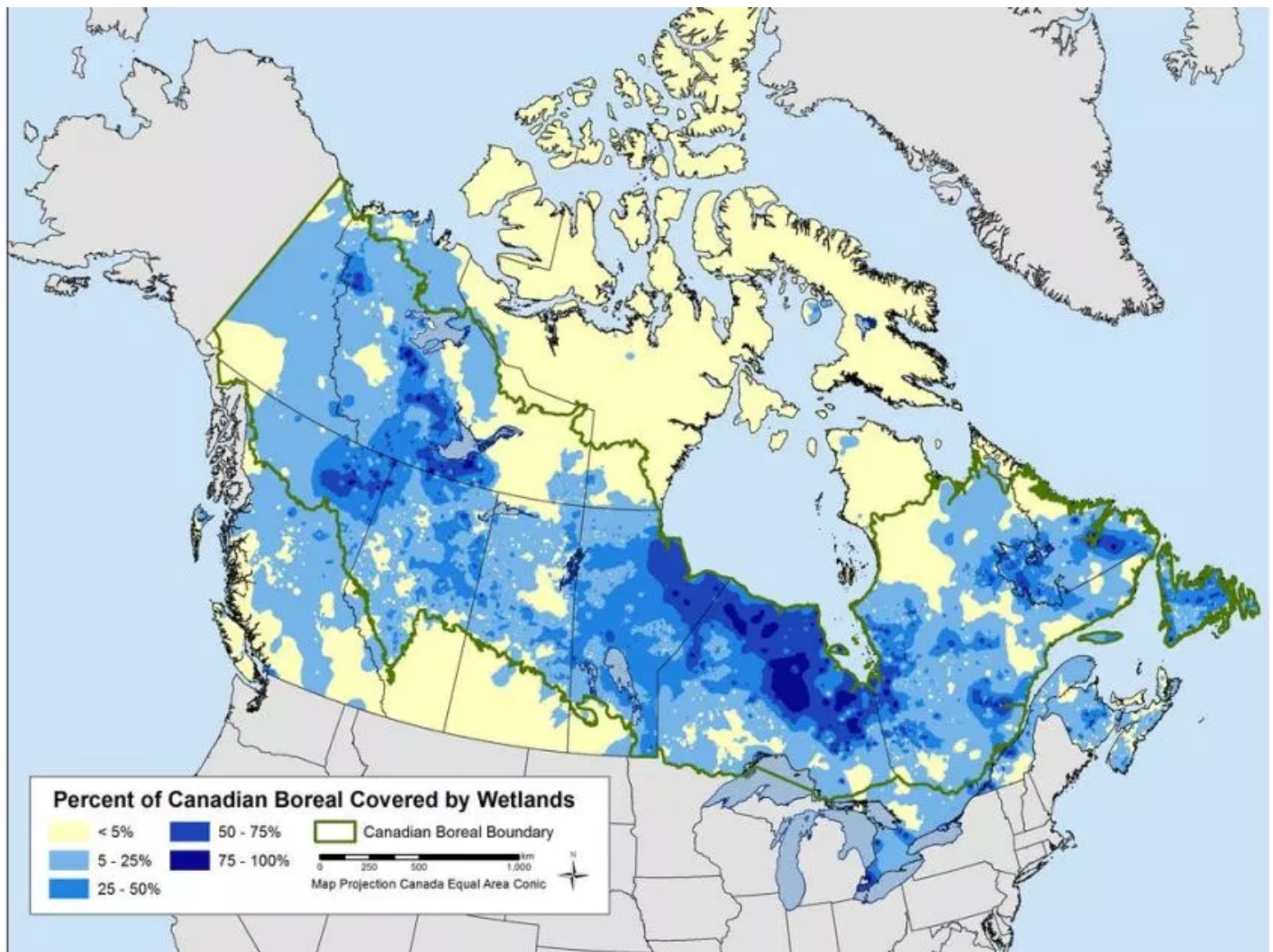


Opinion: Wetlands are disappearing fast. Urgent action is required

HILLARY PAGE Updated: February 6, 2018



Geological Survey of Canada map shows the significance of wetlands across Canada. *CNSPICS CND*

Canada is home to 25 per cent of the world's wetlands, which are important for the health of Canada and the health of our planet. In British Columbia, we see proof all around us. From valley-

bottom lands in the Okanagan and Kootenays, to our coastal estuaries from the Lower Mainland to Haida Gwaii, these are crucial ecosystems for plants and animals, as well as for human health and community resilience.

However, these ecosystems are disappearing very quickly due to residential and commercial development, conversion to agriculture, and the influx of invasive species. Every day, important wetlands are being lost across Canada.

All across the country we have seen wetlands disappear in the places where we need them the most. In the South Okanagan, only 15 per cent of the valley's original wetlands remain. In Ontario, over 72 per cent of wetlands have been lost, and 65 per cent of the coastal salt marshes in the Maritimes are now gone.

Since 1900, over 64 per cent of the world's wetlands have disappeared or been degraded, with nearly 50 per cent of this loss happening since 1970.

As we lose these places, we also lose both nature and the crucial ecological services that healthy wetlands provide.

Many wildlife species rely on wetlands. They provide vital nesting and feeding grounds for waterfowl and many other animals. When wetlands disappear, species that depend on these habitats have nowhere else to live. Some species become endangered, or no longer occur in large areas of their original range.

Wetlands are disappearing so fast that urgent action is needed to conserve the ones that are left. Wetlands are among the most important habitats that the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is working to conserve. We also work to restore wetlands that have been degraded, to improve these natural spaces for migratory birds, amphibians, fishes and other wildlife.

NCC has protected wetlands across the country for the benefit of wildlife and people for over 55 years. We identify and map Canada's most important wetlands, and focus on areas that most urgently need conservation. We then partner with private landowners, communities, governments and other organizations to conserve these important habitats — including wetlands, floodplains and shores.

To date, NCC has secured over 379,000 acres (153,375 hectares) of habitat for migratory birds and other wetland species under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act.

Wetlands play an important role in the health of our country and our communities. They remove sediments, excess nutrients and even bacteria from our drinking water. They are very effective at storing carbon. And much like a giant paper towel, they absorb and hold water to buffer our cities and farms from floods and droughts – both of which are growing more common and extreme in recent years.

In addition to their importance for nature, many of NCC's wetland areas inspire Canadians to connect with nature. Wetlands provide recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing and canoeing, along with educational opportunities, for people of all ages to learn and explore.

The federal government has been an important partner to NCC and other conservation groups in helping preserve wetlands, through the Natural Areas Conservation Program. By continuing and encouraging this investment in nature, we can protect vital habitat and services that wetlands provide to Canadians.

Canada has committed to protecting 17 per cent of its land and inland waters by 2020. We need to focus this conservation on the places that matter most for nature and matter the most for people. Private land conservation helps both by conserving places that are important for species protection, and for local communities.

Each of us can help Canada be a world leader in saving wetlands, helping address climate change and build a natural legacy for our children and grandchildren. By supporting conservation efforts, sharing your thoughts with friends and various levels of government and the business community you can help make every day a wetlands day.

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