

INTERNATIONAL  
**BOREAL**  
CONSERVATION  
CAMPAIGN



LA CAMPAGNE  
INTERNATIONALE  
POUR LA  
CONSERVATION  
**BORÉALE**

September 26, 2014

Office of the Québec Premier  
Honoré-Mercier Building, 3rd Floor  
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Dear Premier Couillard,

In a letter sent in May 2007, 1,500 scientists from more than 50 countries around the world, including 71 from Quebec, asked Canadian government leaders to ensure the protection of at least 50% of Canada's boreal forest. Since making this appeal, we have followed the progression of this file with keen interest.

We were delighted to hear that on May 9, 2011 after 60 meetings of sectorial working and consensus-building groups, representatives of provincial, regional, First Nations (Cree, Naskapi, Innu) and Inuit governments, and the economic, social, community, and environmental sectors signed a "Partners Declaration" committing to a series of policies for sustainable development in Northern Quebec which included the commitment to devote 50% of the territory to non-industrial purposes, environmental protection and safeguarding biodiversity.<sup>1</sup>

On February 5, 2012 a deadline had been set for achieving that goal by 2035, with an interim goal of 20% by 2020, and with ecological planning initiated by 2013.<sup>1</sup> During the past election cycle you committed to relaunching the Plan Nord in all of its aspects—economic, social, and environmental—taking off where we left.<sup>2</sup>

This commitment deserved, and indeed received, the support of the international scientific and environmental communities; in protecting northern Quebec's natural environment and ensuring responsible development in the rest of the area, your government will set in motion one of the most ambitious sustainable development and nature conservation projects in North America, and one that could serve as a model for the rest of the world.

In 2012 at its World Conservation Congress, the International Union for Conservation of Nature affirmed that, "the aspirational goal of maintaining 50% of the northern territory of Quebec free

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.mddelcc.gouv.qc.ca/communiqués\\_en/2012/c20120205-nord.htm](http://www.mddelcc.gouv.qc.ca/communiqués_en/2012/c20120205-nord.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.plq.org/en/article/a-liberal-government-will-re-launch-sustainable-northern-development-with-the-re-launch-of-plan-nord->

from industrial development, if operationalized correctly, has the ability to be a guiding light to the globe as we combat the enormous global challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change” and congratulated the Government of Quebec “for its vision and commitments to conservation and aboriginal rights.”<sup>3</sup>

Scientists have already catalogued some of the natural resources that constitute the natural heritage of northern Quebec. In terms of wildlife, northern Quebec provides habitat for 340 million birds, and some of the largest populations of migratory caribou and freshwater fish in North America. However, the populations of some species are too low: the woodland caribou, the wolverine and the golden eagle are all on Quebec’s threatened or vulnerable species lists, while the once-large herds of migratory caribou are dramatically declining. In terms of the region’s ecological benefits to society, including water filtration and carbon storage, their value is estimated at 13.8 times the value of the natural resources extracted from it each year.<sup>ii</sup>

In addition to the considerable biodiversity of this region, climate change is a major concern that influences our vision for the conservation planning of northern Quebec. Every day, new factors indicate that environmental degradation is fundamentally affecting our natural heritage, and the reduction of industrial carbon emissions is a top priority. While it is tempting to rely on costly unproven technological solutions, a responsible and sustainable approach fits within our current frame of knowledge. Boreal ecosystems already efficiently store more carbon in their trees, soils and peat than any other environment. It is our responsibility to be the stewards of these vast northern carbon reserves.<sup>iii</sup>

The field of conservation biology identifies four objectives that must be achieved to ensure the long-term viability of an ecosystem:<sup>iv,v</sup>

1. all native ecosystem types must be represented in protected areas;
2. populations of all native species must be maintained in natural patterns of abundance and distribution;
3. ecological processes such as hydrological processes must be maintained; and
4. resilience to short-term and long-term environmental changes must be maintained. In the context of northern Quebec, it is also important that our conservation and development decisions be based on sound scientific data.

It is our firm hope that northern Quebec’s natural landscape can be maintained for future generations, and that a planning process will ensure conservation objectives are achieved while planning for future development in a manner that is consistent with those objectives. It will also be important to move quickly to identify areas that meet these criteria and that may be vulnerable to industrial development so that potential conflicts can be addressed and resolved.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://portals.iucn.org/docs/iucnpolicy/2012-resolutions/en/WCC-2012-Res-064-EN%20Acknowledging%20Quebecs%20advancement%20of%20conservation%20of%20the%20Boreal%20Region.pdf>

We, the undersigned scientists, encourage you to maintain your commitment to conserve at least 50% of the region north of the 49th parallel from industrial activity by 2035, ensuring Quebec's global status as a leader in conservation, one that represents the aspirations of Quebec society as a whole, rather than one particular party. We, in turn, promise to work with you and with the research organizations, Aboriginal people, local communities, various sector stakeholders, conservation groups and businesses of Quebec's boreal region to bring about this vision.

We would urge you, Mr. Premier, to put this planning process in place quickly. We ask that this is done in a manner that fully engages the communities in these regions, especially Aboriginal peoples, whose knowledge, relationships, and, most importantly, rights must be respected.

We feel certain that, in taking this action, Quebec will emerge as a world leader in sustainable development, biodiversity conservation and combating climate change, while growing its economy and creating a new ecosystem management model for the 21st century that will set the standard for countries around the world.

- i. Berteaux, D. 2013. Quebec's large-scale Plan Nord. *Conservation Biology* 27:242-243.
- ii. M. Anielski and S. Wilson, 2009. *Counting Canada's Natural Capital: Assessing the Real Value of Canada's Boreal Ecosystems*. Canadian Boreal Initiative and The Pembina Institute, p. 61.
- iii. This responsibility was expressed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which has recommended that Canada and Russia ensure the protection of their Boreal regions.
- iv. International Boreal Conservation Science Panel. 2013. *Conserving the World's Last Great Forest is Possible: Here's How*. <http://borealscience.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/conserving-last-great-forests1.pdf>
- v. Noss, R.F., A.P. Dobson, R. Baldwin, P. Beier, C.R. Davis, D.A. Dellasala, J. Francis, H. Locke, K. Nowak, R. Lopez, C. Reining, S.C. Trombulak, and G. Tabor. 2012. Bolder thinking for conservation. *Conservation Biology* 26:1-4.

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