

Montreal COP15 on biodiversity facing the sixth great extinction

Protect 30% of lands and oceans or 100% with indigenous peoples?

Monday 5 December 2022, by [BONHOMME Marc](#) (Date first published: 4 December 2022).

After China withdrew last summer due to covid, COP15 on biodiversity was transferred to Montreal, where its permanent secretariat is located. It will be held from December 7 to 19. This COP is much less publicized than the one on climate, although the current catastrophe it is supposed to fight, the sixth great extinction, is of the same magnitude. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the equivalent of the UN IPCC on climate, had produced a powerful report on the subject [1].

Contents

- [Biodiversity is under the yoke](#)
- [The forest retreating, plastic](#)
- [Indigenous peoples live \(...\)](#)
- [Canada-Quebec acrobatics \(...\)](#)
- [Rooted local and indigenous](#)
- [Transforming the temporary](#)

We learned that out of an estimated 8 million animal and plant species on earth (including 5.5 million species of insects), the current rate of species extinction in the world is higher than the average of the last 10 million years by tens and even hundreds of times and this rate is accelerating. Up to 1 million species are threatened with extinction, many within the next few decades. The causes include a 30% reduction in global terrestrial habitat integrity and 47% of flightless mammals and 23% of threatened birds have likely had their distributions affected by the impact of climate change. 33% of marine fish stocks in 2015 were exploited at a biologically unsustainable level, 60% were maximally exploited and 7% were underexploited. In Canada, one in five species is threatened [2].

Biodiversity is under the yoke of profit, says the UN, but countries don't care

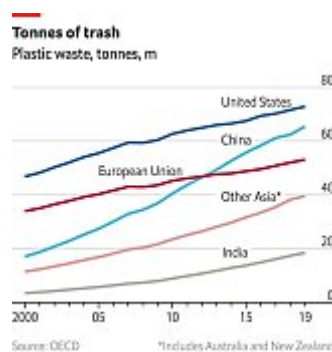
In July 2022, in view of COP15, a “document [of the IPBES] adopted by its 139 member countries, including Canada, makes the observation “that short-term profits and economic growth are the subject of ‘predominant attention all over the world, while the multiple values of nature are rarely taken into account in political decisions.’” [3]. Furthermore, “70% of the world’s poor are directly dependent on wild species. One in five people rely on wild plants, algae and fungi for their food and income; 2.4 billion rely on fuel wood for cooking.” [4]. All in all, the pursuit of profit basically causes the sixth great extinction, which prevents lots of people from meeting their basic needs, sometimes to the point of forcing them to contribute to the plunder of nature despite themselves for the sake of

immediate survival.

These UN reports signaled the failure to achieve the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets [5] of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity as part of its Strategic Plan 2011-2020. “From tackling pollution to protecting coral reefs, the international community did not fully achieve any of the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets agreed in Japan in 2010 to slow the loss of the natural world. [...] The 20 Aichi biodiversity targets are broken down into 60 separate elements to monitor overall progress. Of those, seven have been achieved, 38 have shown progress and 13 elements have shown no progress. Progress remains unknown for two elements. [...] Half a trillion dollars of harmful government subsidies for agriculture, fossil fuels and fishing are highlighted in the report as a particular area of concern...” [6].

The forest retreating, plastic replaces it from the depths of the ocean to the summit of Everest

Meanwhile, the greats of this world are dragging their feet to solve plastic pollution. “In March 175 countries endorsed the idea of a UN accord governing plastic waste, which has been found everywhere from the deepest part of the ocean to the tip of Mount Everest. [...] Some parties—including Britain, Canada, the EU and Switzerland—want the final treaty to be binding, and to set a goal of stopping plastic pollution by 2040. America agrees with the aim but favours voluntary action and doesn’t want new curbs on production. [...] Just 9% of the stuff is recycled. But countries have until the end of 2024 to finalise an accord. An effective one is far from being in the bag.” [7].



As for global deforestation, it is progressing even if it is at a lower rate when it should stop and lead to a reversal according to the declaration of the Glasgow leaders on forests and land use [8]. “Annual deforestation decreased by around 29 percent -from 11 million hectares per year in the decade 2000-2010 to 7.8 million hectares per year in the period 2010-2018. [9]. Considering natural or unnatural reforestation, [n]et forest area losses have more than halved during the survey period, decreasing from 6.8 million hectares per year in 2000-2010 to 3.1 million hectares per year in 2010-2018.” Over 18 years, global gross deforestation equals the total area of Quebec and more than half the net area. “The loss of tropical forests accounted for more than 90 percent of the global deforestation from 2000 to 2018, at 157 million hectares - that’s roughly the size of western Europe. [...] Cropland expansion (including oil palm plantations) is the main driver of deforestation, causing almost 50 percent of global deforestation, followed by livestock grazing, accounting for 38.5 percent.”

