



International Challenge for the 90s April 1990

SUSTAINING
wetlands



“Thirty years ago, man set out to explore outer space and the moon and eventually distant planets. Today, we have discovered a planet that is crying out for help: this planet, our earth.

Restoring our own habitat has to be everyone's first priority and restoring wetlands is a vital part of it. Progress will start with understanding the necessity to tread more lightly on this earth. We need to understand the intolerable cost of neglect. There is no room for anyone on the sidelines. None of us can sit this one out. Make no mistake about it; we will be asking Canadians to make sacrifices. Partnership is the key to the success of this initiative. We will be asking Canadians to be among the world's first peoples to commit themselves to sustainable development. The Green Plan will define the course of national environmental policy for the 1990s. For our part, we will commit ourselves to managing the government in a manner that makes the public sector a model environmental citizen – and an example to the private sector. Part of this commitment includes bringing forward a federal policy on wetland conservation.”

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE BRIAN MULRONEY, PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA



Forum Partners

- ~ Canadian Institute of Planners
- ~ Canadian Wildlife Service,
Environment Canada
- ~ Ducks Unlimited Canada
- ~ International Association of Fish and
Wildlife Agencies
- ~ National Fish and Wildlife
Foundation (USA)
- ~ National Round Table on the
Environment and the Economy
(Canada)
- ~ National Wildlife Federation (USA)
- ~ Nissan Canada Ltd.
- ~ Royal Bank of Canada
- ~ Sustainable Development,
Environment Canada
- ~ Wildlife Habitat Canada



Forum Secretariat

For further information on the Forum and
wetland conservation, please contact:

Dr. James H. Patterson
Coordinator, Sustaining Wetlands Forum
Suite 109, 1750 Courtwood Crescent
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
K2C 2B5

Telephone: (613) 228-2601

FAX: (613) 228-0206

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Canada Wetland Facts

- ~ Over 127 million ha (14%) of Canada is covered by bog, fen, marsh, swamp and shallow water wetlands.
- ~ Canada's wetlands comprise an estimated 24% of all of the wetlands of the earth.
- ~ Over one seventh of the original pre-settlement wetland area of Canada has been converted to other uses.
- ~ Conversions of wetlands have been severe in some areas such as Central Prairies sloughs (70%), Atlantic salt marshes (65%), urban wetlands (80 to 98%), Pacific estuarine marshes (70%), and southern Ontario and St. Lawrence Valley hardwood and shoreline swamps (70 to 80%).
- ~ Wetlands are critically linked to many of today's major global environmental issues (climate change, freshwater and groundwater quality and supply, the carbon cycle, water and air pollution, soil and water conservation, wildlife habitat).
- ~ Canada's wetlands provide over \$10 billion in benefits to Canadians each year.
- ~ No government in Canada today yet has an approved wetland conservation policy in place, although the federal government and at least four provinces are actively developing such policies.
- ~ The majority of wetlands at risk in Canada are in private ownership or on provincial crown land.
- ~ The federal government manages 29% of all of Canada's wetlands, those located on federal lands and waters, particularly in northern territories.
- ~ Canada is a world leader in wetland conservation through designation of 30 Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention and support of numerous international initiatives.
- ~ Private sector initiatives have resulted in protection of at least one million hectares of wetlands in Canada.
- ~ On average about \$80 million a year will be spent in Canada on wetland conservation by the public and private sectors from the years 1990 to 2005.

Purpose

The purpose of this Forum was to stimulate discussion on opportunities to sustain wetlands by providing the broadest possible environmental and economic benefits to Canada. The process used was a multi-sector national policy forum to develop recommendations for the consideration of the National and Provincial Round Tables on the Environment and the Economy and other appropriate groups. The Forum focussed on the integration of soil, water and wetland conservation initiatives and how these coordinated approaches might generate benefits for all sectors. Particular emphasis was placed on agricultural, municipal, business, and environmental conservation responses to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, wetland conservation policies, and the sustainable use of wetlands in Canada.



