

**Courage My Friends Podcast Series III – Episode 8**  
**COP15 and 30x30 Part I: How Do We Make Good on Our Global Commitment to Reverse the Tide of Biodiversity Loss and Mass Extinction?**

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**ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.

*Needs No Introduction* is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

[music transition]

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

**STREET VOICE 1:** I was already worried about my job, food and housing. So now I have to worry about healthcare as well?

**STREET VOICE 2:** Seems like we wanna jump back to normalcy so bad that we're not even trying to be careful at this point.

**STREET VOICE 3:** This is a 911 kind of situation for global climate crisis. This planet is our only home and billionaires space-race is not a solution. The earth is crying for survival. It is time for action.

[music]

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

**VOICE 4:** Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

**COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER:** This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

**RESH:** What led us into the present age of biodiversity loss and mass extinction? Are we on track to halt and reverse this crisis by 2030? What is the role of Indigenous-led conservation? What is the significance of Ontario's Greenbelt? Can growing urban centers co-exist with the urgent need to protect and conserve the natural environment?

I'm your host, Resh Budhu.

In this two-part episode of The Courage My Friends podcast, *COP15 and 30x30: How Do We Make Good on Our Global Commitment to Reverse the Tide of Biodiversity Loss and Mass Extinction?*, Executive Director of Environmental Defence, Tim Gray and National Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and

Wilderness Society or CPAWS, Sandra Schwartz, discuss the crisis of biodiversity loss and mass extinction, Canada's commitments under COP15's Kunming-Montreal Global Agreement and challenges and strategies toward meeting the very ambitious and even more necessary 2030 target.

Sandra and Tim, welcome. Thanks so much for joining us.

**TIM:** Oh, thanks for having me.

**SANDRA:** Thanks for having us.

**RESH:** Sandra, I want to begin with you. Could you give us a quick definition of biodiversity and what is the scale of biodiversity loss that's facing us right now?

**SANDRA:** So, we are experiencing unprecedented impacts of biodiversity loss and climate change, where arguably they are now two of the top global crises that the world is facing.

Each of the crises exacerbates the other and because both ultimately are going to devastate nature and living conditions for people, if those conditions are left unchecked.

I'm not sure how to give sort of a scientific definition. And Tim certainly might be able to add to what I'll say. But it essentially is what is the lifeblood of the planet. It is everything from the mosses and lichens to insects to our furry friends and what we often call mega fauna, things like polar bears, everything in the oceans from plankton and the water itself.

If we don't have rich biodiversity, we ultimately can't survive as a species on this planet. Humans are part of biodiversity too, and I think we often fail to remember as humans that we ultimately are part of nature. And so what we do to nature, we ultimately are doing to ourselves.

**TIM:** I think something else that people just need to remember is that when you're speaking about biodiversity, you're talking about the variety of all life on Earth. So that's all the organisms that Sandra was describing, but it's also all of the variety within those organisms. So this is all the genetic diversity that exists. It's all the population-level diversity. And it's really important that all of that be conserved as well.

I think quite often when we're thinking about protecting populations of plants or animals, we think, oh, if we have a few of them left, you know, that's okay. But it's actually really, really important to maintain large, viable populations of these plants and animals or mushrooms or fungi, bacteria, etc. in order for them to be able to persist over the long-term.

What happens when we lose that diversity of life on Earth? That diversity, both of the individual creatures, but also that genetic diversity, is that the ability of any of these, plants or animals to survive into the future is compromised. I mean, you can think of it in terms of humans. If there was only a few of us on the planet, just how few varieties of genes there would be. And if something came along, a disease or a virus, something like we've just gone through that was particularly deadly, you could actually lose the entire population.

So as we really reduce wildlife populations, plant populations around the planet, one of the big risks is they're compromising their ability to persist into the future.

**RESH:** And you know, the numbers around this loss are pretty staggering, right? So what we're hearing is, about a million plant and animal species are on the brink of extinction. In a recent BBC interview, Elizabeth Mrema, Executive Secretary of the UN Convention on Biodiversity also gave some figures - that we have altered the world environment by 97%. This means 75% of all lands, 66% of marine ecosystems, 50% of coral reefs have died. 85% of wetlands have been degraded.

This is very much core to the mission of CPAWS, Sandra. And I wonder if you could just tell us a bit about the work and the mission of CPAWS.

**SANDRA:** Yeah, so thanks for that question. I think the stark reality and the staggering numbers you're talking about, the UN has reported recently, like you said, that around a million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction. And that is really within a few decades. That's more than ever before in human history. And that's largely a result of human interaction with nature. So whether that is from exploration, from mining for example, forestry, essentially, you know, any time humans interact with nature, there is going to be some loss. Now, that's not to suggest that all those species necessarily all disappear. But in land-based habitats, there has been at least a 20% decline since the turn of the 19th or 20th century, pardon me, since the 1900s.

And there was a recent report done just here in Canada on species loss. And that report that was done by both federal as well as provincial governments, all the governments working together, showed that one in five species in Canada is threatened with extinction.

So 20% sounds a lot lower, but when you put it into the stark reality of 1 in 5, that's astronomical in terms of numbers. So clearly we need to act now to save the natural world, because it is sustaining us as humans.

