

Intergovernmental collaboration needed to reverse biodiversity loss

by Doug Holmes

Human well-being is dependent on natural ecosystems to absorb carbon, provide clean air and water, reduce risk of infectious outbreaks, and act as buffers against floods and extreme weather. But with environmental degradation and habitat loss accelerating at an alarming rate, more than 190 countries came together in 2022 under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to agree a goal for each country to conserve 30 percent of its land and water by the year 2030.

The 30x30 target is an ambitious commitment for Canada given that less than 15% of our land and freshwater is currently protected.

Achieving the goal requires all levels of governments working together. To facilitate co-operation, the federal government has established a Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database (CPCAD) where areas that meet international conservation standards can be listed and count towards Canada's biodiversity target.

Working with BC Nature, the District of Summerland has put forward nine municipal-owned areas to be registered on CPCAD:

- Adams Bird Sanctuary
- Woodbridge Nature Preserve
- Mount Conkle Park
- Giant's Head Mountain Park
- Little Giant's Head Mountain Park
- Landry Crescent parkland
- back portion of Living Memorial Park
- Priest Camp Historic Park
- Cartwright Avenue neighbourhood park

To count towards the 30x30 target, at least 75% of each site must be preserved. Up to 25% can be used for non compatible activities such as trails, playgrounds and parking lots provided they do not significantly impact the park's ecological functions or biodiversity values.

By including local areas in the 30x30 database, Council can demonstrate its commitment to conservation and assure residents that our community parks are being protected.

For its part, the federal government is using a number of other conservation measures to meet the 30x30 target, including creating at least 10 new national parks, 10 new national marine conservation areas, and 15 national urban parks. Regionally, a process is underway with First Nations to establish a South Okanagan-Similkameen national park reserve.

The federal government manages just six percent of Canada's land mass so provincial leadership is essential to achieving the 30x30 target. The BC government protects critical habitat by issuing a Government Actions Regulation (GAR) under the Wildlife Act to designate wildlife management areas.

Locally, a GAR is in place at the end of Garnet Valley to protect a mule deer winter range. The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship cited this last year in its recommendation against approval of a proposed gravel pit in the area, noting that negative impacts on ecosystems are likely to be permanent or long-term and irreversible.

The Ministry of Mines approved the pit anyway and, one year on, Summerland Council continues to meet with government ministers to voice concerns.

The Province maintains that "compatible natural resource activities" may take place in wildlife management areas but, in an area the government itself says is critical for the survival of several species at risk, it's difficult to see how a gravel pit is compatible. Certainly it runs contrary to the global vision of reversing habitat loss and undermines what many of us are doing at the local level to achieve the 30x30 goal.

Doug Holmes is mayor of Summerland