

The Provinces' Environmental Mishmash: We Need Federal Legislation with Teeth

By Monica Guetre

This year, I hope we really take many moments to stop, observe and listen. I hope that we really see what we are doing and incorporate conscience action into protecting our waterways and our land.

I really hope that this year is the turning point and we never have to say, "I remember those great old days like walking through tall wild grass prairie or through shaded woods; paddling a canoe or skipping a stone across a crystal clear lake that we could actually drink from; hearing loons calling to each... Those were the days we could walk into so many natural wonders."

Our reminiscing could end up being a family get together sharing pictures of our travels or posting on-line the lost natural beauty so that the next generation has an inkling of what they missed out because they were born a bit too late.

In December 2022, during the UN biodiversity conference COP15 in Montreal, about 20,000 delegates from more than 190 countries put forward their ideas and concerns on what the UN has declared as a universal human right: "Healthy Environment".

At the agreement's most basic level it is all about how we treat each other, our families, communities, seniors, children, the most vulnerable; our in-between spaces that should remain wild for all living creatures, and use that as a measurement of our self worth individually and as a country. It means walking the talk.

Many of us believe in this basic healthy environment principle and many of us live this philosophy daily. This very basic right to a healthy environment has evolved as our understanding of how we fit in has evolved.

This basic "Right" has been expressed by many over decades and even for thousands of years when First Nations arrived in this land. You could say Canadians are lucky because we have about 20,000 years of accessible knowledge; we just have to listen and brush up on our curiosity skills.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, "Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty." He also said, "The indifference, callousness and contempt that so many people exhibit toward animals is evil first because it results in great suffering in animals, and second because it results in an incalculably great impoverishment of the human spirit."

The COP15 meeting has Canada committing to working in collaboration with Indigenous partners, the provinces and territories, stakeholders, and other levels of government to reach its goals of creating 10 new national parks and conserving 25% of lands and waters by 2025, and 30% of each by 2030. The consensus goal is to conserve one third of our water and land. Canada got off easy as our nation currently has a low population density

Now the bigger questions arise. What third and how do you maintain biodiversity if it's only in areas already sparsely populated or carve out protected geographical areas disconnected from each other? How do we protect the ocean along our the coasts from international encroachment or from industry, municipalities

and residents dumping their waste water, chemicals and so much trash when we don't enforce existing provincial-territorial and federal regulations?

Even a former Prime Minister was involved in a secret project to store nuclear waste in Labrador, one of the top natural wonders of this country.

Yes, if we make radioactive waste, we have to store it safely for a very, very, very long time so that it does no harm. But instead of being secretive and non-transparent when energy comes with baggage, maybe we should find solutions to solve our energy making that isn't associated with high pollution potential. Make it clear, we are no longer in the business of using our tax dollars for another non-renewable, non-sustainable and polluting energy choice.

A major discovery last month could provide renewable clean energy essentially forever when the National Ignition Facility (NIF) in the US harnessed nuclear fusion for the first time. If scaleable, this is a game changer.

From now on governments need to move forward and focus our very limited tax dollars to support healthy environments that embrace renewable energy to meet zero emission and zero pollution targets.

Our Canadian track record is dismal on health environments. In the 6th National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity which is an overview of our progress to meet the 2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets. While it says we are on track to meet 11 targets plus the marine and coastal portion of Target 1, we are progressing at an insufficient rate to meet 6 other targets plus the terrestrial and inland waters portion of Targets.

Without Federal legislation that actually has teeth and protects all of Canada from ourselves and international global forces how do we put the brakes on our needs for competing land uses, pollution, population growth and our human activities?

It would be great if our politicians not only say the words but make it a reality in cross-party legislation. Just say no instead. Stop wasting tax dollars with another report that's been done hundreds of times in some other form over many decades.

Francis of Assisi, said, "If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men."

I hope you agree it is much easier and rewarding to work alongside "mother nature", than against her.

I hope this year, you and your family have the chance to experience Canada, and please remember leave no trace that you were there so that others can enjoy her beauty too.