

One of World's Largest Conservation Commitments: Ontario to preserve one-half of its Boreal Forest, more than 55 million acres

Nobel Prize Winning Climate and Conservation Scientists Call Visionary Plan to Protect Vast Canadian Boreal Forest Unprecedented

(Seattle, Wash.) – As news spreads of Ontario's commitment to protect over 55 million acres of Canada's Boreal Forest, an area the size of the United Kingdom, leading international scientists and conservationists are expressing their strong support for Premier Dalton McGuinty's science-based leadership.

"Premier McGuinty has set a new standard for Canada and the rest of the world for land conservation by committing to one of the world's largest conservation plans," said Dr. Joshua Reichert, managing director of the Pew Environment Group. "Ontario's commitment to set aside half of its Boreal Forest helps ensure the long-term integrity of a vital ecosystem. This is truly a conservation milestone."

Ontario's plan to protect 50 percent of its Boreal Forest is considered a conservation science first and the size of this commitment is unprecedented in North American history. "This is the kind of bold leadership and large-scale thinking that the world needs as we confront the challenges of global warming," said Dr. Terry Root of Stanford University. Dr. Root is a lead author for the United Nations' International Panel on Climate Change, which was awarded last year's Nobel Peace Prize. "Solutions to ensuring the survival of species and ecosystems as they are forced to move north to adapt to our warming planet require protection of very large unfragmented blocks of habitat like what we see in northern Ontario. And making these areas off limits to industrial uses helps ensure that the carbon there now doesn't get released and make things worse," added Dr. Root.

The announcement widely cited the recommendations made by 1,500 scientists to the Canadian Government last May to set aside at least half of Canada's Boreal Forest in large, interconnected protected areas to guard against climate change and protect internationally significant wildlife populations. (see <http://www.borealbirds.org/scienceletter.shtml>) These concerned scientists, led in part by Dr. Root, include some of the world's most notable ecologists, climatologists, and conservation biologists.

Scientists identify the 1.4 billion-acre Canadian Boreal Forest as one of the world's most significant and largest intact forest and wetland ecosystems. The Boreal Forest:

- Is the world's single-largest terrestrial carbon storehouse. The Canadian Boreal Forest alone stores 186 billion tons of carbon – equivalent to 27 years of the world's carbon dioxide fossil fuel emissions.
- Contains the majority of North America's fresh, unfrozen water.
- Hosts some of the planet's largest populations of wolves, grizzly bear and woodland caribou.

- Provides nesting grounds and nursery for billions of migratory songbirds and waterfowl; half of North America's birds are dependent on Canada's Boreal Forest for their survival.

"The province of Ontario should be congratulated in its vision for setting aside so much essential habitat for Boreal species," said Dr. Stuart Pimm, Doris Duke Chair of Conservation Ecology at Duke University. "In its commitment to protect 50 percent of its remaining intact forest, Ontario is setting an example for the rest of Canada and, indeed, for other countries to follow."

Dr. David Schindler, winner of the 1991 Stockholm Water Prize, water sciences' equivalent to the Nobel Prize, added, "Premier McGuinty has long-term vision, recognizing that storing carbon, protecting biodiversity, and traditional lifestyles and maintaining freshwater supplies are more important than immediate profits. Now the rest of Canada must set aside equivalent areas. The rapid disappearance of the Boreal Forest is of particular concern in Alberta, where oil sands development, logging, and mining exploration have damaged much of the Boreal outside of Wood Buffalo National Park, a United Nations World Heritage Site."

Scientists worldwide recommend that a target of 50 percent protection of an ecosystem is necessary to sustain it over the long term. Overall, only 10 percent of Canada's Boreal Forest is currently protected. "Ontario's announcement of its intent to protect 55 million acres of Boreal forest is a breath of fresh air to a world besieged by stories of biodiversity loss," said Dr. Peter Raven, president of the Missouri Botanical Garden. "It is especially noteworthy that Ontario followed the recommendations of scientists in setting its conservation goals and one would hope that it is a precedent for the world to follow."

For the past decade, the Pew Environment Group, through its Canadian Boreal Initiative project, has been working with First Nations, industry, government and conservationists to preserve Canada's Boreal Forest, an internationally significant ecosystem for the world's climate and biodiversity. Industrial development, including logging, mining and oil and gas extraction threaten Canada's Boreal Forest.

For more information,
Visit the blog of Jeff Wells, Senior Scientist, Boreal Songbird Initiative
<http://www.borealbirds.org/blog/?p=102>

Send a thank-you note to Ontario's government at: www.borealbirds.org.

Additional Background:
Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty's announcement widely cites scientific recommendations, see
<http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/Product.asp?ProductID=2353>.

Ontario's announcement underscores the significance of the Canadian Boreal Forest's global role as a carbon storehouse and the importance of leaving that carbon in place by restricting disturbance. For further background and mapping of carbon in Canada's Boreal Forest see <http://www.borealbirds.org/resources/factsheet-IBCC-globalwarming.pdf>

Additional information background and maps available on
www.interboreal.org.