

Thriving Natural Environment Advisory Table Report

Towards Canada's first National
Adaptation Strategy



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

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Introduction

Canadians are already witnessing and experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change. Canada's climate is warming two times faster than the global average, and three times faster in the North. Across the country, the impacts of climate change are affecting communities, rivers, oceans, animals, plants, and pose serious risks to our health and well-being.

It is clear that alongside efforts to urgently reduce emissions and limit the negative effects of climate change, Canada must accelerate efforts to adapt to current and future impacts. Timely and cohesive action across Canada will be critical for addressing the complexity and unknown scale and intensity of this new climate reality and ensuring that Canadians are able to survive and thrive into the future. Coordinating efforts and investments across the many actors that are advancing adaptation in Canada offers a unique opportunity for cooperation, to use resources more efficiently, and achieve better adaptation outcomes.



Graph 1 – Climate Change Impacts on Ecosystems

In December 2020, as part of its strengthened climate plan, *A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy*, the Government of Canada committed to develop Canada's first National Adaptation Strategy with provincial, territorial and municipal governments, Indigenous Peoples, and other key partners. A National Adaptation Strategy offers the opportunity to unite actors across Canada through shared priorities, cohesive action, and a whole-of-Canada approach to reducing climate change risks.

To inform the development of Canada's National Adaptation Strategy, the Government of Canada has launched five expert advisory tables to focus on:

1. Health and Wellbeing;
2. Resilient Natural and Built Infrastructure;
3. Thriving Natural Environment;
4. Strong and Resilient Economy; and,
5. Disaster Resilience and Security.

The advisory tables will advance work over two phases. Phase 1 focused on providing advice on transformational goals and concrete medium-term objectives for each of the thematic areas. Phase 2 will focus on advice on short-term actions for attaining those objectives, including discussion of performance indicators and reporting mechanisms.

Each Advisory Table is co-chaired by a federal department along with an external partner or stakeholder and includes diverse membership from Indigenous Peoples, youth, professional associations, the private sector, environmental organizations, academia, adaptation experts, and others.

This report includes the advice provided by the Thriving Natural Environment Advisory Table on a transformational goal and medium-term objectives, which concludes Phase 1. This work will inform the overall development of the National Adaptation Strategy, shaping all subsequent actions, funding, and accountabilities in Phase 2.

Thriving Natural Environment Advisory Table

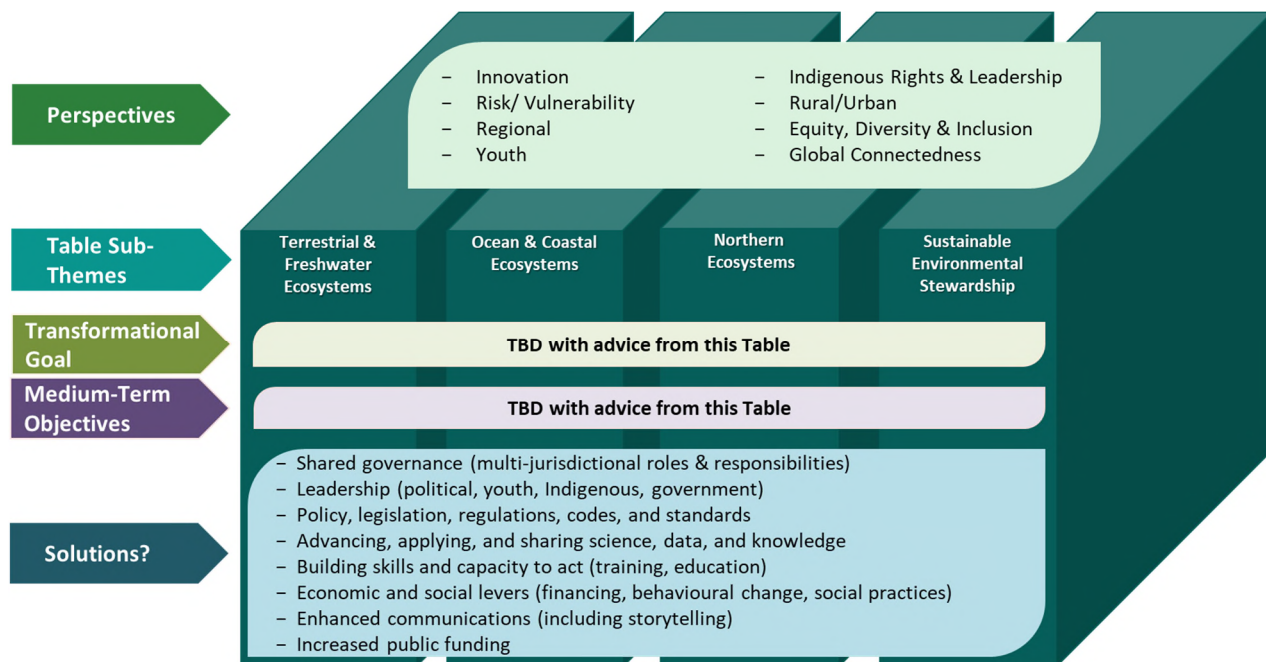
Members of the thriving Natural Environment Advisory Table – co-chaired by Jeff MacDonald, Director General of Climate Change Adaptation at Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Graeme Reed, Senior Advisor at the Assembly of First Nations – participated in eight virtual meetings (in a combination of all-member gatherings and smaller groups) from October to December 2021 to shape their advice on a transformational goal and medium-term objectives for a thriving natural environment.