CPAWS is the only charity nationally that is dedicated to the protection of public lands, freshwater and ocean. And we have a strong national and regional presence across the country. We have chapters in all regions, from the North through to the West and East, and everything in between. We work in a way that respects the sovereignty and leadership of Indigenous nations, and we focus on conserving nature to respond to the dual crises of accelerated biodiversity loss and climate change.

So our vision as an organization is that at least half of land, freshwater and ocean in Canada is permanently protected in order to sustain nature and people for both current and future generations. And the important part there is permanency. We can't underscore enough the importance of permanence. You can't just do it for a little bit of time. It has to be permanently in order to protect nature long-term.

**RESH:** And Tim, I wonder if you could also speak to some of the main drivers of biodiversity loss in Canada.

**TIM:** Yeah, I think in Canada a lot of our population, of course, is concentrated in southern Ontario, lower mainland of British Columbia, southern parts of prairie provinces. And so what we see in terms of biodiversity loss is greatest in those areas. And that underscores the need for action to protect the remaining wildlands, forest wetlands, etc. that exists in these areas. And also to restore them because their long-term survival is threatened just by the rarity of both the species and the ecosystems within those areas.

Resource extraction, conversion of forests and wetlands to agriculture, urban development. Those are the main drivers in those landscapes.

If you move, further north, the changes to biodiversity, losses of species abundance, actual loss of species from the landscape, tends to be more related to resource extraction. Forestry, logging for example. Mining impacts on particular watersheds, etc.

The further north you go, of course the human settlement footprint is lighter in Canada. But because of our rapacious demand for resources, the human footprint extends far, far beyond the boundaries of where we live. In fact at a global scale, it's estimated that we're consuming about two and a half hectares, per person, per year of resources. And the productivity of the planet is about 1.6.

So we're, you know, kind of about 75% over-consuming on a planetary scale. And of course, the Canadian individual's contribution to that over-consumption, like that of Americans or Europeans, is much, much higher than people living in countries that are not as developed and are not such rapacious consumers of consumer goods, energy, etc.

So, we really are overreaching the capacity of the system and what we see in terms of biodiversity loss, both domestically and internationally, parallels what we see in terms of changes to the climate from producing too much carbon dioxide and putting that into the atmosphere. So these are twin crises that really, at a fundamental level, have the same cause.

**SANDRA:** I think it's also important to recognize that there's also direct exploitation of organisms globally. So whether that's for certain medicinal uses or cultural practices, that is an issue.

Climate change is one of the direct drivers of change in nature, as is pollution. So we have to remember that these things are all sort of interconnected. And so as we're looking for solutions both for climate as well as for biodiversity loss, we need to think of these two pieces together so that we aren't driving a worse situation for one or the other.

When we're talking about as an example, the significant alteration of the marine environment, what's interesting to note - and I think where there's a lot of opportunity within the Canadian context - is the trends for alteration of both land and sea, tend to be less severe when they are held or managed by Indigenous Peoples or local communities.

**RESH:** Absolutely. Just to mention that this is the first part of this episode. The second part of this episode will actually be focusing on Indigenous-led conservation as well.

You both brought up the rate of consumption. And Tim, as you were saying, we find that there's a real global imbalance. That essentially 12% of the planet's population is consuming much more than their fair share.

We just in terms of population, reached the 8 billion mark not too long ago. And, you know, sometimes what we've been hearing in terms of climate is, well, it's overpopulation, it's overpopulation. But we really do need to consider rate of consumption as perhaps more key than the number of people that are living on this earth.

But before we move on, Tim, could you also tell us about Environmental Defence and some of your current focus.

**TIM:** Yeah, so Environmental Defence, and you've probably gathered this from the name, we spend a lot of time linking Canadians to decision-makers in protection of the environment. So that can be corporate decision-makers,, elected representatives, etc. So we do that through a path of educating Canadians about key issues that we're working on and then creating the mechanisms for them to engage in their community to make a difference.

Our key areas of focus right now include climate, our work around livable communities and sustainability in the urban fabric of the Greater Golden Horseshoe in Ontario. Work on toxic chemicals, so that includes pesticides and the chemicals that would be found in consumer products. Reduction of plastic waste, which is a scourge that is affecting human health, but also biodiversity in particular. And we have a program that focuses on fresh water, mostly on the Great Lakes here in Ontario.

**RESH:** Okay, thank you.

So UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said at the opening of the recent Global Biodiversity Conference in December that "humanity has become a weapon of mass extinction." Many refer to this period as the Sixth Age of Mass Extinction. - The last one is what brought the end of the dinosaurs. And so this is the only mass extinction event in human history. And as you said, Sandra, it is caused by human beings. Yet as we go about our daily lives, many may not realize the full scale of this crisis. So, Sandra, how do we experience species and biodiversity loss in our daily lives? For say more and more the average person who's living somewhere in an urban center, how do they feel this?

**SANDRA:** Well, I think that's part of the challenge. One can't always say that it's completely, directly seen on a daily basis. But as a gardener myself, I've certainly seen a decrease in pollinators that are coming into my backyard. And at a very hyper local level, I'm also not seeing the songbirds that I used to see. Now as someone who is kind of attuned to seeing these changes, these are things I've noticed. I live close to the Ottawa River. When I head down there, I also see certain species of plants that are occupying spaces more than they may have in the past. Like invasive species, for example, that are encroaching on some of the wetland areas. But again, I'm more attuned to noticing these things.

