



# Allies for Nature

**A call for a Canada - U.S. agenda to support  
people and the planet**





# Introduction

There are times in the Canada-U.S. relationship when doors swing open to collaboration that will create a positive legacy for future generations. This is one of those times.

Canada and the United States share a vast natural heritage of earth and forests, rivers and lakes, wetlands, grasslands, and coastal areas across the world's longest international border. We share airways and trails, and a maze of corridors for spectacular annual migrations of whales, birds, caribou, and other wildlife.

Canada and the United States also share accelerating nature crises, as entire populations of species collapse, and the world inches closer to climate catastrophe.

Wildlife species don't know borders. They don't carry passports. Only 2,000 Monarch butterflies were counted this Winter in an area of California where millions used to migrate from Canada. There are precipitous declines in right whales, caribou, songbirds and many other species that cross our borders. Ecosystems such as forests and grasslands that safeguard our climate face increased threat from industrial expansion.

When biodiversity collapses, the web of animals and plants that support one another and our climate is torn apart until almost nothing can survive.

Canada and the United States share a responsibility to act.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has made the most important conservation commitment in Canadian history. He now has an ally in U.S. President Joe Biden, who has made significant commitments to goals shared by Canada for conservation, climate action, and species protection.

The doors are open to an alliance for nature.

Both governments have made the "30x30" pledge to conserve 30 per cent of land, freshwater and ocean by the year 2030. They both support Indigenous-led conservation. Nature-based climate solutions are on the agenda in each country.

Acting jointly on these commitments on both sides of the 9,000 km border would generate post-pandemic hope now and ensure a legacy for nature and for future generations.

There is an historic opportunity to work together to address the twin existential environmental crises of our time: species collapse and climate change.

Teaming up could also create a powerful influence on the international stage as the nature crisis joins climate at the top of the global environmental agenda.

Coordinated efforts to protect nature across Turtle Island, as some Indigenous peoples refer to North America, would help the whole planet.

A Canada-U.S. alliance could have a breakthrough impact for nature and the climate if bold joint action is pursued in three priority areas: Expand protections for ecological corridors and the species that rely on that habitat, support Indigenous-led conservation, and advance nature-based climate solutions.

Nature Canada urges Canada and the United States to build towards a joint declaration on an alliance to maximize nature's capacity to harbor biodiversity and safeguard our climate, and to establish the formal cooperation mechanisms that will move this agenda forward.



## An Alliance for Nature Agenda:

1. **Protect and connect ecological corridors**
2. **Support Indigenous rights and conservation**
3. **Advance nature-based climate solutions**

### 1. Protect and connect ecological corridors

Some of the world's most precious ecological corridors span the U.S. - Canada border, from mountain ranges in the West, to the Great Plains grasslands in the prairies, to seascapes off the three coasts and the boreal forest spanning Alaska to Newfoundland.

A Trudeau-Biden joint action plan to protect and reconnect fragmented corridors would support the safe movement of wildlife species for food, shelter, reproduction, and adaptation to a changing climate.

Nature can also be better protected by improving and coordinating stronger action through key policy and legal instruments. For example, rollbacks on migratory bird protections announced in the waning days of the Trump administration risk further declines in bird populations, which are already in free fall across North America, with three billion birds lost since 1970-- an overall decline of 29 percent in this period.

Potential priorities for increased cross-border conservation include:

- **Central and Eastern forest systems.**

The landscape between Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario and Adirondacks Park in New York State is important to many species at risk. There are protected areas between the two, but they are fragmented and need to be connected. Similarly, connecting and conserving areas within the forested, mountainous Northern Appalachian - Acadian region, stretching from New York to Nova Scotia, would support a rich web of wetlands, rivers, lakes, streams and bogs and the species that live in them.



