



SUBMISSION TO:
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON FINANCE
PRE-BUDGET (2015) CONSULTATION

Executive Summary

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) would like to thank the Standing Committee on Finance for the opportunity to participate in the 2015 pre-budget consultation process. This submission falls under theme number four of the consultation guidelines, “ensuring prosperous and secure communities, including through the support of infrastructure.”

The Nature Conservancy of Canada applauds the government’s on-going commitment to investing in our natural infrastructure through the Natural Areas Conservation Program (NACP). We believe conservation efforts such as the Natural Areas Conservation Program contribute to our country’s sustained economic recovery and enhanced growth while conserving our natural heritage and our working landscapes.

In real economic terms, Canada’s natural infrastructure provides valuable goods and services, such as cleaning our air and water, flood control and carbon storage. Conservation “infrastructure” is essential for thriving communities, robust employment and economic growth. An investment in our natural infrastructure directly contributes to Canadian quality of life, our standard of living, and makes Canada an attractive country in which to invest, live, work and play.

A Canadian Success Story

Here in Canada, we are lucky to have spectacular natural landscapes from coast to coast to coast. Our natural heritage is at the heart of Canada’s national identity. A recent poll conducted for the Nature Conservancy of Canada found that 94 percent of Canadians value the natural areas close to their homes. In fact, 75 percent believe there aren’t enough protected places close to where they live.

With the recognition that preserving our natural infrastructure is a priority, the Government of Canada launched the Natural Areas Conservation Program in 2007. To date, the federal government has invested \$245 million in the program. This investment has been more than matched by Canadians, the private sector and other governments to drive more than \$600 million in conservation activity to date. Recently, the government announced a further commitment of \$100 million to the program under the new National Conservation Plan.

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The Natural Areas Conservation Program is a unique public-private partnership which invests in direct on-the-ground action. The results speak for themselves:

- Since the program's inception, the equivalent of more than 900 NHL sized hockey rinks have been conserved each day;
- Public funding has been leveraged to achieve more than \$600 million in conservation activity since the program's inception;
- Conservation efforts have led to the provision of natural habitat for more than 165 species at risk and over 450 species of conservation concern;
- Today, more than 80 percent of Canadians live within 100 km of a Natural Areas Conservation Program project; and,
- The Program has enabled the government to build on its record of establishing and expanding parks and protected areas, and conserving important areas in Canada's working landscapes.

Through the NACP, the Nature Conservancy of Canada engages in conservation projects that are the result of negotiated, win-win arrangements with willing landowners. The Program is a Canadian success story, delivering measurable results and maximum value for the taxpayer dollar through unique public-private partnerships. These conservation partnerships offer a cost-effective way to protect Canada's natural infrastructure and ensure prosperous and healthy communities.

Ensuring Economic Prosperity through Conservation

Canada has led the world in its recovery from the global economic recession. But we must remain vigilant if we are to achieve a full recovery and enhanced, sustainable economic growth.

At the Nature Conservancy of Canada, we believe that it is possible to realize the goal of sustained economic growth while conserving our natural heritage and our working landscapes. In fact, we believe that the two are inextricably linked.

In real economic terms, nature provides valuable goods and services, such as cleaning our air and water, flood control and carbon storage. Conserving these services is essential for thriving communities, robust employment and economic growth. Land conservation directly contributes to our quality of life.

Our natural heritage is one of Canada's competitive advantages. It is woven into our Canadian identity and brand. The accessibility of our natural areas to major Canadian centres contributes to our high standard of living and makes Canada an attractive country in which to invest. Conservation also contributes to a healthy environment which, in turn, is a foundation for a strong economy.

The Natural Areas Conservation Program has connected more Canadians than ever to Canada's conservation mission. To date, nearly 4,000 km² have been conserved in southern Canada – where Canadians live, work and play.

Our conservation partners come from all walks of life and corners of Canada: individuals, landowners, communities, provincial governments, other conservation organizations, First Nations, and industry. They have worked with us, through the Program, to create win-win solutions from coast to coast to coast. In fact, many of our projects allow for both conservation and productive use of the land (such as ranching) to co-exist.

National Conservation Plan (NCP)

In May 2014, the Government of Canada took another important step to support land conservation and engage Canadians, with the launch of the National Conservation Program (NCP). Under the NCP, the federal government has committed to renewing the Natural Areas Conservation Program with an additional \$100 million in funding over five years. The Nature Conservancy of Canada thanks the government for its continued commitment to this Canadian success story.

The National Conservation Plan focuses on three priorities: Conserve, Restore and Connect.

1. **Conserve:** The NCP works to conserve Canada's lands and waters, by safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity and ecosystems through conservation and stewardship actions, including on working landscapes and seascapes.
2. **Restore:** The Plan also works to restore Canada's ecosystems: it supports the restoration of degraded ecosystems, which, once restored, will provide habitat for wildlife and clean water, and are essential for the protection and recovery of species at risk.
3. **Connect:** The NCP works to connect Canadians to nature, leveraging existing successful initiatives to help foster an appreciation for nature and building a "community of stewards" among Canadians of all ages.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada seeks to engage with Canadians so that they can understand the impact that conservation efforts have on our quality of life and natural infrastructure. To this end, NCC encourages Canadians to take "Time for Nature," to see the benefits of connecting with our natural world. Our community of stewards includes our energetic Conservation Volunteers, who annually give more than 10,000 hours of labour to care for our conserved lands; our interns, who are tomorrow's conservation leaders; and the thousands of Canadians who simply enjoy the recreational haven of our conserved lands. Together we are supporting Canada's natural infrastructure to ensure that we leave a legacy for our children that is worth inheriting. Generations to come will see that our conservation efforts enable cleaner air and water to nurture the environment, populating Canada's beautiful landscapes with great blue herons in New Brunswick, grizzly bears in Alberta and waterfowl in Ontario. Canadian children will see that we left our country a better place than we found it, and will carry on the conservation tradition to ensure a greener and prosperous Canada for those that come after them.

Creating a National Inventory of Protected Spaces

Creating a national inventory of protected spaces is an important component for Canada as it works towards meeting its goals under the proposed 2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. In particular, Target 11 requires that by 2020, at least 17 percent of our land and freshwater be conserved in well-managed, well-connected protected areas or other effective area-based conservation measures. Canada will need a comprehensive inventory of protected spaces that includes private conservation as we measure our progress towards these targets. In support of this effort, the government recently allocated \$3.2 million over five years for the development of a complete national inventory of conserved areas in Canada.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada applauds this initiative, and is ready to assist the Government of Canada and work with partner organizations to create a comprehensive inventory of protected spaces and enhance our ability to report on our collective conservation efforts. We believe this project will be an important step to understand the broad diversity of conservation areas that exist across Canada, and help us share information on Canada's conservation progress with Canadians and the international community.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada would like to extend an invitation to members of the Standing Committee on Finance to join our "Time for Nature" initiative and visit one of the beautiful sites protected by the NCC under the Natural Areas Conservation Plan. It is a great opportunity to see the tremendous results that come from investing in our natural infrastructure, improving our quality of life, and growing our economy.

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