So, there are certainly things that I do to try and encourage pollinators into my own yard. Making sure that I'm not using certain products while I'm doing my gardening to contribute to their decline.

It's not as cold in Ottawa this year. While it's a cold day, it's not nearly what we've seen in the past or even the snowfall that we're used to seeing, which also has an impact on nature. So, we may not have as many seeds to feed, or plants to feed the wildlife come spring because we haven't had the snowfall and the water required for those plants to grow.

I'd ask that people kind of contemplate in their own lives what they may be missing just around their own neighborhoods, let alone what we see when we go into more wild spaces.

**TIM:** Biodiversity loss has real world implications for people, but I agree that it's often hard for people to see it or understand it when they're living in a city or very much cut off from that world.

So it does require thinking more broadly about our role as an organism on a biologically rich planet, and to think through the consequences of some of the changes that we're bringing to the world and what that means about the long-term survivability of our culture and our species.

**RESH:** Absolutely. And you know, as many have pointed out, it's no small irony that the most important world conference on biodiversity had to be postponed, not once, but twice due to COVID. Tim, you had mentioned this before and I wonder if you could expand on this connection between biodiversity loss and pandemics, because we're still in this one now.

**TIM:** Yes. I mean, you know, the COVID situation is a good example where most of the science consensus seems to be that the virus moved from a crowded market environment where animal species that would normally never be together, were forced into cages directly adjacent to each other and that allowed for very rapid evolution of a virus and then it enhanced its ability to jump to the human population. So, an inappropriate manipulation of wildlife habitat in that case looks like it actually gave rise to a very pathogenic virus.

More broadly, when we have loss of biodiversity, you are also increasing your reliance quite often on things like pesticide use. Like the farmland in southern Ontario when economic conditions or lack of proper information leads farmers to eliminate hedgerows and woodlots in search of maximizing the amount of land and production, you lose habitat for insects and bird populations. And therefore the natural predator control for insects that might eat the crops disappear.

You see the farmers turning to more pesticides and fertilizers to maintain their productivity, looking for more land to maximize the value. And you get into a bit of a vicious cycle of greater and greater chemical dependency. More chemicals being used, more pesticides being used means more wildlife death, more impact on insect populations. And then of course the impact on all of us as those chemicals in those foods move through the food chain, and we're eating all of this stuff.

**SANDRA:** I'm just gonna sort of jump in on that, your question around sort of the connections between the pandemic that we are still living through, although some people like to believe it's done. I think back in 2020 there was a study released, looking at why deforestation, for example, and extinctions are making pandemics in the future, more likely. One of those reasons is that as cutting down forests or other extractive industries diminish biodiversity and as we build more infrastructure, it actually increases the risk of pandemics like COVID-19. And for quite a number of years, lots of ecologists have actually talked about this. The basics behind it is that as some species go extinct, those that tend to survive and thrive, like rats and bats for instance, are more likely to host those potentially dangerous pathogens that then jump over to humans.

So you were likely to see more and new disease outbreaks as a connection between sort of human development and biodiversity loss because of the type of species that tend to survive.

**RESH:** And you know, scientists are referring to this as potentially the age of pandemics now, right?

**SANDRA:** Yeah.

**RESH:** So COP15, or more formally the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity was held in Montreal last December - and just to note, this is different from the earlier Global Climate Change Conference, COP27 that took place in Egypt last year - To date, COP15 is the most important global

gathering on biological diversity and its loss. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is the landmark agreement coming out of COP15.

And Sandra, you were actually at this conference in Montreal. So what are the key outcomes of this very important agreement?

**SANDRA:** Yeah, so we were, as an organization, CPAWS, was thrilled that we had the adoption of an ambitious new Global Biodiversity Framework that was focused on halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030.

It's great we have this agreement. Now implementation's going to be important because we need to ensure that if it's fully implemented, the Framework itself would in fact put us on a path toward living in harmony with nature. But again, I will underscore that it's a path toward. It will not resolve species loss entirely, but it will work toward and in a big way, work toward halting and reversing the loss that we're seeing.

So from our perspective, it was a huge win, both for people, but also for the planet. And from our perspective as an organization, the targets that we were most focused on, in relation to protecting more land and ocean, focuses on Indigenous leadership, but also quality of protection.

So Target Three of the framework is requiring the protection of at least 30% of land and ocean is protected globally by 2030.

There's also a requirement to protect areas of ecological importance. To ensure that those areas are well connected. So when we talk about connection, it's not just having individual parcels of land, but it's also making sure that those parcels of land are connected with corridors, for example. And that they're also effectively managed and governed equitably.

And what we were also really thrilled to see and worked sort of quite hard behind the scenes to ensure was part of the agreement, was a recognition or a requirement that Indigenous rights were respected and that Indigenous territories are recognized.

So those were important parts for us. There were other targets in the agreement that address a diverse range of issues including eliminating environmentally harmful subsidies. And also upholding, as I mentioned, Indigenous rights, but Free, Prior and Informed Consent, or FPIC. And, all together the goals and targets of the agreement really do present a comprehensive plan to protect and restore biodiversity.

But it's ambitious. And really, from our perspective going into the conference, what we were most holding out hope for was that the Framework Agreement would be ambitious.