Introduction



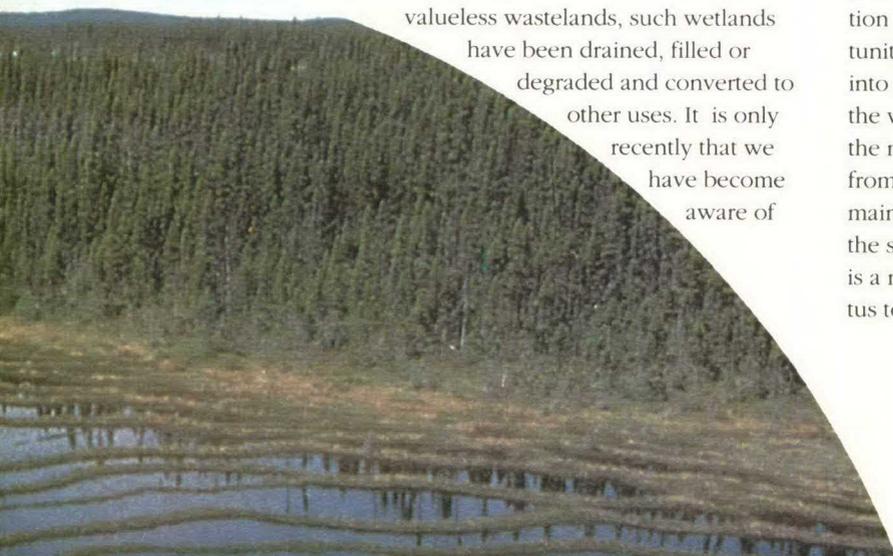
Since the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) released its landmark report "Our Common Future", the notion of sustainable development has gained widespread exposure and acceptance. The concept of linking economic and environmental dimensions into day-to-day decision making to ensure the sustainable use of our natural resources makes basic common sense to people from all walks of life. In spite of the intellectual attractiveness of Brundtland's recommendations, however, much needs to be accomplished if sustainable development is to become a reality.

Past utilization of wetlands in North America provides one of the clearest examples of unsustainable development. While it is true that in certain areas they still exist in abundance, wetlands in vast areas of North America have been severely depleted. Once considered

valueless wastelands, such wetlands have been drained, filled or degraded and converted to other uses. It is only recently that we have become aware of

the immense values that wetland functions provide, both to the quality of our environment and our economy. In Canada alone, it has been estimated that the economic benefits derived by Canadians from wetland functions, use, and products are worth in excess of \$10 billion annually. As some of the most biologically productive and dynamic ecosystems in the world, we are just beginning to realize that our wetlands are truly of global significance. Canada's wetlands encompass almost one quarter of the total global wetland resource base. If we in North America cannot develop instruments to sustain wetlands that make both economic and environmental sense, what hope is there to maintain the vast wetland resources in the developing world?

While the management of North American wetlands has exemplified unsustainable development in the past, wetland conservation provides one of the most tangible opportunities for putting sustainable development into action. Science has clearly demonstrated the value of wetland functions and defined the nature and extent of the problem resulting from the loss of these functions. In terms of maintaining and restoring wetland functions, the solutions also seem clear. What is missing is a national vision that will provide the impetus to move ahead with the task and to help



create public and private sector partnerships that will harness the market place to sustain these ecosystems.

As the first public event convened by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, the *Sustaining Wetlands Forum* held in Ottawa, April 9-11, 1990 was a milestone towards sustainable development in Canada. The Forum was neither a beginning nor an end, but rather a catalytic step in a long-term process. The purpose of the Forum was twofold: first, to highlight the environmental and economic significance of wetlands; and second, to break down intersectoral barriers and foster the partnerships by different interest groups that must be formed if practical and effective solutions to environmental problems are to be found. It was successful on both counts.

Public and private sector conservation organizations have shown insight and leadership in wetlands conservation. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the precedent-setting North American Waterfowl Management Plan have demonstrated that multinational and multisectoral partnerships and commitments can function very effectively when they are working towards a common interest.

The *Sustaining Wetlands Forum* served as a catalyst to bring even more diverse interests together. It demonstrated that new partnerships do work. The Forum exemplified Round Tables in action and underscored the need to continue this type of dialogue at national, provincial and local levels. The Forum recognized that resolving environmental issues

is not just the responsibility of government, but must include all representative groups and interests.

