

Governments must 'make good' on promises made at COP-26

To the Editor,

Last week at COP-26, more than 100 world leaders, including our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, pledged to [end and reverse deforestation by 2030](#). Nature-based climate solutions, such as protecting and restoring forests, were a central theme, highlighting the importance of working with nature to mitigate climate change.

The global commitment to end deforestation by 2030 is welcome, given nature's critical role in regulating Earth's climate and protecting biodiversity. However, halfway through COP-26, [the Global Day for Climate Justice](#) underlined the widespread and growing demand that climate commitments be put into action.

The real driver for change lies in the hands and hearts of local communities that are willing to protect what they care about. From floodplain rehabilitation in Bangladesh to peatland protection in Ontario's Hudson Bay lowlands, communities worldwide are mobilizing to protect and restore nature locally. Involving Indigenous and local people at every stage, from the initial planning to long-term monitoring, is key to the success of these projects.

A promising example are local efforts to protect the Highlands Corridor, stretching between Queen Elizabeth II Wildlands Provincial Park, Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park, and Silent Lake Provincial Park. This natural corridor encompasses over 100,000 hectares of forests and wetlands – an immense natural storehouse of carbon on unceded public and private lands.

There is strong interest among landowners locally to do their part, says Paul Heaven, an ecologist with Glenside Ecological Services Limited. Within a week of the Haliburton Highlands Land Trust requesting partners in conservation, five landowners had signed up, keen to develop plans to better manage and protect 1,000 acres of private land within the corridor.

In addition to storing carbon for the long term, protecting the Highlands Corridor would also help to mitigate the impacts of flooding, occurring more frequently as the climate changes. As recommended by [Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding in 2019](#) conserving wetlands and forests helps to absorb and store water and thereby reduce costly flood damages – by up to 29 per cent in rural areas and 38 per cent in urban areas.

Other associated benefits of protection include safeguarding opportunities for outdoor learning, recreation and wild food harvesting as well as biodiversity conservation. With a diversity of habitats including rocky barrens, wetlands and forests, the Highlands Corridor is home to 32 species at risk, 15 provincially significant species and 38 locally significant species, says Heaven.

It's time to embrace the idea that each person and each community can make a difference. Nature-based solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss begin in our own backyards.

But, of course, governments must also make good on their commitments. In April this year, the Government of Ontario announced its intention [to expand the province's protected areas](#). Political leaders must honour that promise, beginning with places like the Highlands Corridor.

Submitted by Jenna Cardoso, Ontario Nature, Protected Places Assistant