans Act* MPAs). Budget 2016 also provided funding of \$137.3 million over 16 years, starting in 2016–2017, and \$7.4 million ongoing to continue work on developing new national parks and national marine conservation areas, including the proposed NMCA in Lancaster Sound, and to undertake feasibility assessments for NMCAs in the Southern Strait of Georgia (British Columbia), the Magdalen Islands (Quebec), eastern James Bay and southwestern Hudson Bay. Budget 2017 announced funding to explore how to protect the future of the Arctic Ocean’s last ice area where summer ice remains each year.

I would encourage members of your committee to follow the work of the marine conservation targets at www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans/index-eng.html.

Indigenous Conservation Areas and Guardians Programs

There is a growing national dialogue around the potential contribution of Indigenous protected areas toward reconciliation and conservation of biodiversity in Canada. For example, Ms. Mary Simon, in her March 2017 final report to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, recommended that Canada work with Indigenous organizations to conceive a new federal policy directive that sets out a process for the identification, funding and management of Indigenous protected areas, and to identify long-term stable funding to support locally-driven terrestrial guardian and Arctic coastal and marine stewardship programs.

I should note that while the Committee and Ms. Simon have used the term “Indigenous protected areas,” the Government is considering the use of a broader term: “Indigenous conservation areas.” The term “Indigenous conservation areas” is an intentionally recognized term used to convey a spectrum of conservation tools that could contribute toward Canada’s biodiversity targets beyond traditional protected areas. Examples may include areas of sustainable use that are co-managed with Indigenous Peoples.

As part of its work, the Indigenous Circle of Experts will develop a proposed term and definition for a spectrum of Canadian Indigenous conservation areas in terrestrial and inland waters, along with defining principles, criteria, and indicators to recognize and support these areas in different contexts. These elements will be developed and refined through a series of regional gatherings and site visits with Indigenous government and

community representatives who have established, or wish to establish, Indigenous conservation areas within their traditional territories. A final report with recommendations is expected in fall 2017.

Budget 2017 announced \$25 million over five years, starting in 2017–2018, to support the development of a pilot Indigenous guardians network. This initiative will facilitate enhanced Indigenous land stewardship and resource management within traditional lands and waterways. The network will support partnerships with Indigenous communities in monitoring ecological health, maintaining cultural sites, and protecting sensitive areas and species.

With respect to Indigenous engagement in protected areas in the marine context, Indigenous organizations are involved in the process to gather information (scientific, socio-economic and cultural, and traditional ecological knowledge) leading to the identification of Areas of Interest for possible future *Oceans Act* MPA establishment. Indigenous organizations are involved in the establishment and implementation of *Oceans Act* MPAs where they have demonstrated an interest. In most cases, Indigenous organizations participate in MPA governance and management through multi-stakeholder advisory committees.

Finally, I would like to address several additional items raised by the Committee:

- The Government remains committed to implementing its responsibilities and commitments under the *Species at Risk Act*. For example, protection of critical habitat has been put in place for over 60 species in national wildlife areas, Schedule 1 national parks and migratory bird sanctuaries, and marine and freshwater aquatic areas. As part of Canada's national strategy for the protection of species at risk, the Government of Canada established a number of conservation initiatives such as the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk. This program allocates approximately \$12.2 million a year to projects that both conserve and protect species at risk and their habitats and to those that prevent other species from becoming a conservation concern.
- In February 2017, ministers responsible for parks, protected areas and biodiversity conservation confirmed that conserving Canada's species at risk remains a key priority. They agreed to work together bilaterally and multilaterally to establish common objectives and priorities, share best practices, and advance our scientific knowledge and explore opportunities to develop complementary policies and programs to better support species at risk recovery and habitat conservation.

- The national park system plan needs to be updated to reflect 21st century conservation science. Public input to a round table process on Parks Canada that I recently hosted supported renewing the plan based on modern conservation methods, climate change understanding, Indigenous knowledge, and improved science. Nevertheless, the plan will continue to direct our current priorities. Budget 2016 announced funding to establish the proposed Thaidene Nene national park reserve, and Budget 2017 confirmed that work to pursue a national park in the unrepresented Manitoba Lowlands natural region is a priority.
- The Government is examining how the *Oceans Act* can be updated to facilitate the designation process for MPAs, based on science and public input. The Government is also examining what, if any, legislative changes could be made to improve Canada's process for designating protected areas.
- With respect to climate change, I would draw your attention to the February 2017 statement by federal, provincial and territorial ministers (www.scics.ca/en/product-produit/news-release-meeting-of-federal-provincial-territorial-ministers-responsible-for-conservation-wildlife-and-biodiversity) where they acknowledged that healthy, biologically diverse ecosystems help to reduce the vulnerability of communities to climate change and increase climate resilience. Ministers also acknowledged that the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience can negatively impact our efforts to address climate change. Given the interrelated nature of these two issues, ministers agreed to work together, and within their own respective jurisdictions, to ensure that our responses to the challenges posed by climate change and biodiversity loss are mutually supportive.

I commit to returning within the year with a report on actions taken, and to be taken, in response to the Committee's report, and I welcome any further advice the Committee wishes to offer based on additional consultation, research and analysis.

In closing, on behalf of the Government, I thank the Standing Committee members once again for their excellent work and more specifically, for their vision and commitment to ensuring our nation passes on its natural legacy for the benefit of future generations.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Environment and Climate Change