- **Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative.** This project seeks to protect the mountain range habitat that is home to such iconic species as grizzly bears and golden eagles, from the Yellowstone National Park in the state of Wyoming up to the Yukon Territory in Canada.
- **The Great Plains Grassland ecosystem** spanning southern Canada to Mexico, is a globally significant swath of one of the most endangered landscapes on Earth, with significant potential for carbon storage and habitat for many species including the Central Flyway for migratory birds.
- **Three Shared Coastlines** provide significant opportunity to collaborate for protection of ocean corridors from sea floor to surface and revival of at-risk species. Resident orca whales live in waters from Alaska to central California. Endangered North Atlantic right whales swim more than 1,500 kilometres from feeding grounds in Canada to calve in warm waters in the southern United States.
- **Freshwater Rivers and Lakes.** Canada and the United States share the Great Lakes St. Lawrence ecosystem, home to 200 species at risk. The Columbia River, largest in the Pacific Northwest, flows into the Pacific Ocean. The Red River flows North from Minnesota to Lake Winnipeg. The Lake of the Woods and Rainy River Watershed spans the Ontario, Manitoba and Minnesota borders.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION:

- Invest in new and expanded protected networks of transboundary lands, freshwater and ocean to link fragmented corridors and preserve connected ecosystems as part of the pathway to meet 30x30 conservation goals.
- Coordinate joint measures to safeguard and recover species at risk such as the Porcupine Caribou herd, including protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- Prioritize and respond to conservation needs identified by existing binational governance bodies such as the International Joint Commission.
- Reinvigorate conservation action through the Commission for Environmental Cooperation and other North America wide mechanisms like the Grasslands Roadmap Summit, which brings together conservation groups, first nations, producers, and governments to plan and implement joint actions.
- Identify weaknesses and strengthen international agreements for nature protection such as the Migratory Birds Convention and the Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.
- Support cross-border networks of local groups working on conservation corridors and work to promote and restore international hiking trails like the Pacific Crest Trail.

## Support Indigenous rights and conservation

Supporting the rights of Indigenous peoples to govern and manage the lands and waters they have stewarded for millennia is central for reconciliation and the realization of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Across the globe, the areas of highest value for biodiversity and climate regulation are on lands managed or co-managed by Indigenous communities.

Learning from and collaborating with Indigenous governments and communities is therefore essential to Canada-U.S. cooperation in conserving large transboundary landscape corridors.

*“We need to create a new paradigm by braiding the best parts of traditional and scientific knowledge to change our relationship with each other and with Mother Earth.”* - Steven Nitah, Lutselk'e Dene First Nation leader.

The Canadian government supports the creation of Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Guardian programs. These programs, also recently started in Alaska, support Indigenous people to care for their lands and community using traditional knowledge and science.

*“The guardian programs literally transform people’s lives and communities,”* says forester Valerie Courtois, Director of the Indigenous Leadership Initiative. *“... By honoring the cultural responsibility to the land, Indigenous Peoples are strengthening our communities and expressing our nationhood.”*

President Biden has committed to working with tribal governments for conservation goals and appointed Rep. Deb Haaland, the first Native American cabinet secretary, to the Department of the Interior, the key office for establishing protected areas.

*“A voice like mine has never been a Cabinet secretary or at the head of the Department of Interior,”* she said in a message pinned to the top of her Twitter feed. *“Growing up in my mother’s Pueblo household made me fierce. I’ll be fierce for all of us, our planet, and all of our protected land. I am honored and ready to serve.”*



### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION:

- Support the establishment of Indigenous-protected areas and Guardian programs to manage these areas within the United States and Canada, including possible cross-border initiatives.
- Promote dialogue and learning across nations and borders on facilitation of Indigenous-led conservation and climate planning.

### 3. Advance nature-based climate solutions

We need to work together to connect the dots between the stress climate change is placing on species and ecosystems, and nature's capacity--from forests to farms--to store carbon.

Just as degradation of nature generates greenhouse gas emissions that fuel global warming, healthy forests, peat bogs, wetlands, grasslands, and oceans are also natural carbon sinks, absorbing and storing greenhouse gases. 'Blue carbon' ecosystems, such as saltmarsh and seagrass, may sequester carbon at higher rates than terrestrial ecosystems.

Restoring and defending these natural habitats helps prevent wildlife loss, cools cities, and boosts resilience against sea-level rise, river flooding, extreme fire weather and severe land degradation.