**RESH:** Right. So reaching 30% protection and conservation by 2030, the shorthand for this is now 30x30, right? And this is only seven years away. I mean, here we are

in 2023. It is ambitious, seven years away. Where are we right now in terms of protected areas in Canada?

**SANDRA:** Well, we're not nearly close enough. We are currently at around, 13.5%, for land and 13.9% for ocean. Those numbers are based on last year's numbers that are formally recognized by the federal government. So, yeah, seven, seven years is not a lot of time. But we did a report last year, which we called our Roadmap to 2030, which as we looked at all the opportunities across the country, if the federal, provincial, and territorial governments all worked together, and where that implementation of the global agreement is gonna be critical, it is ambitious to have a 30%, by 2030 goal - But it is achievable. We're going to get very close to the 30% target. We identified in our report a pathway to success, the existing opportunities, many of which were Indigenous-led. And if those initiatives are supported and implemented, we would get very close to 30% on land and we would surpass 30%, in the ocean.

**RESH:** And it's not like we have a choice about this, right? It's not like we can say, well, it's ambitious. Is it even doable? We have to do this because we are at a crisis point right now. So, Tim, back to you. What are some of the additional key strategies that Canada is undertaking to meet this target In the words of Environmental Defence, how do we bring COP15 home?

**TIM:** Yeah, it is a challenge. And I think the most progress has been made on public land across the country. And, in particular with collaborations and leadership from Indigenous communities in the northern parts of the country. This is where some huge gains have been made around creating protected areas.

You know, one of the real challenges that we face is that, even as we sign international agreements that commit to stopping loss, increasing protection, advancing restoration to address biodiversity loss is that we see, like in particular in Ontario right now, a massive race in the opposite direction with dismantling of protection regimes for woodlands, wetlands, massive encouragement of sprawl development, at the expense of building denser cities with transit, etc. So it is a real challenge to see the most populist, most wealthy province with a huge amount of the the biodiversity that this country holds, literally racing in the direction of further destruction of that.

There's a real disconnect between what we do as a country when we sign these kind of agreements and the energy and effort that are put in internally to ensure that those commitments are being advanced and adhered to. And, I think in the Ontario situation in particular, Canadians are gonna be looking to the federal government to step in and address the threats that the Ontario government is bringing to biodiversity here in Ontario.

**SANDRA:** Just to add on to what Tim was talking about. We did a poll late last year in the Fall, which showed that the majority of Canadians actually do support the commitment to protect more land and sea in Canada. And they consider land and ocean protection a major voting issue. So it's hard to understand why there's not

greater political will and faster action by certain provinces and provinces predominantly, to implement existing protection projects and to pursue new opportunities, let alone go backwards.

In our research, we identified seven key provinces and territories: Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Ontario, which are home to the largest combined area of prospective, protected terrestrial sites. And those jurisdictions could reach that 30% terrestrial target if they merely supported and implemented existing opportunities. It's not just about identifying new ones. If they actually had political will and commitment to protect existing ones.

And so when we see the polls that show that Canadians support action; we're hard-pressed to understand why governments aren't following suit.

**TIM:** Yeah, I think that's clear that Canadians are very much protective of their protected areas and would like to see more established.

I think that's why here in Ontario, for example, the current government had to lie to the public before the last election and promised them that the Greenbelt would never be touched. And then of course, within a few months after the election, announced that it wasn't going just be touched, but the big important parts of it were going to be bulldozed.

So, I think the only way that this kind of stuff happens at a political level is through the disproportionate influence of major economic groups.

I mean, the public hates this. We saw this in Alberta with the backlash against the idea of opening huge areas of the Rocky Mountains to coal development.

The public backlash here in Ontario against developing the Greenbelt is fierce and furious. So the public's on side, but politicians, in some cases, can be lured into doing things for particular industrial interest groups that are counter to the long-term public interest and are very destructive.

**RESH:** I'm gonna get onto the Greenbelt, but in terms of what you're both saying, it is essential that within our, you know, federalist system, that we get agreement from all levels of government, given the jurisdictional fractures and disagreements that can happen, as we see with tension between the province of Ontario and some municipalities over the Greenbelt, the drama around the Federal Carbon Tax that played out between the federal government and some of the provinces, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba in 2019. So, is this a time therefore, to consider constitutional rights for nature and biodiversity. Other countries have done it. I don't think we have. Well, we haven't. What are your thoughts on that?

**TIM:** Yeah, I think it's time. I mean, I think it's time at a global scale that we recognize that we absolutely have to ascribe rights to the environment, because that is really about the long-term public interest at an international scale and needs to be

translated into domestic rules. And constitutional reform would be, you know, a preferred mechanism to do that. Absolutely. Because then when things happen that are deeply regressive and against the long-term interests of protecting biodiversity or our climate, there would be legal recourse for citizens beyond just the usual electoral cycle. We'd have legal recourse to pursue redress against some of those destructive behaviors by people that get elected.

So I think it would be a fundamentally beneficial thing to see that kind of reform occur.

**SANDRA:** I would entirely agree with what Tim is saying, and I think there's some really interesting examples, recent examples in Canada, not necessarily on the constitutional side.

The Magpie River in Quebec is in the Cote-Nord region. It's a river that has very strong cultural significance for Innu in the area. And back in February of last year, there was a declaration to have the river declared a legal person. And it is now providing greater certainty for the future of the river as a result.