During the initial set of meetings, members identified some major elements and considerations to achieve a thriving natural environment and advance adaptation in Canada. This baseline helped set the context for the development of the transformational goal and medium-term objectives. Considerations included:

- The National Adaptation Strategy should recognise that when the environment thrives, people thrive; and act to push forward new, innovative and collaborative opportunities that bring cultural livelihood, cultural wellbeing and mental health and safety needs to the forefront.
- Achieving a thriving natural environment must include shifting away from a development lens towards a stewardship lens that positions people as part of and active participants in ecosystems.

- Achieving a thriving natural environment must include focus on creating the conditions for ecosystems to be resilient. Ecosystems have incredible inherent resilience, but humans and the growing impacts of climate change have, and continue to, reduce the ability for resilience and natural processes to take place (e.g. for recovery after natural disturbance like storms).
- Efforts to advance a thriving natural environment must include consideration of future climate warming and conditions - for example, remediation and restoration of impacted landscapes must be planned with a view of how they may remain resilient in the future. Strategies for this include not treating landscape boundaries as fixed, but provide buffers and space for further change.
- Adaptation for a thriving natural environment should address imbalances inherent within settler/colonial/capitalist society, and work towards an approach and mindset that stops the degradation of nature and re-establishes balance. Linkages to the frameworks on stopping nature loss by 2030 and restoring nature by 2050 should be made.

Further to those discussions, members ensured that multiple perspectives were incorporated in the development of their advice, and that the transformational goal and medium-term objectives were developed in consideration of terrestrial, freshwater, oceans, coastal and Northern ecosystems, as shown in graph 2.



Graph 2 – Thriving Natural Environment: Areas of Focus

Accordingly, members identified key priority areas to inform the development of the transformational goal and medium-term objectives, which are outlined in the following section. Some considerations included:

- The goal should include language about environmental and social justice and inclusiveness; make reference to and align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); acknowledge damages already done to nature, largely by humans; and consider a broad scope of adaptation services that ecosystems provide to all, including those for humans such as spiritual and health benefits.
- There is a need to depoliticize nature and reimagine our structural systems so that the environment is central and incorporated into everything we do, including public health.
- Society struggles with the concept of both retreat from high-risk areas as well as retreat from status quo positions/practices. We need to prepare Canadians for worsening impacts and inevitable loss and damage, particularly in northern and coastal areas, and support communities in processing and realizing the idea of “retreat.” On the topic of status quo positions, we need to be ready to revisit previous decisions with the lens of social, environmental, Indigenous, and climate justice to ensure transformational adaptation action.
- Transformational awareness and action to protect and conserve the country’s ocean ecosystems is critically important for environmental and community adaptation. For example, we must:
 - Increase our understanding of the health of coasts and oceans in Canada, and their potential for resilience in the face of climate change;
 - Enhance coastal and riparian areas planning to ensure that sea-level rise, storm surges, floods, and other climate-related impacts are minimized;
 - Increase our understanding of the implications of ice-free ecosystems and the broad connections across biomes.

1. Goals and objectives

This section outlines the final transformational goal and medium-term objectives proposed by the Thriving Natural Environment Table. Several iterations were required to achieve consensus on the text, which was an indication of the commitment of members with the process, the diversity of expertise, and a push for inclusive, well designed, and ambitious language.

Transformational goal

Transformational goals are inspirational, ambitious, and achievable. They establish a shared vision, inclusive of many perspectives and views, and instill hope for an ideal long-term future while being grounded in a view of what is possible to attain. Goals are often broad and general in scope, outline direction and overall destinations, and may not be easily measurable on their own. The National Adaptation Strategy will set a 30-year timeframe for its aspirational goals, to 2050, in alignment with Canada's climate mitigation targets.

Proposed Transformational Goal: By 2050, all of us in Canada¹ have strengthened our understanding of natural systems and transformed our relationships and behaviour within them. We have learned from and acted upon diverse ways of knowing² to ensure ecosystems and communities can collectively evolve, adapt and thrive in a changing climate. In achieving a full recovery of nature and sustaining a thriving and resilient natural environment, we have halted and reversed biodiversity loss; recognised Indigenous laws, rights, and title; and, embraced the values of social, environmental, and intergenerational justice.

