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Submission on
Canada's 2030 National Biodiversity Strategy
Milestone Document

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Summary of Recommendations

The Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA) presents key recommendations to the federal government on *Canada's 2030 National Biodiversity Strategy Milestone Document*. This response emphasizes the need for inclusive planning, sustainable design, and ecosystem-based solutions to address Canada's unique biodiversity challenges.

The CSLA calls on the federal government to:

- #1: Engage planning and design professionals in the development and implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and to recognize their influential role in not only spatial planning but also the design and development of the built environment at all scales.
- #2: Recognize one of Canada's greatest challenges will be to protect and enhance biodiversity in geographic areas most heavily impacted by human systems, more specifically those impacted and degraded by urban development and agricultural land uses.
- #3 Support planning and design strategies that benefit and sustain both ecosystems and society goals.
- #4: Allocate resources to prioritize ecosystem-based planning and design, and nature-based solutions as practical, effective, and sustainable approaches to the restoration and enhancement of biodiversity in the built environment.

Introduction

The [Canadian Society of Landscape Architects \(CSLA\)](#) is a non-profit, professional organization dedicated to advancing the art, the science, and the practice of landscape architecture in Canada. Representing over 3,200 landscape architects, associates/interns, and landscape architecture students, the CSLA is committed to promoting and increasing awareness of our profession and advocating for urban design and renewal, reconciliation, sustainable and socially just communities, climate change adaptation, nature-based solutions, ecological restoration and enhancement, and the preservation of cultural landscapes.

For almost 200 years, the profession of landscape architecture has sought to bridge the gap between the natural and the built environment by designing with nature. Landscape architects apply innovative solutions to complex design challenges. We integrate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) into the design of outdoor spaces, balancing human society's needs with the natural environment. Because each landscape architecture project is unique, developing site-specific solutions that rely on the natural, physical, and human sciences is fundamental to our practice.

Landscape architects serve as critical members of interdisciplinary teams that have been assembled to address specific design or research challenges. Landscape architects offer unique perspectives on biodiversity, ecosystem services, and sustainable design. We understand the complex interplay between natural systems and human activity which enables us to create designs that not only protect, but also enhance biodiversity. By integrating ecological principles into our projects, we provide solutions that are both functional and regenerative – in other words, what we do best is nature-based solutions.

In 2019, the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA), of which the CSLA is a member, declared a [Climate and Biodiversity Emergency](#). This declaration affirms landscape architects' commitment to a significant, long-term shift in thinking, behaviour, and policy. As a creative discipline we recognize our great responsibility to accelerate city afforestation to sequester carbon, generate urban biodiversity, and protect cities from extreme heat – a growing threat to human survival. But we don't just work in urban environments, we work at all scales: global, regional, local, and human, to strengthen, protect and enhance Canada's wider functional ecosystems. We amplify biodiversity and societal prosperity, fostering resilient communities better prepared for a changing climate.

Response to the 2030 National Biodiversity Strategic Milestone Document

The CSLA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the **2030 National Biodiversity Strategy (NBS) Milestone Document**. We are encouraged by the emphasis in the report on the need for a transformative approach to biodiversity conservation and enhancement, as well as the commitment to uphold and implement the rights of Indigenous Peoples, the original caretakers of the lands, waters, and ice. We recognize the strengths of the proposed strategy including its comprehensive vision and alignment with the 23 targets identified in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). And we agree wholeheartedly that we must “find new ways of doing things, of working together and of financing our efforts”.

To this end, the CSLA urges the federal government to acknowledge that one of Canada's greatest challenges will be to protect and enhance biodiversity in areas where the natural environment intersects human land uses and activities. In urban areas, where pressures associated with land use change, development and population growth will continue to create conflicting priorities, difficult decisions need to be made. If we are to find new ways of doing things and working together the federal government must integrate the strategic role of planning and design professionals – those who directly influence the built environment at all scales – as key actors in realizing the objectives of the NBS. Through collaborative efforts, we can ensure that Canadian natural *and built* environments are “healthy, thriving and sustaining and enriching the lives of current and future generations”.

The following recommendations build upon the strengths proposed in the Milestone Document. Rather than reiterating our shared vision and goals, these recommendations highlight the opportunities to do more, and to do things differently by working together.

Recommend #1: Engage planning and design professionals in the development and implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and recognize their influential role in not only spatial planning but also the design and development of the built environment at all scales.

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)'s stakeholder engagement process held throughout 2023 is to be commended. Last year, you hosted a Biodiversity Symposium, launched a public survey, received written submissions from over 60 organizations, and held in-person engagement sessions. However, notably missing from the current list of participants are the professional associations who represent Canada's planning and design professionals, more specifically landscape architects, planners, architects, and engineers.

Landscape architects will have a pivotal role in the implementation of Canada's NBS. Our expertise in fostering multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches is crucial in creating environments that balance human needs with ecological sustainability. And we welcome the opportunity to participate in the ongoing process of developing the NBS.

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For comparison, CSLA members participated on several of the advisory tables during the development of the National Adaptation Strategy (NAS). The participation of these members demonstrates the leadership and skills landscape architects bring to complex and important issues. The NAS acknowledges the significant role of professional associations in developing guidelines for climate resilience, incorporating climate considerations into professional standards, promoting best practices for climate change adaptation, and for raising awareness and providing education on climate risks. The NAS further recognizes that the professional bodies are key actors in achieving the national objectives and targets, highlighting the need for similar engagement with these organizations in the development and implementation of the NBS.

