

Spare change, spare species?



Photographer: Robert R. Taylor

You probably spend several toonies every day without even thinking about them. But there's an ever-growing irony in the fact that the polar bear appears on our money. The growing environmental effect of economic and industrial activity means that one of our most enduring national symbols is being driven ever closer to the point of no return.

We may think of the polar bear as epitomising the 'Great White North', but in fact the population of polar bears inhabiting the Ontario shores of Hudson Bay is the most southerly in the world.

The bears hunt ringed seals principally from early April to July on the sea ice, which makes up part of their habitat. But rising temperatures mean that, every year, the sea

ice is breaking up earlier and earlier, roughly three weeks earlier than it did just thirty years ago. As bears are forced onto land sooner, this shortened feeding season means a decline in body condition, particularly in pregnant females. The result? Lighter females produce smaller litters and lighter cubs that are, in turn, less likely to survive to adulthood.

The remainder of the year the bears are forced onto the land. The land of the far north in Ontario is an ancient frozen carbon rich peatlands. Recent discoveries beneath these peatlands of diamonds, gold and platinum, all highly priced precious minerals, are attracting exploration akin to the 'Klondike goldrush'.

The resultant disruption to peatlands and their precious stored carbon accelerates climate change which is the single largest threat to Polar Bears. We must continue to work to protect our bears and their fragile habitats and also address the many causes of climate change such as massive peatland destruction and overall land use changes. These iconic yet vulnerable creatures may appear on our spare change, but their value amounts to a lot more than a few dollars. How and where we mine is as important to climate change as the light bulbs you use, or the car you drive.

what's inside



SPARE CHANGE, SPARE SPECIES?



WILDLANDS LEAGUE MAKES HISTORY



WILDLIFE IN ONTARIO'S BOREAL FOREST



AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO OUR SUPPORTERS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



PEATLANDS FOR LIFE

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Wildlands League makes history

Climate change is the greatest global environmental threat. Human interference with the natural carbon cycle is the cause; combustion of fossil fuels and conversion of terrestrial carbon the culprits.

The Boreal Forest is one of three¹ of the last great forests left on the planet. It is an air purifier and water filter. As we move into a carbon constrained future, forests and peatlands become increasingly important to keep intact. They sequester carbon and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Mining, forestry, hydro development and the supporting road infrastructure are already converting Ontario's vast north. Industrial fragmentation and conversion of the boreal forest and peatlands accelerates the threat from climate change.

To date, jurisdictions around the globe have ignored protection of terrestrial carbon as part of their climate change strategy.

That is, until now.

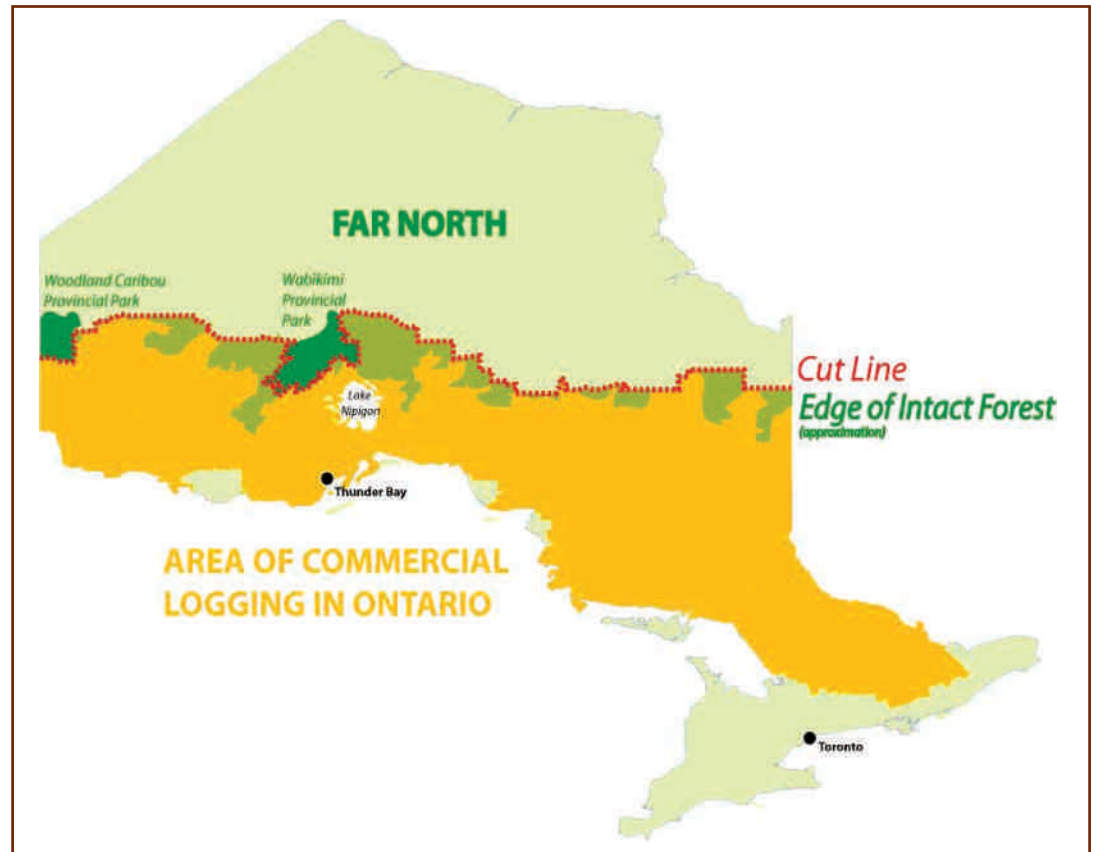
After almost a decade of work by Wildlands League, on July 14, 2008 Ontario's Premier, Dalton McGuinty, announced the permanent protection of more than 22.5 million hectares of Canada's Boreal Forest - one of the largest conservation commitments in history.

