

Biodiversity in crisis

THREE THINGS NOVA SCOTIA CAN DO RIGHT NOW

by EAC STAFF

Photo: Raymond Plourde



Photo: Michelle Paul

The UN's recent report on the state of the world's biodiversity sounds an alarm and call to action, matching the scale and urgency of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s recent climate report. More than one million species are at risk of extinction in our lifetime, and the trends that have pushed them to the brink continue.

The 2019 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services calls for “transformative change” at every level of society. Yet, in Nova Scotia, we're still not acting on some of the simplest changes that can help protect people and the planet.

In the face of the important warnings in the IPBES report, the Ecology Action Centre has put forward the following recommendations for three immediate actions Nova Scotia can take.

1 Biodiversity conservation through protected areas

The number one cause of biodiversity loss is “changes in land and sea use” - in other words, habitat loss. This often happens when natural habitat is permanently converted to something else (like a parking lot).

Protected areas are places where natural habitats are protected from natural resource extraction where and conservation of nature comes first. These areas are anchors of biodiversity, hold the greatest concentrations of wildlife, and provide ecosystem services like water purification. We need more of them for all species to survive.

Nova Scotia has the ability to take immediate action on biodiversity loss — meet its long-promised goal of reaching at least 13 per cent of Nova Scotia as protected areas.

Karen McKendry, Wilderness Outreach Coordinator at EAC, says getting to 13 per cent is one of the easiest actions the government can take right now to help address biodiversity loss and climate change.

“The lands that need to be protected to get to 13 per cent have already been identified, assessed, and consulted on,” McKendry says, “These critical nature areas are simply awaiting designation by cabinet.”

TAKE ACTION

Call on Minister of Environment Gordon Wilson, and the Premier, to designate lands already picked out in the Parks & Protected Areas Plan.

2 Stewards of our Earth

As the IPBES report recognizes, the world's Indigenous Peoples are responsible for stewarding 80 per cent of Earth's biodiversity. As report authors describe, the trends of extinction that are rife across the planet “have been less severe or avoided in areas help or managed by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities.”

Here in Nova Scotia, Mi'kmaq ways of knowing remain critically important to biodiversity protection. However, treaty rights have not been respected and rights holders have often been left out of mainstream biodiversity protection efforts.

To take meaningful action on biodiversity loss and climate change in Nova Scotia, we need to respect and heed Mi'kmaq rights holders when they assert Treaty to protect sensitive ecosystems from the threats posed by dirty energy projects including the Alton Natural Gas Storage Project.

“Projects like Alton Gas that do not have the consent of Mi'kmaq Nation should not continue to have the support of Federal and Provincial governments,” says Sadie Beaton, Community Conservation Research Coordinator at the EAC.

TAKE ACTION

Support frontline Mi'kmaq land defenders and water protectors, including the Alton Gas resistance, by donating, and by amplifying their voices.

Formally protecting land already slated for protection. Supporting folks on the front line of protecting water and land in this province. Participating in, and supporting the expansion of, existing programs that help increase energy efficiency while saving money. These are Nova Scotia's low-hanging fruit when it comes to taking meaningful action against the biodiversity crisis.

“We need to ask why our province isn't taking these steps to protect people and the planet,” McKendry says.

This piece was originally written in recognition of International Biodiversity Day. Staff contributors include Karen McKendry, Sadie Beaton, Joanna Bull, Sam Fraser, Gillian Wesley, and Emma Norton.

3 Climate change and biodiversity loss are linked

Climate change is now one of the main drivers of the current mass extinction event. Whole ecosystems are changing due to the over-abundance of greenhouse gasses we continue to expel into the atmosphere.

The International Energy Association estimates that 49 per cent of GHG emissions reductions needed to stay below two degrees will come from energy efficiency.

“It's the largest slice of the climate solution pie,” says Emma Norton, Energy Conservation Coordinator at the EAC.

In Nova Scotia, our power utility is legislated to buy the most cost-effective form of energy available. “The most cost-effective form of energy available to them is energy efficiency. That's why every year Nova Scotia Power buys energy efficiency from Efficiency Nova Scotia,” Norton says.

Energy efficiency is something Nova Scotians can tackle at home — Efficiency Nova Scotia offers free programs to help people get energy saving light bulbs and pipe insulation. In addition, Efficiency Nova Scotia and the Clean Foundation offer HomeWarming, a program that provides free energy assessments and home energy upgrades to low-income homeowners to reduce energy poverty in Nova Scotia.

“Nova Scotia's HomeWarming program provides low-income homeowners with free energy upgrades to their homes so that they can save an average of between \$600 and \$1,000 each year. Other programs offered by Efficiency Nova Scotia subsidize or finance energy efficiency upgrades for Nova Scotians so that larger projects are more affordable for more people,” Norton says.

TAKE ACTION

Ask the province to commit to tripling energy efficiency in Nova Scotia's electricity sector by 2030. Visit ecologyaction.ca/egspa to click-to-send an email asking Premier McNeil to set strong climate goals like this one today!