The thoughtful presentations of prominent speakers, including the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of Saskatchewan, a former Premier of Quebec, and the Vice-President of the Business Council on National Issues, underscored the fact that wetland conservation is an important environmental and economic issue that now is well recognized on the national scene. This was also indicated by the time and effort that over two hundred representatives of the business, agriculture, planning and environmental conservation communities put into four sectoral workshops. The Forum demonstrated that people from totally different backgrounds and perspectives can indeed work together openly and constructively without resorting to dogma or endless debates of principle.

There was a feeling that the group came and saw the issue, but had yet to conquer it. There were many important players from both sides of the Canada – United States border representing a great diversity of interests. There was a remarkable current of consistency in recognizing the absolute requirement for an integrated approach to conservation of wetlands as components of the overall landscape.

While recognizing wetland conservation as a globally important environmental and economic issue, the Forum concluded that sustaining wetlands on a global scale would only come about from the cumulative result of individual land use decisions in our respec-

tive backyards. As well, it was recognized that wetland issues do not stand alone. They must be viewed in the context of managing these ecosystems for many uses, in ways that make both economic and environmental sense and that do not impair ecosystem functions.

The workshops undertaken at the *Sustaining Wetlands Forum* have resulted in a series of over 70 recommendations for action developed by and targeted with respect to four national sectors: business, agriculture, planning and environmental conservation. These recommendations deal with a range of critical issues including development or modification of policies and legislation, review of codes of practice, public and political awareness and education, direction to planning and management, research, monetary incentives and program tools and delivery. These are presented in the four sections that follow with excerpts from comments by the speakers at the Forum. While these recommendations cover a broad range of concerns and influence, the key element is that they do not require significant amounts of new funding or programs to be put into place.

The *Sustaining Wetlands Forum* was a positive step towards establishment of a national vision for wetland conservation and management. As we enter the decade of the 1990s, the collective will of Canadians and their leaders will see the benefits to be derived from initiatives such as the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and a vast array of wetland conservation programs. We will put in place effective interlocking and



“Sustainable development is about taking different interests and making them work, both in an environmental and an economic sense. It seems so simple when all of the disparate interests involved take a step backwards and look at what they have in common. That is partnership and that is what sustaining wetlands is all about.”

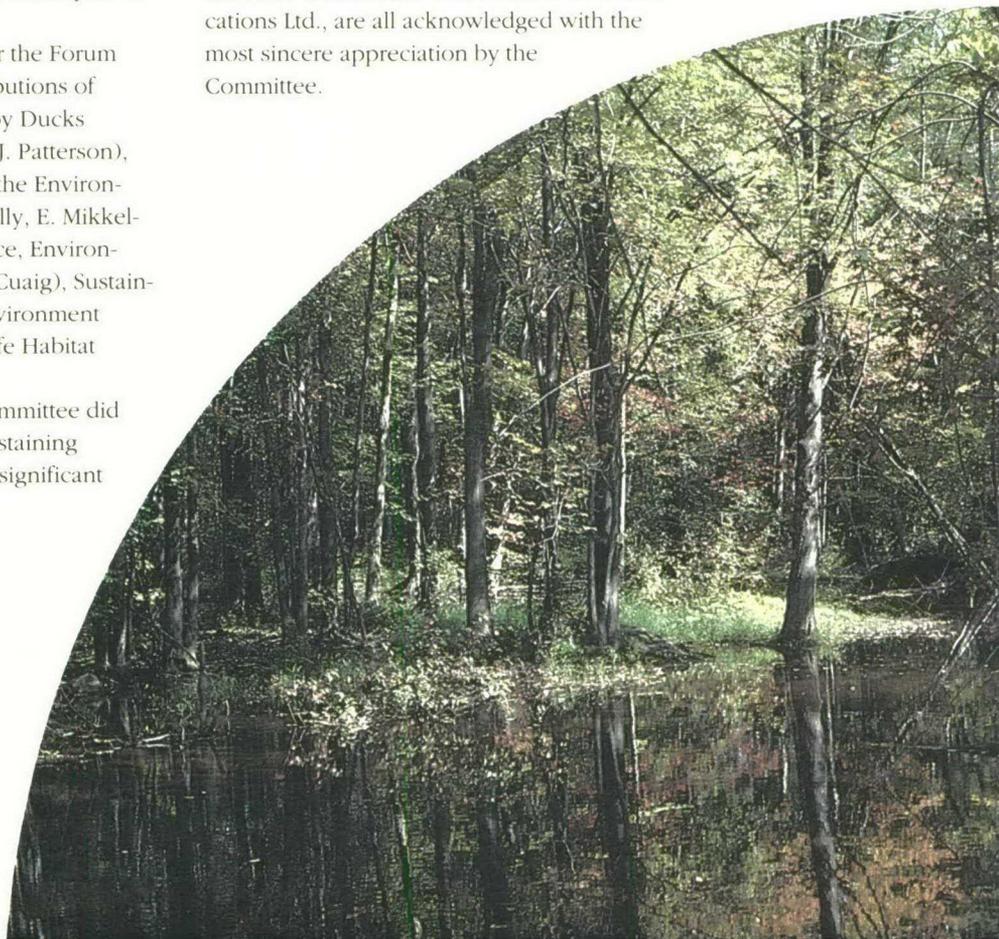
DR. DAVID JOHNSTON, CHAIR, NATIONAL ROUND TABLE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE ECONOMY