Scale of Area to Be Protected

- 22.5 million hectares; 87,000 square miles; 225,000 square kilometers
- Ontario's Northern Boreal region is 43 per cent of Ontario's land mass; more than half of this would be protected in an inter-

connected network of conservation lands.

- Ontario's new protected area will be larger than 40 of the 50 U.S. states, including New York, Florida, and Washington State.
- Larger than 60% of the world's nations and almost as large as the United Kingdom or twice the size of England



Carbon in the Boreal

- Forests store about 50% of Earth's terrestrial C (1 trillion tonnes)
 - Boreal forest is the largest storehouse (23%)
- Forests and peat lands in the Far North store about 97 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide

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¹Forests once covered roughly half of the Earth's land mass. Now, significant forests remain only in the Amazon, Russia and Canada. Canada has responsibility for 25% of the world's remaining intact forest, and Ontario has responsibility for 15% of that. Together with Manitoba, Ontario's northern forests constitute the largest proportion of Canada's remaining Boreal Forest.



Wildlife in Ontario's Boreal Forest

- Extinction rates increase as the number of stresses for wildlife increases. Scientists recognize that if we ensure large, connected, natural habitats in the Boreal Forest, we may help limit extinctions; wildlife will have a better chance of avoiding extinction if they don't also face habitat loss and fragmentation.

Ontario's Boreal Forest is Home to Aboriginal Communities

- It is home to 24,000 people living in 36 communities.
- Communities retain strong ties to the land and traditional food gathering and other land-use activities remain important
- Most communities are not accessible by road



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Getting The Science Right

Fifteen hundred Scientists concerned about the Boreal sent this in a letter to the Premier:

We thank you for your bold and visionary commitment to the world's future in your recent announcement to protect 225,000 square kilometers of Ontario's still intact Boreal Forest. As scientists who have had the opportunity to carry out research and engage with policy makers around the world, it has been rare that we have been witness to conservation actions of truly historic proportions....

We are among more than 1,500 scientists from around the world who last year sent a letter to Canadian government leaders pointing out the

global importance of the Boreal as one of the last large undeveloped and wild forest ecosystems left on earth.

Courtesy of the International Boreal Conservation Campaign (IBCC)

and the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI)

Next Steps

Far North legislation is expected this spring. The legislation needs to enshrine the key elements of the Premier's announcement in law. AND also expected this spring is a substantive revision to the century old Mining Act. Wildlands League has been working almost as long on changes to this Act. A new mining act should mean that mining activities no longer prejudice land use planning

across the Far North and it should return the destiny of FNs lands to the people who live there. Finally, how the new Green Energy Act is implemented could have significant impact to the Far North and possible destruction of peatlands.

Wildlands League is working on all three pieces of legislation and more information can be found on our website and in the next issue of this paper.

An important message to our supporters from the Executive Director

Wildlands League places a high value on our relationship with you, our donors. Without your support we would not be able to achieve our mission to save, protect and enhance Ontario's wilderness.

We thank you for your commitment to us.

In a world increasingly faced with the realities of climate change, wilderness is ever more precious. Ontario has more carbon stored in the forests and peatlands of the north than is emitted from automobiles globally in 10 years. AND the global significance of these ecosystems in capturing even more carbon while providing clean water and clean air for the planet cannot be underestimated. In short, the intact ecosystems of Ontario are the natural carbon sequestration system.

Your donation is making a difference that will be felt by everyone including your children and their children.

In addition, we believe that transparency and accountability are essential to our success. With this in mind, we recommitted to the Imagine Canada's Ethical Code Program.



If you have any questions about our work or our ethical practices, please feel free to contact Nicole Thouard, or visit our website.

Janet Sumner

Peatlands for life

The Boreal peatlands are unique ecosystems, and Ontario has over 27 million hectares of them. They are the primary habitat for a variety of threatened or endangered species, such as the caribou and wolverine, and also home to more than half of the total global population of 40 bird species during the breeding season. And scientists are also becoming increasingly aware of the key role peatlands play in the global carbon cycle.

The Boreal peatlands are the world's largest terrestrial carbon reserve. In their natural waterlogged state, peatlands grow at a rate of 0.5mm per year and accumulate about 23g of carbon per square metre per year. This amounts to literally billions of tonnes of carbon in these northern ecosystems, on average more than 1300* tonnes of carbon per hectare. And this is the world's second largest wetland filtering billions of litres of fresh water and purifying massive quantities of air.

But economic development does not recognise the value of these habitats, only the minerals that lie buried beneath them. Current mining practices, such as those employed at the Victor Diamond Mine, near Attawapiskat, drain vast stretches of peatland to reach the minerals. Industrial intrusion considerably impoverishes the Boreal hydrology as it is drained. As the peat dries and oxidises, the stored carbon is released as carbon dioxide and methane, very potent greenhouse gases.

As the effects of global warming assert themselves, it is difficult to overstate the importance of safeguarding current stores of carbon and preserving the peatland ecosystem's potential to shield us from the warming effects of climate change with their considerable cooling ability.

The Provincial government has announced intentions to achieve 'aggressive' greenhouse gas emissions reductions. While this is absolutely necessary to combat climate change, these goals are undermined if industrial development compromises our natural carbon storehouse.

The most logical step surely must be to secure the existing carbon stores and create a rigorous international climate change framework supporting wilderness conservation.

Every dollar and every letter you send helps us reach this goal. Your continued support is integral to our success in protecting Ontario's boreal forests and peatlands, for Ontarians, for Canadians, for the world.

*the carbon stored in peatlands is only beginning to be understood through research and this number will most probably be revised upward.