And it's part of a global movement to recognize rights of nature in law. And certainly, again, being led by Indigenous communities around the globe to uphold those rights of sacred and ancestral rivers, forests, and mountains. So, it was a first in Canada and very likely not to be the last.

**RESH:** And as you've, you've been pointing out, Indigenous Peoples are very key to this, right? So Indigenous peoples account for 6% of the global population, their lands are 20% of the Earth, which contains 80% of the world's biodiversity.

We see a microcosm of this pattern in Canada as well. And this is very much highlighted by the new framework, that we need to put more emphasis on Indigenous-led conservation. And Indigenous groups have also been talking about the Greenbelt. The Hiawatha First Nation has been talking about the impacts of development on the Greenbelt to their communities as well.

So we need to conserve and expand already protected natural areas. We also need to create new ones and purposely created Greenbelts, such as the Ontario Greenbelt would be an example of this.

So Tim, where, and what is the Ontario Greenbelt and why is it so important to Ontario and indeed the rest of the country. So explain the Greenbelt to us.

**TIM:** Yeah, I mean, it's a Green belt, which is, I guess it was a good name to give to it. So, it has grown over time.

The original anchor piece of this was the protection of the Niagara Escarpment. So this is the geographic feature that you see at Niagara Falls and extends all the way

from there, all the way up to, the northern end of the Bruce Peninsula in Southern Ontario, in Tobermory. And there is a key geological feature.

Because it is a rocky outcrop, a lot of it had remained natural, but was being increasingly encroached upon. So back in the 70s, the Conservative government protected all of that with a new land-use plan, one of the first ones we ever had in Ontario, put it off limits to development.

And then over time, successive governments added to that until in 2005 a final expansion occurred. And now the Greenbelt is about 2 million acres. And it's meant to be permanently protected. And the values that it protects, are very much related to both Nature and the ecosystem services that Nature provides, but also as an anchor for our planning around urban expansion and development in the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

But on the nature side, one of the key attributes is the headwaters of major river systems that flow from it, down through the cities and into Lake Ontario, where most of the population of Southern Ontario gets its drinking water. And these headwater areas are made from sand and gravel that was deposited at the end of the last glaciation.

So incredibly important as places to take in rainwater, make sure it doesn't rush down to the lake too quickly causing floods, but also to clean it and put it into the groundwater, into the river. So that's a major component.

It also is heavily forested, which obviously is very important from local climate amelioration, heat amelioration perspective in the Greater Golden Horseshoe for the uptake of carbon, for the production of oxygen, production of wildlife habitat, and the stabilization of that water flow that I was talking about.

It also is farmland. And the permanent protection of farmland means that we have a source of local food grown on high quality land. Some of the best land in the world actually for growing food that is proximate to our major population centers. And that of course, is increasingly important in times of increasing food insecurity. But also the agricultural industry in Ontario is huge. It's our largest industry. And so the long-term viability of that is important socially and economically as well.

Some of the high profile crops that are grown in Ontario, come from this area. Things like our vineyards and our wine industry and our specialized fruit crops, they're on the Greenbelt. So this is very, very important land and it's been protected by governments of all stripes with increasingly intense rules for a long time.

And then why it matters from a planning perspective is that the certainty around development not occurring on the Greenbelt was paired with something called the Growth Plan, which encourages greater density of housing within existing urban boundaries. Focuses on building public transit in and between major cities. Talks about concentrating infrastructure, keeping costs lower. You know, converting our very much sprawl-based city building model in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, to

one that is more sustainable and more pleasant and livable for the citizens of Southern Ontario.

And that, of course is incredibly important for attracting people here, keeping them here, providing them with high quality of life and a future that is going to be economically prosperous.

**RESH:** And right now the Greenbelt, well, for the last couple of months, have been the headline news, at least in Ontario, because of development. And most recently, the introduction and the passing of Bill-23: The More Homes Built Faster legislation that was passed by the Government of Ontario late last year. So Tim, if you could just continue with this, what are the concerns? What are the impacts of this Bill on the Greenbelt?

**TIM:** Yes. So about 7,400, acres of land have been removed from the Greenbelt, as you described. Of course this is completely contrary to repeated promises made by the Premier and his Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. They have said that it's absolutely essential to do this because they have nowhere to build houses. That's a demonstrably false statement. And that's been discussed thoroughly in the media.

There's an area about the size of the city of Vancouver within existing urban boundaries, undeveloped within the Greater Golden Horseshoe. It's very clear that these lands were removed from the Greenbelt to benefit particular landowners. The paper-trail on this has been well documented by investigative media as well with land purchases occurring on this farmland by developers who should have had no thought that they would ever be available for development. But of course, the money to be made here purchasing land at agricultural values and then flipping it to housing is very, very high. So there's no public interest rationale around the need for housing to do this. And it, of course is contrary to long-term commitments multiple governments, including this one, have made.

Some of the places, probably the one that is most egregious, and it's also the largest, it's about 70% of the lands to be removed, is in something called Dufferin's Rouge Agricultural Preserve. It was both part of the Greenbelt, but also had its own separate protective legislation, which was removed by Bill-39 at the same time that Bill-32 was going through.