mutually supporting wetland conservation policies and initiatives recognizing the diverse interests and needs of all sectors of the Canadian economy. Canada will be seen as an example to the world for sustaining the wetland resource not only nationally and regionally, but also internationally. Wetlands will be seen as an exciting, important part of Canadian life.

An Organizing Committee for the Forum resulted from the major contributions of both staff time and resources by Ducks Unlimited Canada (T. Dupuis, J. Patterson), The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (M. Kelly, E. Mikkelsen), Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada (A. Kaarik, J. McCuaig), Sustainable Development Branch, Environment Canada (C. Rubec), and Wildlife Habitat Canada (K. Cox).

However, the Organizing Committee did not act alone in making the Sustaining Wetlands Forum happen. The significant

contribution of writing teams to develop draft recommendations for discussion, the leadership of twenty workshop facilitators and rapporteurs from many different agencies across Canada, and the timely, excellent contracted services of A.S.A.P. Management Services Ltd. (L. Anderson), Maruska Studios Ltd., and Continental Golin /Harris Communications Ltd., are all acknowledged with the most sincere appreciation by the Committee.



Agriculture Recommendations



Incentives and Disincentives

- 1** All public and private sector organizations with an interest in wetlands should work to develop effective mechanisms and appropriate compensation levels for the transfer of funds from the beneficiaries of wetlands protection to those who incur the associated costs (primarily landowners).
- 2** Provinces and municipalities should review and, where necessary, revise land assessment and taxation systems to ensure that they do not discourage wetland conservation. For example, tax assessments should be based on existing rather than potential uses.
- 3** Municipalities should be compensated by the province or private sector organizations for losses in their tax base resulting from revisions in assessment procedures related to wetland conservation.
- 4** Income received by landowners from habitat easement agreements should not be taxable.
- 5** The income tax act should be revised to reduce incentives for land clearing and drainage.
- 6** The public and private sectors should compensate landowners for wetland habitat enhancement and conservation farming practices.
- 7** Agriculture Canada should examine both the feasibility and the acceptability of implementing procedures for cross-compliance which would make receipt of income support payments conditional upon farmers adopting acceptable management practices for agricultural soil and water.
- 8** Federal and provincial governments should implement an enhanced program of crop damage prevention and compensation.
- 9** Governments should restructure the framework of agricultural support programs so as to simultaneously enhance natural resource conservation efforts and reduce vulnerability under international trade agreements.



Research

- 10 Environment Canada should assume a lead role in sponsoring research into the development and use of suitable methods, including if necessary a modified Canadian wetland classification system, to assist in targeting resources and actions to priority areas for wetland conservation.
- 11 The Federal-Provincial Committee on Land Use should be charged with actively promoting coordinated wetland research and annually reporting on the status of wetland research efforts across Canada.
- 12 Federal and provincial agricultural programs should give greater emphasis to research on the environmental impacts of agricultural production.



Education, Extension and Information

- 13 Public and private sector organizations should develop more effective means to inform the general public as well as policy makers about the net benefits of providing public support for wetland conservation.
- 14 Wildlife, habitat, hunting and related special interest groups should educate their membership on responsible resource use, which must include respect for landowners' concerns.