Medium-term objectives

Medium-term objectives outline concrete, measureable, and specific milestones that are necessary to make progress towards aspirational goals, and are conducive towards forming a set of actions. Objectives may be achieved through different levers, including knowledge generation, regulations, capacity building, funding, etc. The NAS will set a 5-10 year timeframe for its medium-term objectives, and aim to establish 5 objectives per aspirational goal.

Proposed Medium-Term Objectives:

A new relationship with Nature

1. By 2030, all levels of government³ are making every effort to halt biodiversity loss and improve ecosystems' resiliency, including by limiting and modifying human activities to be in harmony with nature in a changing climate.

¹ All of us in Canada includes all communities across the country, including underrepresented groups such as, youth, women, Indigenous people, newcomers, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities, including Black Canadians.

² The term diverse ways of knowing is used to reference to the broad spectrum of knowledge systems held by those of us in Canada. This includes Indigenous Knowledge Systems, local knowledge, and the various sciences, recognizing the diversity and heterogeneity of each of them.

³ The levels of government include federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and municipal.

Transforming governance

2. By 2030, all levels of government⁴ are implementing collaborative, innovative, comprehensive, inclusive, and systematic approaches for adaptation governance in Canada, with a focus on creating a thriving natural environment. In addition, new funding mechanisms and capacity building programs, co-developed and co-implemented by the communities most affected by climate change, are in place.
3. By 2030, recognizing the vital links among adaptation, reconciliation, and decolonization, Indigenous nations, organizations, and communities exercise self-determination on their lands and territories, including for ecosystem stewardship initiatives, with the support of other levels of government.

Accelerating Nature-Based solutions for adaptation

4. By 2030, all levels of government strengthen incentives, mandates, indicators, targets and tools in their programs and legislation to increase rapidly the use of nature-based solutions for adaptation across the country, reduce reliance and stress on grey infrastructure, increase social benefits of nature, and better account for the economic and non-economic value of ecosystem services⁵.
5. By 2030, the ecosystems most affected by climate change have conservation, restoration plans, monitoring programs, and management practices in place⁶ to ensure their continued viability and adaptive capacity. These plans and programs are informed by diverse ways of knowing and respect for Indigenous laws, rights, and title.

Knowledge Mobilization & Informing Decision-making

6. By 2030, drawing on diverse ways of knowing, comprehensive and accessible information on the state of ecosystem adaptation and resilience informs decision-making at all levels of government, supports locally-led actions, and is communicated to all of us living in Canada.
7. By 2030, professional associations and organizations in Canada integrate comprehensive considerations of climate change, ecosystem stewardship, nature-based solutions, Indigenous laws, rights and title, and values of environmental and intergenerational justice in their ethics, standards, regulations, and operations.

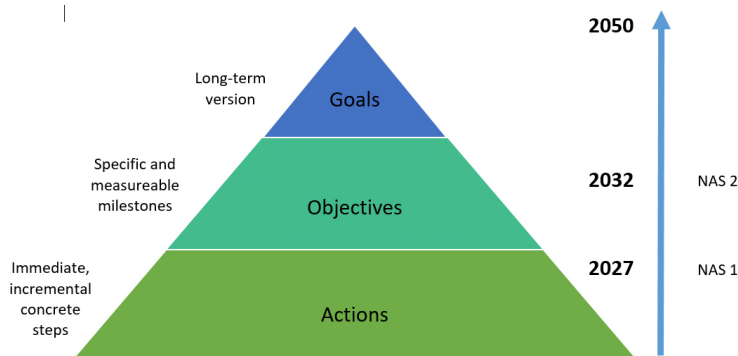
⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Improved and responsible valuation of ecosystems will be developed, while also recognizing non-market-based instruments to ensure a thriving environment.

⁶ For example: protected status, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), ecosystem connectivity, increase greenspace in urban areas, protection of riparian, floodplain, wetland, fresh water, marine, coastal and Northern ecosystems in high-risk areas.

