

We Must Act  
for an  
Environmentally  
Sustainable  
Future

**Our Forests Are Threatened**

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

## Our Forests Are Threatened

The greatest species diversity exists in the wild and forested areas of the earth. In addition to maintaining biodiversity, forest ecosystems play a vital role regulating the climate and providing water and air purification, nutrient cycling, and erosion and in flood control.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, these wild forests are rapidly being destroyed, especially in the tropics. In addition to increasingly severe wildfires, large-scale industrial farming and resource extraction interests are often the causes of deforestation.

Currently, approximately 30% of the Earth's land area is covered by forests and 7% of that is tropical forests—about half the amount that existed before the advent of modern agriculture around 11,000 years ago. More than 7.3 million hectares (18 million acres) of forest are destroyed each year due to logging or burning.<sup>2</sup>

While deforestation is a global problem, Canada deserves special mention. According to Global Forest Watch, Canada now leads the planet in the degradation of untouched forests.<sup>3</sup> Global Forest Watch reports that 8% of the world's pristine forests were degraded between 2000 and 2013. Of the 104 million acres degraded, an area about 3 times the size of Germany, 21.4% were in Canada. It is reported that Canada's rate of degradation tops the list, with Russia accounting for 20.4% of damaged or destroyed pristine forests, and Brazil, home of the Amazon rainforest, accounting for just over 14%.

The most severe loss of forests in Canada is occurring in the northern parts of the Prairie Provinces, in particular around the oil sands operations near Fort McMurray, Alberta. The interior of BC, Northern Ontario, and northern Quebec have also seen widespread forest loss. Worse still, very little new forest coverage has been added to compensate for the devastation. Only in the Maritimes has there been evidence of any significant reforestation.<sup>4</sup>

The forest industry is a major economic player in Canada. By Global Forest Watch's calculations, logging was worth some \$21.5 billion to Canada's economy in 2011, accounting for 1.2% of all economic activity. The importance of protecting our forests makes strong economic sense.

In addition to industry-led deforestation, human-induced climate change is also contributing to the loss of natural forests. We have seen an increase in severe wildfires in many large forests in Canada. Studies show that a changing climate will only continue to exacerbate extreme weather events, including severe drought and wildfires.

Not only are natural forests home to a significant proportion of the Earth's biodiversity and to approximately 1 billion people who live in them,<sup>5</sup> they also play a large role as carbon sinks. By keeping carbon out of the atmosphere and oceans, natural forests help control the global climate. The results of destroying these precious—and often,

sacred—spaces are, therefore, twofold: carbon is released into the atmosphere, thereby increasing global GHGs, and forests are inhibited from removing carbon from the atmosphere.

Given their environmental and cultural importance, we must act to conserve what's left of natural forests and start the vital process of restoring degraded areas by replanting native tree species. This will require action within Canada and on a global scale. Furthermore, it must be part of Canada's climate action strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blog.globalforestwatch.org/data-and-research/world-lost-8-percent-of-its-remaining-pristine-forests-since-2000>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/deforestation/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.foei.org/what-we-do/forests-and-biodiversity-explained-2>



## NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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