“ Everything possible must be done to save wetlands, even though this will mean drastic changes in agricultural practices. This has become one of the most pressing resource management issues in our province. To many people the enormity of this problem is downright intimidating, but it is one which we are prepared to tackle, and one which we are tackling. Farmers are very concerned about environmental issues, like wetlands. However, we can have all the money in the world to protect wetlands, but if the farmer doesn't see that it is in his best interests to do so in his day-to-day land use decisions, it won't happen.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan is a revolutionary step in bilateral wildlife management. Protection of this unique resource is crucial. This Plan and the Canada-Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Agreement are significant steps towards the goal of sustainable development.”

THE HONOURABLE GRANT DEVINE, PREMIER OF SASKATCHEWAN

- 15 Provincial and territorial education authorities, other relevant agencies, and non-government organizations should collaborate in the development of information and awareness packages which will improve understanding of the importance of wetlands and sensitize students to the special needs and concerns of farmers and other landowners.
- 16 Governments should develop more effective extension services to assist farmers in making land management decisions that integrate wildlife and habitat interests with agricultural production.



Agricultural Policy Reform

- 17 Federal, territorial, and provincial departments and agencies concerned with agriculture should complete assessments of all programs and policies affecting agricultural land use, and present the results to the National and Provincial Round Tables on the Environment and the Economy.
- 18 The National and Provincial Round Tables on the Environment and the Economy should jointly sponsor a national workshop involving all stakeholders for the purpose of developing specific recommendations for agricultural policy and program adjustment to ensure that all programs and policies are neutral or positive for conservation of wetlands.
- 19 Agriculture Canada should consider, in the course of its Agriculture Policy Review, the recommendations in the report "Common Ground" produced by Wildlife Habitat Canada.
- 20 Federal, territorial, and provincial agriculture departments should jointly design and implement a farm income support program that is not linked to production of commodities.
- 21 The Canadian Wheat Board should revise the basis for the quota allocation formula to grain volume rather than current acreage.
- 22 Annual Western Grain Transportation Act benefits should be paid directly to farmers in order to promote diversification of livestock and other kinds of food production in the Prairie provinces.
- 23 Agriculture Canada Permanent Cover Programs in Western Canada should be expanded and extended so that more marginal land, including wetlands, may be removed from annual cultivation.

Business Recommendations



Business Practice

- 24 An Environmental Code of Conduct which is industry specific should be developed.
- 25 Canadian businesses should take proactive positions on environmental issues and the use of natural resources, including wetlands, and effectively communicate these positions to other businesses, governments, and the public.
- 26 Business practices and their effects on wetlands should be assessed by developing environmental self-assessment procedures such as environmental audits.
- 27 Partnerships should be created to develop business opportunities that help to achieve a healthy environment and protect wetlands.



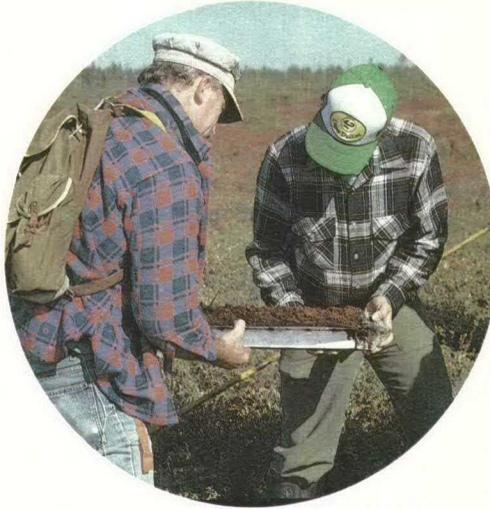
Education and Information

- 28 Canadian businesses should educate their employees on how to deal with environmental issues; on how to comply with environmental laws; and on how to understand the benefits of implementing environmentally sound practices.

“If we are to meet the challenges ahead for wetland conservation, there will have to be great reliance on the ability of private sector organizations to take the initiative, to define the environmental agenda, and to raise the necessary money to get on with the job. And we must start today.

We must pay more than lip service to the environment; we must do more than study problems only to produce lengthy recommendations that go unread because they are politically or economically unrealistic. We must change established patterns of thought and lifestyle. It will not be easy.”