It is directly adjacent to Rouge National Park, on the eastern side of the GTA, very close to the City of Pickering. Development in this area has never been contemplated. This was formally publicly owned land, sold to farm community with legal easements to keep it as farmland forever, which have now been removed and open for development. So threats both to forest and wetland systems that are associated with the National Park, contrary to Indigenous rights and Indigenous opposition, threatens the viability of farming in that area. And farming is part of Rouge National Park. And so the viability of the farm community is threatened, major river systems, federally listed species at risk, fisheries habitat, migratory birds. The list is very, very long. This very large area is very much going to compromise, the integrity of the National Park and threaten downstream residents with flooding, etc.

So this is one that I think you're gonna see a huge amount of resistance to, and I think in particular is one where the federal government is going to need to get involved because of the threats to the park, Indigenous rights and all those other values which are areas of federal responsibility.

**RESH:** There's also, you know, highways, the threat of highways, and I know that Ottawa, has also been expanding into their Greenbelt and many concerns there.

**SANDRA:** Oftentimes we hear governments say, well, we can just take the hectares that we're gonna develop and we'll protect hectares elsewhere. You can't just take a parcel of land, develop it, and then take another parcel of land and protect it and assume that it's a one for one arrangement. When you're talking about ecology and lands that are potentially ecologically rich, you can't necessarily assume protecting marginal lands and developing ecologically rich lands somehow are equivalent. They're not. And so the Greenbelt area in Ottawa is an example of that too.

One of our chapters, our Ottawa Valley Chapter has been working for several years trying to get the Greenbelt of Ottawa declared as a national park. It's an interconnected, series of lands that sort of surround Ottawa. They are ecologically rich. There is some unique biodiversity on those lands. And so you want to protect those lands because of the ecological value they also have. While they may not be declared at the moment as national parks, other than Rouge National Park that Tim was talking to. In essence, when you want to protect, you know, 30% of land, the federal government will need to intervene when it is on the Rouge National Park in particular. If there are impacts on the park from removal of those Greenbelt lands that are adjacent.

**RESH:** Is Greenbelt development then a violation of Canada's international biodiversity commitment under the new agreement? Is that something that can be an argument that can be developed or is being developed?

**SANDRA:** It's a little more complex. You know, which lands are declared protected. And again, that status of protection does have a UN definition associated with it. So you can't just declare lands as protected and add them to the inventory.

They do go through quite a rigorous assessment to determine whether or not they meet the criteria.

Removing Greenbelt lands, would it be in contravention? I think we would say yes, but they're not necessarily recognized currently under the formal criteria.

**RESH:** Right. And getting towards that goal, we need, obviously concrete policies to ensure that, but policies are nothing without regulation and enforcement.

And one of the things that seems to be happening is the erosion of Conservation Authorities, again, around this issue of the Greenbelt. And that seems to have been

happening for quite some time. So, Tim, could you speak a bit more about that? What's been happening with Conservation Authorities?

**TIM:** There's been repeated legislative attacks on Conservation Authorities in Ontario by the current Ontario government.

So for those who are not familiar with Conservation Authorities, these are entities that were created about 70 years ago. And they look at the landscape and manage it on a watershed basis, which is really progressive. Managing and analyzing development across a landscape on an ecological basis, which you know, a watershed is.

So, what they do is look at the amount of development that's occurring in a watershed. What the carrying capacity of that watershed is in terms of flood events and ability to have water absorbed into the ground overall. Nutrient-loading from agriculture, sewage inputs from cities and all these kind of things. And try and focus on keeping our water supply clean and not seeing excessive development in those watersheds.

The development industry, especially that, that likes to build low density, sprawling subdivisions, has, you know, long hated the role of Conservation Authorities in doing things like working with municipalities to keep development out of floodplains, ensuring that wetlands are protected, that forest cover is protected.

So this, rollback of their ability to be involved, in fact prohibition from commenting on development applications and plans, very much is an attack on the long-term protection of biodiversity, water supply, and frankly, human health and safety. And it is really very much at the behest of the development industry and a government that sees the industry as their client, rather than the long-term public interest.

**RESH:** And it's been contentious here in Ontario. I mean, last December, the head of Ontario Species Conservation Action Agency, that was created by the Government of Ontario resigned. Two years before that, there were seven resignations from the government appointed Greenbelt Council over changes to Conservation Authorities. So this seems to have been in the offing for a while.

**TIM:** It has. And you know, I have worked with some of the major development associations on policy issues. Everything from a strategic plan for wetland conservation to individual hearings, etc. So it has been a longstanding demand of the Ontario Home Builders Association for example, to see rollback of the role that Conservation Authorities play in protecting these values. Allowing them to more fully develop the entire parcels of land where they're building houses without having to you know, worry about all these other public values.

**RESH:** You know, we've been talking about this within the confines of Canada, but the climate and biodiversity crises are borderless. Canada's climate commitments stop at our borders, even though our climate and biodiversity damage extends far beyond our borders, for instance, Canada's global mining operations.

Is this being addressed? Was this in any way addressed within the Kunming-Montreal agreement?

**TIM:** Yeah, I mean, I think both at the biodiversity level and in climate, a big part of our obligation is to provide the financial resources for countries that are impacted. To both adapt in the case of climate, transition their energy systems, etc. But also in the case of biodiversity is to have the support to create protected areas, change management approaches to landscapes in some of these other countries that have less financial capacity to do that.

So both, the COP Agreement for climate and the one for biodiversity, include key targets there in terms of expenditures in the hundreds of billions of dollars over the coming seven years to 2030 to support those kind of activities in countries and for Canada to contribute. So that's a big part of it.