In the spirit of doing things differently and working together, the CSLA encourages ECCC to consider expanding the diversity of experience and expertise on the [new Nature Advisory Committee](#) by also including members of the planning and design professions.

#2: Recognize one of Canada's greatest challenges will be to protect and enhance biodiversity in geographic areas most heavily impacted by human systems, more specifically those impacted and degraded by urban development and agricultural land uses.

Canada faces a distinctive challenge due to the geographic overlap of the areas with the highest number of species at risk and those areas most heavily impacted by human systems, more specifically urban development and agricultural land uses. As urban centres continue to expand under the pressures of population growth and housing shortages, the importance of preserving, restoring, and enhancing biodiversity in the altered and degraded landscapes becomes increasingly critical. In addition to direct impacts on the natural environment, urbanization has regional impacts on lands required to support the supply chain of key productive sectors, including food production and materials production in support of the construction industry.

Landscape architects and planners can contribute to enhancing biodiversity on lands impacted by urbanization and industry. Implementing green infrastructure and ecosystem-based approaches, such as the development of urban green spaces, biodiversity-friendly water bodies, and expanded native vegetation cover, not only enhances urban biodiversity but also complements traditional infrastructure with flood protection, air and water purification, and energy provision.

Landscape architects recognize the importance of managing growth and development. Ensuring that our future housing needs are balanced with environmental and society needs requires innovative approaches that do not perpetuate harm or create a crisis for future generations. A few well-known examples of development-oriented projects involving Canadian landscape architects include: the renewal of [Les Habitations de Saint-Michel Nord](#), Montreal; the 2.4 hectare living roof on the [Vancouver Convention Centre](#); and [Millennium Water \(the Olympic](#)

[Village](#)), Canada's first sustainable neighbourhood development and a legacy of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic.

#3: Support planning and design strategies that benefit and sustain both ecosystems *and* society goals.

Landscape architects are at the forefront of the effort to harmonize the needs of ecosystems and society. We recognize the economic, ecological, and social services that natural assets contribute to our communities. By leveraging federal funding programs, landscape architects contribute to regional, national, and international conservation targets through ecosystem-based planning and design projects.

Landscape architects have expertise in designing with nature and as such are uniquely positioned to lead conservation and restoration efforts. A few well-known examples of projects involving Canadian landscape architects include: the creation of [Agguttinni Uumajunut Pimmariuninginnut](#) (Territorial Park), recipient of the Canada Nature Fund Target 1 Challenge; the [Environmental Master Plan for Parkland County](#); and the [Ecological Restoration Plan of Roper Regional Westland](#), Edmonton.

In the words of Ian McHarg, a renowned landscape architect, "Let us green the earth, restore the earth, heal the earth." This sentiment encapsulates our mission: to advocate locally, nationally, and internationally for a sustainable future.

#4: Allocate resources to prioritize ecosystem-based planning and design and nature-based solutions as practical, effective, and sustainable approaches to the restoration and enhancement of biodiversity in the built environment.

The CSLA strongly advocates for the allocation of resources to promote and prioritize nature-based solutions (NbS) as a strategic approach to the restoration and enhancement of biodiversity in the built environment. Nature-based solutions (NbS) include the design and implementation of green infrastructure, restoration of degraded ecosystems, and the integration of natural elements into urban environments. However, not all attempts to 'green' the built environment can be considered a NbS, which uses the power of functioning ecosystems as the infrastructure upon which to provide or enhance services that benefit society and the environment. Ecosystem-based NbS involve the conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of ecosystems and harness biodiversity and ecosystem services to increase resilience.

A few well-known examples of projects that incorporate these strategies involving Canadian landscape architects include: Bring Back the Don / [Don Mouth Naturalization](#) and the [Port Lands Flood Protection Project](#), Toronto; [The Forks](#), Winnipeg; [Dale Hodges Park](#) on the Bow River, Calgary; and the [Iona Island Wastewater Treatment Plant and Regional Park Project](#).

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Recognized by the United Nations in 2020 as a key pathway for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), NbS are not only cost-effective but also crucial for global sustainability, and climate mitigation and adaptation, particularly in urban contexts. NbS synergies together with infrastructure build function and increase in value and strength over time, as opposed to traditional grey infrastructure that degrades with time.

To fully leverage the potential of landscape architecture and NbS, additional resources are necessary. Canada needs to promote ecosystem-based NbS as the standard practice for practical, effective, and sustainable alternatives to established urban and rural development. This includes providing funding for research, technical assistance, and incentive programs. For example, funding is necessary to address the chronic lack of regionally sourced seed and nursery stock available to support design professionals in Canada. We cannot implement NbS strategies and repair ecosystems with native vegetation if the necessary plant material is not made widely available.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the CSLA reiterates the benefits of including planning and design professions, particularly landscape architects, in the development and implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy. We are the profession that will not only promote but will also deliver results towards enhanced ecological connectivity, community engagement, and the integration of biodiversity in urban development.

The CSLA remains committed to offering its expertise and insights in this collaborative journey towards a biodiverse, sustainable, and resilient Canada and welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the federal government and other stakeholders. This collaborative approach will ensure the success of biodiversity strategies and contribute towards the shared goal of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.