MR. PETER VIVIAN, VICE-PRESIDENT, BUSINESS COUNCIL ON NATIONAL ISSUES



- 29 Businesses should establish, together with governments, a list of information sources to help businesses understand wetland issues and regulations and find solutions to related environmental problems.
- 30 Accumulated environmental expertise developed by businesses concerning wetlands protection and management should be shared.

Planning and Management

- 31 Research on and the promotion of the creation of wetlands for water quality management purposes should be undertaken by Canadian businesses.
- 32 Businesses should incorporate in their plans comprehensive mitigation, rehabilitation and enhancement measures for affected wetland areas.
- 33 In order to help maximize local benefits from wetland conservation and use, local and regional business organizations should be formed and supported.
- 34 The formation and coordination of committees in existing business organizations to focus interest on wetland conservation and related environmental issues should be encouraged.

Municipal and Regional Planning Recommendations



Setting National Goals

- 35** Recognizing the accepted global values of wetlands, “no net loss of wetland functions” in Canada should be established as a national goal.
- 36** Each level of government in Canada should have a clear statement of goals and policies with respect to wetland conservation and protection.
- 37** Each jurisdiction should have comprehensive wetland policy and legislation requiring local authorities to respect wetland values in their decision making processes.
- 38** Conservation should be an explicit goal and responsibility of all government departments and agencies having programs affecting wetlands, and of all environmental impact assessment processes in Canada.
- 39** All levels of government should develop practical and measurable targets for protection and preservation of wetlands and should cooperate in the development and implementation of means for their achievement including acquisition of specific strategic sites.



Environmental Awareness and Public Education

- 40** The values of wetlands should be made known to the public and to decision makers through the cooperation of governments, non-government organizations, educational institutions, and the media.
- 41** Ministries of Education should develop teaching modules on environmental ethics and sustainable development, including specific units on wetlands.
- 42** All professional planners should have an understanding of the basic principles of ecology. This should be a component of university planning programs and a requirement for membership in Canadian professional associations of planners. Such training should also be included in professional skills upgrading programs.
- 43** All Canadian professional associations of planners should incorporate a commitment to conservation and environmental protection in their codes of professional ethics.



Support for Local Decision Making

- 44 Federal, provincial, and territorial governments should provide funding for local governments, non-government organizations, conservation bodies, and others to ensure access to information, advice, expertise and legal assistance to intervene in wetland development issues.
- 45 National non-government organizations with wetland expertise should provide support to local bodies to intervene in wetland development disputes of local or regional significance.
- 46 The actions of conservation organizations should be acknowledged as being beneficial to the community such that, through charitable status, such organizations can present their case to decision makers on the same tax footing (e.g. on a level playing field) as now available to the corporate sector.
- 47 The public should be involved early and effectively in decisions affecting local wetlands. This requires public consultation by governments and proponents of wetland development.



Legislative Powers and Policies

- 48 Federal, provincial and territorial governments should prepare sustainable development strategies to provide a general framework for land use planning, economic development, and conservation in each jurisdiction.

“ We view our continued close work with Canada on the implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan as a top national priority. We have a long history of working together to resolve natural resource problems.

For decades, for instance, Canada and the United States have cooperated on waterfowl research and preservation. Our habitat preservation plans have been augmented by another joint effort: the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (USA). It will make recommendations on the acquisition and restoration of wetlands in the United States in order to cultivate partnerships and move towards President Bush’s objectives of making protection, recovery, restoration, and renewal of wetlands a moral imperative – a legacy to inspire every citizen of North America.”

MR. DON KNOWLES, DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



- 49** In each province and territory, a comprehensive system of regional planning areas should be established, with boundaries that take natural characteristics such as watersheds into account, to provide suitable geographical units for ecosystem-based land use planning and the coordination of municipal, conservation, and resource use planning.
- 50** The governments of each province and territory should establish a general framework for land use and conservation policies, with legal force to govern both the plans and programs of government departments and agencies, and regional and local land use planning.
- 51** Governments and their agencies should be subject to the same rules as private land and property owners.
- 52** Governments should use legislation or regulation in preference to weaker instruments such as policies or guidelines to control wetland use. Examples could include:
- ~ Agricultural land preservation legislation
 - ~ United States Title 404 Legislation
 - ~ Environmental Bill of Rights
- 53** The onus of proof on wetland land use decisions should be reversed by establishing a process which causes proponents to have to prove there is no significant loss relative to an overall objective of “no net loss of wetland functions”.