And then for some of our industries that are particularly active at a global scale, such as the mining industry - the international mining industry is heavily dominated by Canadian companies. Having legislative rules for the operation of Canadian registered companies about how they treat people and treat land and address biodiversity and climate concerns when they're operating in other countries is something that we really should be doing in Canada.

**RESH:** So Canada is a large land space with a relatively small population. It is working to grow its economy, which means that urban centers are going to continue to expand along with populations. Sandra can increased urbanization, comfortably coexist with conservation targets, because we're not just talking about, you know, building over green spaces and greenbelts, but also, how do you feed these populations? Where does their waste go? How do you power growing cities? What is the relationship, in your opinion, between urban expansion and conservation?

**SANDRA:** Well, let me start with sort of thinking about protection differently. So the conservation movement, over the past century was really founded on a worldview of wilderness that was really something that was considered separate from humans and it needed to be protected from humans. I think we've advanced quite a bit, even though wilderness is still in our name as an organization, we have been evolving, to think more in terms of the way that Indigenous peoples think; which is really, respecting all beings and our responsibility to care for land and water.

So thinking about trees, plants, animals, mountains, etc. as relatives and not as commodities. So it doesn't mean that those can be all privately owned and exploited. And that comes back to the rights of nature itself.

So thinking about it from that context, we have to think about urbanization differently. It's not suggesting that we can't continue to expand, but it's how you expand. Do you expand into areas that are ecologically rich, that have been protected, that need to be permanently protected, for example? Or do you look at more density in terms of the way our cities are built?

So, you know, when cities are developing their plans, they need to contemplate dense neighborhoods. Multi-use neighborhoods that are around transit, instead of sprawl.

Sprawl is the issue. It's not urbanization. And so I think we need to be careful about suggesting that all industrial development or human development is all going to have a negative impact.

It's going to have an impact, but it can be done far more sustainably than it currently is.

**RESH:** To put it maybe in a too simplistic nutshell, it's not about building out, it's more about building up. Tim, sort of the same question to you. So in terms of what Sandra was saying, that we can build cities in a better way, in terms of having that coexistence between urbanization and conservation, how can we move from you know, sort of a human centered anthropocentric worldview to an ecocentric worldview in terms of urban development?

**TIM:** As Canada's population grows and it's growing quite rapidly, and you know, I think we have a responsibility to make room for people from other parts of the world to live here. And we have a need for that economically and socially as well. But on a macro-scale, of course, the human population has to stop growing and over time needs to become smaller.

Collectively the best way to bend that curve is to provide security of life for people where that is not the case. We've seen repeatedly where people have confidence that their children will survive and prosper is that they stop having so many of them.

But of course, our consumption as a developed country means that our consumption per person is so much higher than it is in many parts of the world. And that has to be continued to be bent down through changes in technology and habits and movement of goods, etc.

Cities themselves, of course, in Canada in particular, can and should be built much more densely. Most of our urban development that has occurred here since the second World War is at a scale that makes the people who live there completely car dependent.

Occupancy densities are way too low to support public transit in most cases. There's no proximity to workplaces, schools, shopping, etc. And anyone who lives in these areas realizes that they just spend all of their time in the car for anything that they need because there's no choice.

People need choices. They need to be able to live in places where they can move through their daily lives and access the things that they need, in a way that does not make them dependent on the car and all of its costs and impacts on their own health, etc.

The creation of denser community leads to also other positive outcomes in terms of longevity, body form, address of obesity, and a whole bunch of other values. And it's cheaper. Within the Greater Golden Horseshoe, property taxes are much lower in the denser cities than they are in the less dense, suburban areas developed since the second World War.

And that is really related to the cost of infrastructure. Individual houses being built in a spread out way across farmland, building roads, sewers, water-lines to connect all of that together is just gonna be necessarily much more expensive to both build and maintain than where people live more densely together.

So, We need to do that. And to do that we need to change some of the rules in our cities to make that more possible. Development of multi-story, mid-rise buildings along main streets. A return to a time when you could build a 10-unit, two-, three-bedroom apartment building on streets like mine. I live in a downtown Toronto neighborhood and there are some beautiful old, multiplex multi-apartment buildings on my street. But the last ones were built in the 1930s and zoning bylaws in the city have prohibited anything like that from being built for almost a hundred years.

You know, that has to change if we want to have more people living inside of our cities and to have access to the kind of housing that they need and can afford.

Most of the condo development that's been occurring in Toronto is single and bachelor units. Well, if you have a couple of children, you can't live in one of those. So we need to see a greater government role in stipulating the kind of building is occurring, and also a return to the times when government was involved in the co-op housing movement, etc. So that a lot of these houses and apartments and condos can be more deeply affordable. Because what's gone on with speculation, the real estate market means that a basic human need, which is access to housing is beyond reach for, very many people, either to own it or even to rent it.

So, clearly there's a need for policy action.

**SANDRA:** I just also wanted to add, when we talk about density, it doesn't mean sort of building on every single bit of stamp of land. For example, the federal government announced in a previous budget the establishment of national urban parks. Those will also be not only important to achieving that 30% target. While they'll be small and only a very small percentage of that target, they still are really important spaces.

