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Strong Nature Accountability Act would serve as a litmus test of Canada's pledge to protect nature

From October 21 to November 1, 2024, the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will take place in Cali, Colombia. The hope for this conference is to build on the momentum of COP15 which was hosted in Montreal at the end of 2022. COP16 is often referred to as 'the implementation COP', where necessary progress needs to be made to implement the landmark [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (KM GBF).

By championing and signing that deal, Canada committed to protecting 30% of lands and oceans by 2030 (30x30), while respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, despite all the big promises made, the federal government is still significantly lagging in their implementation. By the end of 2023, Canada [had only conserved](#) 13.7% of its terrestrial area and 14.7% of its marine territories.

In fact, the federal government has a track record of failed nature commitments. None of the previously agreed biodiversity targets, which include international commitments under the 1992 Convention for Biological Diversity as well as targets under the 2010 Aichi Protocol to the Convention, [has been fully](#) achieved.

Therefore, passing a **strong nature law** would serve as a key indicator of the Canadian government's global nature protection commitments. However, the recently [introduced](#) Nature Accountability Act (C-73) falls short of guaranteeing that Canada will fulfill its international obligations to stop and reverse the loss of nature this time around. In order for Canada to be in alignment with its nature protection obligations, the bill must:

- Set comprehensive national targets for 2030, 2040, 2050, and beyond 2050;
- Provide regular reporting on progress and accountability mechanisms;
- Ensure a whole-of-government approach to nature protection and impose a biodiversity "shield" that would apply to every federal authority's approval process;
- Guarantee everyone's right to a healthy environment;
- Acknowledge, strengthen and ensure the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to their lands and waters, including the [right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent \(FPIC\)](#), as expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Without these essential inclusions, this proposed Act risks failing to serve its intended purpose of putting Canada on track to achieving its global nature protection targets.

In addition to this, the Canadian government must recognize the interconnected root causes and solutions of the biodiversity and climate crises and ensure they are tackled together. While nature's destruction accelerates, people all over the world feel the combined impacts of the climate and biodiversity crises: loss of access to food and water, public health crises, injustice, and displacement.

An ambitious and successful implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at COP16 is essential to reverse biodiversity loss globally and mitigate the consequences of the climate crisis on people and the planet. In the transition to the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29), which will take place from November 11 to 22 in Azerbaijan, we need a unifying, systemic approach that mandates action between biodiversity conservation and restoration with climate action and justice.

Ultimately, the implementation of the GBF at COP16 and the passing of the Nature Accountability Act need to be about shifting power from extractive industries to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Further, in its approach to nature protection, Canada must address environmental racism and ensure an even access to nature and environmental benefits by Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities in Canada.

Passing a comprehensive act at home will serve as the ultimate litmus test of the federal government's leadership and commitment to protecting nature on land and at sea.

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