Modifying Existing Policies and Programs

- 54** Governments should eliminate policies and funding for programs which directly encourage wetland destruction and should redirect funds to wetland preservation and restoration (i.e. use of quota systems and subdivision regulations, and revision of freight rates, land clearing, and drainage subsidies).
- 55** All government policies and programs should be reviewed to determine whether they promote wetland degradation and be modified or eliminated if found to be detrimental.



Management Tools

- 56** Governments should provide a comprehensive base of information on the occurrence, characteristics, and trends of use of wetlands in support of better integration of wetland values and functions into the decision making process at all levels.
- 57** The federal government, in collaboration with other governments and non-government organizations should develop more effective evaluation procedures for wetlands, to replace traditional cost-benefit analyses, and to better demonstrate the full range of wetland values.
- 58** Cumulative effects of many small wetland losses are important and too little is known of the consequences and how to deal with these losses. Governments should recognize cumulative effects in their planning. Furthermore, federal, provincial, and territorial governments should fund research into the evaluation of better planning methods to deal with cumulative effects.
- 59** Alternatives to the adversarial approach should be explored and encouraged (e.g. mediation, cooperative management strategies); incentives should be used to encourage wetland conservation; and disincentives should be removed.
- 60** Greater use of caveats, conservation easements, and similar instruments should be made in promoting wetland conservation.
- 61** Use of the tax system to compensate for conservation and protection of wetlands should be explored.
- 62** In cooperation with private enterprise and non-government organizations, governments should continue to utilize acquisition as a selective tool for conservation of higher priority wetlands especially those under immediate threat.

Wildlife and Environmental Conservation Recommendations



Policy and Legislation

- 63 The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, in conjunction with federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and private sector partners, should establish an interjurisdictional Wetlands Task Force comprised of representatives from university, government and non-government organizations to facilitate the development of comprehensive, mutually supporting Canadian wetland policies in all jurisdictions by April 1991.
- 64 Due to the multi-disciplinary nature of Round Tables, the recommendations they develop should be directed to the highest levels of government in the absence of procedures for resolving land use conflicts.
- 65 Existing wetland regulations should be enforced and strengthened with adequate budgetary support.



Planning and Evaluation

- 66 The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy should further direct a Wetlands Task Force to develop a Canadian Wetland Conservation Program and Canadian Wetland System Plan.
- 67 Federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions should work within the context of this Canadian Wetland System Plan.
- 68 All jurisdictions in Canada should recognize the value of the holistic approach to wetland conservation and the value of wetlands in relation to other land uses.
- 69 The development of community conservation strategies should be encouraged by all levels of government.

“Appropriate processes are critical to good decision making and we feel the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Canada) will make an important contribution to the decisions that affect the future of our environment. The Federal Government is committed to make Canada, by the year 2000, the industrialized world's most environmentally friendly country. This new Council will review proposals for Canadian projects and programs to be financed under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and advise the federal Minister of the Environment on their implications and effects.”

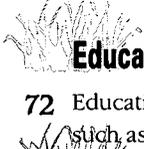
DR. LEN GOOD, DEPUTY MINISTER, ENVIRONMENT CANADA



Program Delivery

70 Wetland conservation programs should maintain and enhance biodiversity and wetland functions to secure benefits to society and wildlife.

71 Successful examples of sustainable wetland development, especially those examples dealing with areas of shared resources such as migratory birds and fish, should be provided to other countries.



Education and Awareness

72 Education and information programs should be developed and delivered to target groups, such as landowners, legislators, and professionals, that have an impact on wetland conservation and development.



Research and Assessment

73 The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy should also direct a Wetlands Task Force to develop a Report on National Wetlands Research Needs and Priorities to guide future research activities in all jurisdictions.



“Wetlands are as important to the global biosphere as the tropical rain forests. Wetlands are the wealth and richness of life itself. We are losing them at an alarming rate. Over 80% of the shoreline wetlands in the St. Lawrence corridor and 70% of our Prairie sloughs are gone. This must not be allowed to continue.”

**THE HONOURABLE PIERRE-MARC JOHNSON, CENTRE FOR MEDICINE, ETHICS AND LAW,
M'GILL UNIVERSITY**

PHOTO CREDITS

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