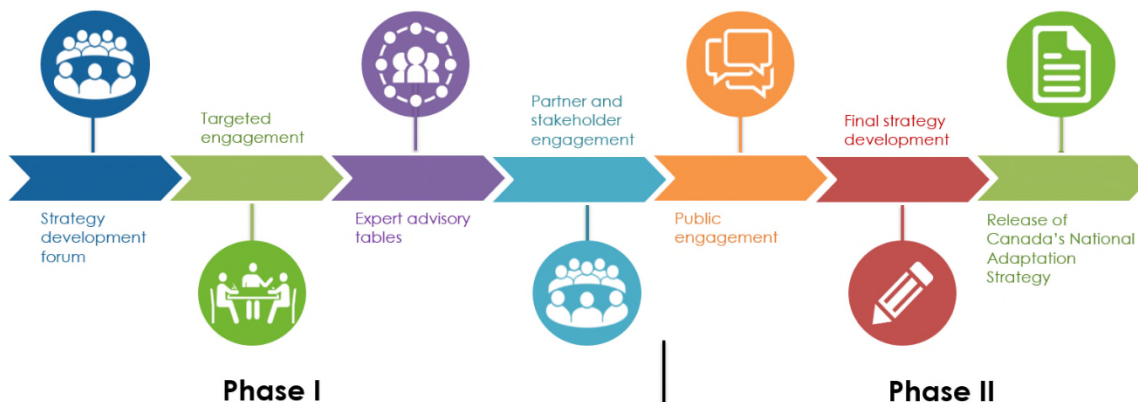
2. Next Steps and Considerations for Phase 2

The purpose of this phase of work was to engage with key partners to identify transformational goals and concrete objectives related to climate change adaptation, to build the framework for Canada's National Adaptation Strategy. The next phase of work will drill down to articulate specific actions needed to attain the objectives, and mechanisms for delivering on these actions.



Graph 3 – Proposed timeframe for Goals, Objectives, and Actions

Phase II will focus on public engagement. The Advisory Tables will also be reconvened to elaborate innovative adaptation actions, with the goal to finalize the national adaptation strategy by the end of 2022



Graph 4 – National Adaptation Strategy - Early action and proposed timelines

Annex

Advisory Table Members

Ana F. González Guerrero, Co-Founder, Youth Climate Lab

Anne Hammill, Senior Director, International Institute for Sustainable Development

Brian Horton, Manager, Yukon University

Brian Tucker, Director of Rights, Research and Policy, Métis Nation of Ontario

Chúk Odenigbo, Founding Director and Director of Ancestral Services, Future Ancestors Services

Colleen Mercer Clarke, Climate Adaptation Committee, Canadian Society of Landscape Architects

Danika Van Proosdij, Professor, Saint Mary's University

Deborah Carlson, Staff Lawyer, West Coast Environmental Law

Ian Mauro, Executive Director, Prairie Climate Centre, University of Winnipeg

Jennifer Parrott, Director, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation

Lara Ellis, Senior VP, ALUS

Michael Polanyi, Policy and Campaign Manager, Nature Canada

Naolo Charles, Founder, Black Environmental Initiative

Sidney Ribaux, Director, City of Montréal

Tyson Atleo, Program Manager, Nature United

Valérie Courtois, Director, Indigenous Guardians

Meeting Summaries

Meeting 1

- Discuss process, consensus-based decision-making and scope

Meeting 2

- Brainstorm on transformational goals

Meeting 3

- Provide advice on medium-term objectives
- Prioritize 3 – 5 medium-term objectives

Meeting 4

- Synthesize advice for NAS Framework

Meeting 5

- Wrap-up and Next Steps

What we heard about the process

1. What do you like about the process?
 - We are in a transformative moment in Canadian history and this is a unique opportunity to contribute positively and shape what Canada will look like in the future.
 - Appreciate the opportunity to hear other member views (diverse perspectives and expertise).
2. What is missing?
 - We need an approach to engage broadly with all Canadians. Governments could play a leadership role, but this is a whole-of-society effort. We need to influence policies, legislations funding, professional organizations, and Canadians across the country.
3. What can be improved?
 - The timelines are very ambitious. We should have the opportunity to dive as soon as possible in the discussions regarding objectives, concrete actions, indicators, and the NAS Framework.

What we heard on the transformational goal and thriving natural environment

1. On a transformational goal for a thriving natural environment ...
 - A transformational goal should lead Canada in the right direction and give hope. The goal should be as specific as possible to remain meaningful, while recognizing that a cultural shift is needed.
 - The goal should include language about environmental justice and inclusiveness; make reference to and align with UNDRIP; acknowledge damages already done to nature; and consider a broad scope of adaptation services that ecosystems provide, including spiritual and health benefits.
 - The NAS should actively invite Canadians to implement actions that match the ambition of the transformational goal.
 - Humans cannot adapt to climate change without a thriving natural environment; therefore protecting and restoring nature and biodiversity should be a guiding principle for the NAS (along with reconciliation, equity, economic opportunity, and alignment with local strategies).
2. On thriving terrestrial, freshwater, oceans, coastal and Northern ecosystems ...
 - Transformative actions to renew human-nature relationships and advance justice and equity should be mainstreamed throughout the NAS, but must include case-by-case and expert input for how they are applied to individual ecosystems.
 - Society struggles with the concept of both retreat from high-risk areas as well as retreat from status quo positions/practices. We need to prepare Canadians for worsening impacts and inevitable loss and damage, particularly in northern and coastal areas, and support communities in processing and realizing the idea of “retreat.”