The Canadian government has made protecting and restoring nature a pillar of its climate policy, starting with investing \$3.9 billion over ten years to unlock the power of nature to reduce emissions, notably by planting two billion trees over a decade. This is just the beginning of what's needed.

Canada and Mexico have already worked closely for two years co-leading the "*nature-based solution action track*" for the Global Commission on Adaptation initiative<sup>1</sup> created to bring attention to nature's role in climate adaptation.

President Biden's executive orders on climate change also feature nature-based solutions, citing the need to limit greenhouse gas emissions related to land-use change, forests, and agriculture and recognizing the importance of reducing emissions from sectors like forestry to meet decarbonization goals.

Canada and the United States must reform the way they monitor, calculate, and report emissions from industrial logging to better represent the industry's impact and to place the industry under a carbon pricing regime to encourage climate-friendlier logging practices. This has particular application in the Canadian Boreal forest, which contains over 300 billion tons of carbon-- as much carbon as the world emits over 36 years.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/adapting/plans/action-nature-based-solutions-climate-adaptation.html>

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION:

- Invest in transboundary restoration and protection initiatives that make ocean and freshwater coasts more resilient to climate change while increasing the carbon sequestration ability of ecosystems like wetlands, grasslands, forests, saltmarsh and seagrass.
- Undertake a joint commitment to fully capture and mitigate carbon impacts in North America's forests through improved forest management, monitoring and accounting. This should include joint investments in on-the-ground monitoring and the establishment of a bilateral commission of policymakers and experts to harmonize forest carbon monitoring, accounting and science on the basis of best scientific and international practices.





## Conclusion - An Alliance for Nature Agenda

President Biden's commitments to nature protection, nature-based climate solutions and work with Tribal governments to protect land and water open a significant opportunity to breathe new life into shared goals with Canada on conservation, climate change, and species protection in North America and on the international stage.

At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the United Nations established the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

A generation later, climate change is a household word and most governments in the world are working toward negotiated targets to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that fuel global warming.

The visibility of the nature crisis is on the rise. Its time has come. The two goals, protecting biodiversity and addressing climate change, are inextricably linked.

Prime Minister Trudeau can encourage President Biden to sign the biodiversity convention and to join Canada and other members of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People and the Global Ocean Alliance.

These groups of like-minded countries champion the 30x30 target of conserving 30 percent of the world's land, water, and ocean for adoption in a Global Biodiversity Framework at the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the convention on biological diversity scheduled for this year in Kunming, China.

Prime Minister Trudeau and President Biden would be well positioned to work together in these coalitions and set a powerful example by establishing their own binational alliance for nature agenda.

The goals of the agenda should be to conserve large landscapes and seascapes, support Indigenous-led conservation, and invest in nature-based climate solutions.

A joint declaration on a Canada-U.S. alliance for nature could be a top feature of Prime Minister Trudeau's first meeting with President Biden, and these issues should feature prominently at the upcoming Leaders' Climate Summit that Biden is hosting on Earth Day, April 22, 2021.

These two countries are unique as G-7 powers with significant marine and terrestrial ecosystems whose protection can make a major contribution to the preservation of life on Earth.



**A Canada-U.S. Alliance for Nature: An agenda for action to advance shared goals for nature and wildlife, Indigenous-led conservation, and climate change.**

**1. Protect and connect ecological corridors**

- Invest in restoring and protecting fragmented ecosystems to slow animal and plant species loss along the great wildlife migratory corridors of Canada and the United States.
- Protect 30 percent of U.S. and Canadian land, freshwater and ocean by 2030 to set a powerful example for global biodiversity goals and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that fuel climate change.