So, Rouge National Park, for example, was mentioned earlier by Tim, that is sort of the first of its kind as a urban national park. But as Canadians, we are really deeply connected to nature. And so we don't wanna have nature far, far away from where we also live because it does underpin our identity. And it's part of our economy, our sense of wellbeing, all of those things.

We were talking about the pandemic earlier. We also saw tons of Canadians flocking to protected natural areas during the early parts of the pandemic. People couldn't get

reservations in parks for camping, for example, for like two years, because everybody was going out to them.

So we also need to make sure that we have nearby nature and planning our cities accordingly.

I was a School Board Trustee here with Ottawa for eight years. And one of the things that I really pushed for and I saw firsthand was many new Canadians who had never been to a park. They didn't know what richness there was. And when you saw kids go into, you know, we would bring them out to Gatineau Park or even to the Greenbelt, and they would just be wide-eyed and say, this is a fantastic place. It was great for their mental wellbeing as well.

We can't assume that more density also implies building after building, after building. We still also need to ensure that we're creating natural places, within urban settings.

**TIM:** That's a really good point. I think Sandra, and you know, it's one of the things that was in Bill- 23 that has caused so much alarm for residents. We saw a change where developers will no longer have to pay the fees that are necessary for urban park creation.

**SANDRA:** Yeah. And we saw this out in Alberta a few years ago when the provincial government out there, were toying with the idea of privatizing some of their provincial parks and removing some of the provincial parks from their park system.

And we saw a huge backlash of Albertans against that move where the government ended up - and that was under the Kenny government - pulling back on that initiative. CPAWS was heavily involved in getting Albertans aware of the issue.

A big part of this, honestly, is just awareness-raising. Because Canadians care, we know they care. We know Ontarians care. We just need to make sure that people are aware and that they know they can do something to stop a bad government policy.

**RESH:** So there's no shortage of ideas, there's no shortage of examples, there's no shortage of passion on these issues. And as we said, 2030 is just around the corner. So in your opinion, what are the most immediate priorities for us in getting to this 30x30 target?

**TIM:** I think there's kind of two buckets. On the large areas, outside of our cities, the big chunks of the country that a lot of people would see as wilderness - which are not, there's lots of people living there - I think Indigenous-led conservation of large areas of land are gonna be an absolute priority. From the federal government, desire to move on that by Indigenous communities. Important work by organizations like CPAWS, etc. to make that happen.

I think protection of biodiversity in our more settled landscapes. To stop the loss of what we have. And to increasingly protect the remnants and then restore the pieces that have been so badly degraded that their long-term viability is in question.

That really is going to require the level of engagement that Sandra was speaking to by Canadians to demand that that occur and that there'd be severe punishment for political leaders who backtrack, undermine, cave into, lobbying efforts by narrow interests. That needs to be punished electorally so that it becomes very clear that going after basic underpinnings of protection and biodiversity of our country is a political third rail, and that politicians stay away from it. So it's that mobilization that's gonna be absolutely incredibly important, where industrial actors are really trying to damage the public interest.

And then in the more northern and rural areas of Canada I think Indigenous leadership is something that's going to be very powerful.

**SANDRA:** I would echo a lot of what Tim just talked to.

From our work at CPAWS, we aren't just wanting to see more lands and ocean protected. We also want to see quality protection. So that means, they aren't marginal lands that are being protected, but they're ecologically rich and help to stem the species loss that we see.

I think the biggest obstacles that we're seeing, certainly on the terrestrial side, is really the lack of political will. And that's the provinces and territories. Jurisdictionally, the federal government only has so much it can do for terrestrial conservation. It can do a lot more on the ocean conservation side.

Guaranteed permanent and adequate funding is gonna be important for marine protected areas. And making sure that we have quality measures in place and strong standards for marine protection are gonna be important.

But on the terrestrial side, really what provinces and territories need to do is they need to agree to collaborate with the Feds and with other provinces to achieve that 30% target. They need to commit to an ambitious regional target. And we did see during COP15, Nova Scotia announced targets, we had the Manitoba government come forward with a large Indigenous-led protected area announcement; working with the federal government as well as the Seal River Alliance. We also saw the Yukon government talk to a target BC government. So we do have those regional targets, but we also need to see the prioritization of Indigenous-led conservation, as Tim mentioned.

We have land use plans, existing protected area proposals across the country. But we need to see those completed. The Newfoundland government, for example, has a protected areas plan, but it's done nothing to implement any of it yet.

And where the federal government really can play I think an important role, now that we've got a global agreement in place, we need to see an implementation plan released for how 30% protection is going to be achieved. And how they're also gonna be supporting Indigenous-led conservation.

We need to see more work around halting and reversing biodiversity loss. The 30% target is one part of that halting and reversing biodiversity loss; it's not the only solution.

We need Nature Agreements with provinces and territories that are negotiated between the federal and provincial and territorial governments, that also have funding that's contingent on significant and measurable contributions to that 30% target and that meet protection standards.

So, you know, again, quality and quantity have to be considered, but it can't be quantity alone.

**RESH:** All right. And with that, Sandra and Tim, thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

**TIM:** Thanks for having us.

**SANDRA:** Yeah, thanks for having us today. It's been great.

**RESH:** That was Sandra Schwartz, National Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and Tim Gray, Executive Director of Environmental Defence.

I'm Resh Budhu, host of the Courage my Friends podcast. Thanks for listening.

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