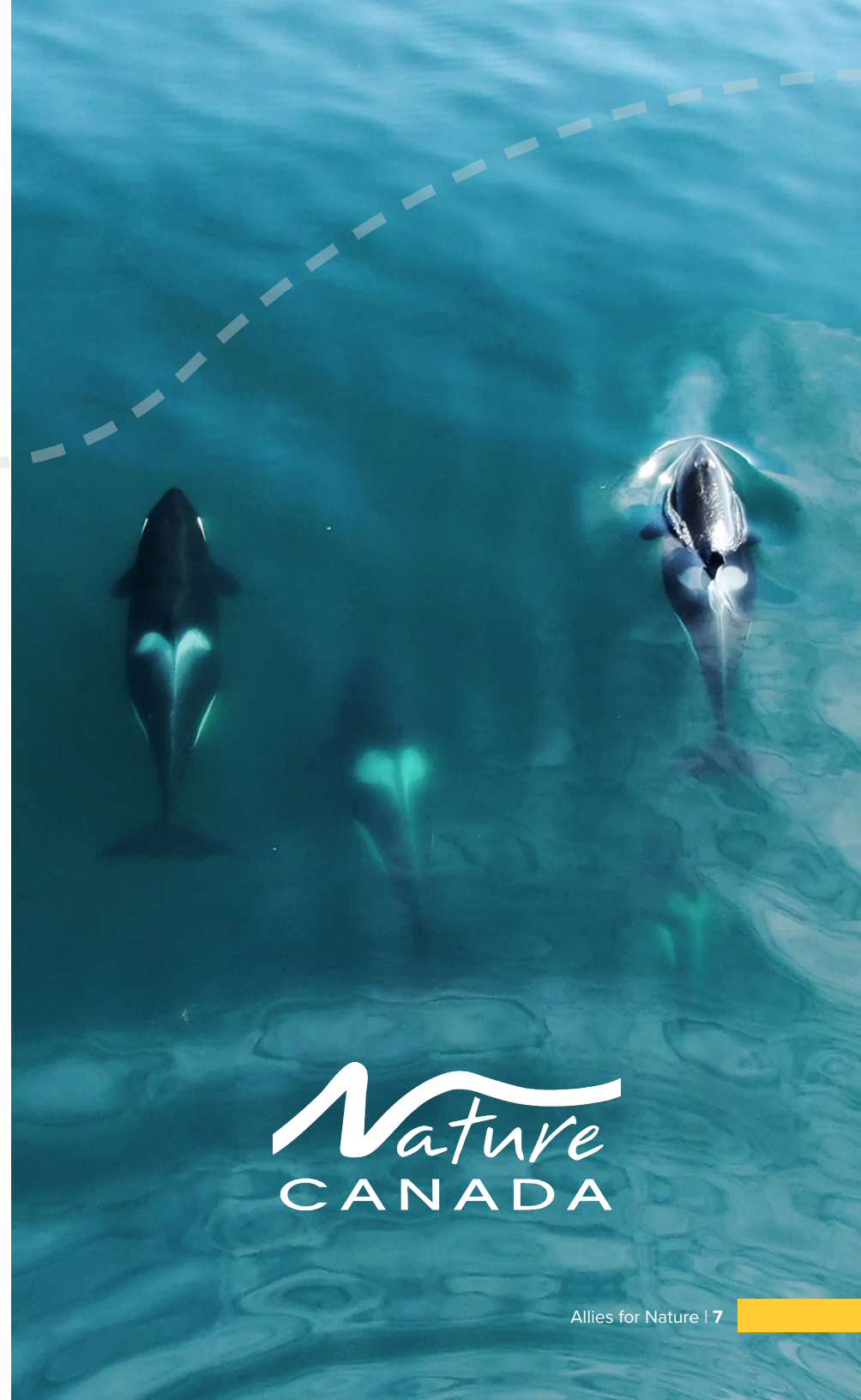
**2. Support Indigenous Rights and Conservation**

- Support the rights of Indigenous peoples through the establishment of Indigenous-protected and conserved areas and Guardian programs, and promote dialogue and sharing of best practices across borders and nations.

**3. Advance nature-based climate solutions**

- Restore degraded ecosystems in wetlands, grasslands, forests, and oceans to increase their power to absorb and store greenhouse gas emissions that fuel global warming.
- Harmonize improvements in forest management and carbon emissions accounting on the basis of best scientific and international practices.

**A joint declaration on a Canada-U.S. alliance for nature should be a top feature of Prime Minister Trudeau's first meeting with President Biden. These issues should feature prominently at the virtual international Leaders' Climate Summit that President Biden is hosting on Earth Day, April 22, 2021.**



**Nature**  
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