The devastation of tropical forests seems to whitewash the management of northern forests. We need to take a closer look. In Europe especially and in Canada, including Quebec, reforestation, whether natural or not, outweighs deforestation, although the areas involved are modest compared

to those in South America, East and South Africa and Southeast Asia. “In Europe, the leading driver of forest losses was urbanization and infrastructure development, which caused 30 percent (1.0 Mha) of total forest losses.” [10]. In a word, urban sprawl is the main cause here. On the other hand, the very significant net deforestation in the South is essentially due to the expansion of agriculture, livestock and fires. “The tropics lost 11.1 million hectares of tree cover in 2021, according to new data from the University of Maryland” [11] above the FAO 2010-18 average. The reason for Europe’s “success” is due to the importation of a substantial part of its food from the countries of the South. More than 90% of European reforestation is due to natural reforestation, probably former marginal agricultural land, while worldwide the shares of natural reforestation and afforestation are approximately equal.

Indigenous peoples live in territories hosting 80% of the remaining biodiversity

At the end of March, in Geneva, in preparation for COP15, “a coalition of 91 countries [resolved to] protect at least a third of the world’s land and oceans by 2030, a goal dubbed 30x30 and repeated in the negotiated text. [...] In 2020, 17% of the earth’s surface was protected and almost 7% of marine and coastal areas. [...] To reach 30%, the delegations count on ‘other effective and equitable conservation measures’ (OECM in English), including areas with human activities compatible with the protection of nature. This paves the way for the inclusion of lands managed and owned by indigenous peoples. [...] ‘The notion of putting nature under glass has not been good for indigenous peoples’, comments Jennifer Tauli Corpuz, of the Nia Tero association and representative of indigenous peoples... [...] Indigenous communities live in territories that are home to 80% of the remaining biodiversity on Earth, according to a recent report by UN climate experts (IPCC). [...]

“For Linda Krueger of the NGO Nature Conservancy, new protected areas will have to pass a test. ‘We need to see that biodiversity is maintained or enhanced there,’ she says. The objective of protecting at least 30% of the planet should not overshadow the efforts needed to preserve nature elsewhere, by increasing green spaces in cities or reducing pesticides in agriculture. ‘We need 100%, we have already lost too much nature,’ she adds” [12]. This, according to renowned Guardian commentator George Monbiot, is where the problem lies. “Take the UK, for example. On paper, it has one of the highest proportions of protected land in the rich world, at 28%. It could easily raise this proportion to 30% and claim to have fulfilled its obligations. But it is also one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. How can this be? Because most of our ‘protected’ areas are nothing of the kind.” [13].

Canada-Quebec acrobatics and banking greed make it clear that the 30% is a trap

Neither Canada nor Quebec rose to the British level. “At the end of 2021, Canada had conserved 13.5% of its terrestrial area (land and freshwater), including 12.6% in protected areas [and] 13.9% of its marine territory, including 9.1% in protected areas” [14]. A simple glance at the adjoining map clearly shows that terrestrial and even maritime protected areas are overwhelmingly located in northern regions that are often forestless and essentially inhabited by Aboriginal and Inuit peoples. In Quebec, the overall percentage of these areas is 17%, also mainly in the northern regions, even if during the summer of 2021, a militant march had finally forced Quebec to add eleven small areas to the south, out of a potential of 83, which increased the percentage by less than a quarter of a percentage point [15].

The European NGO "Rainforest Rescue" goes so far as to question the relevance of the 30% standard. "Protected areas can play an important role in preserving biodiversity and climate, but they are not a panacea. [...] Plans like "30 percent by 2030" set off alarm bells among environmentalists and human rights activists: Up to 300 million people could suffer if the land where they have often lived in harmony with nature for many generations were suddenly to be "protected". [...] Can more protected areas save biodiversity? It's doubtful. For despite the vast number of such areas, the climate and biodiversity crises have intensified. Rather than setting arbitrary goals like protecting 30 percent of the planet's surface, it makes more sense to improve the protection of biodiversity in areas where it is the greatest. These include the rainforests. It is also imperative that we overcome our present way of doing business and living, which is based on excessive consumption of raw materials, agricultural products and energy." [16].

Food for thought. Where will Canada plant its two billion trees promised during the great demonstration in Montreal with Greta Thunberg and whose planting has barely started if not on indigenous land [17] ? It would still be necessary to have their consent and their cooperation if we respect the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. And who says that the financial capital which has already put its paw on the carbon markets and its offsets will not integrate the 30% standard there. "Banks know a growth market when they see it, and they're increasingly seeing one in the buying, selling and generating of carbon offsets. [...] [This market is] expected, however, to grow to upwards of \$50 billion by 2030, consultancy firm McKinsey & Co. estimates, while former Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney was only last year talking about the market possibly topping \$100 billion by decade's end." [18].

Rooted local and indigenous struggles for biodiversity are not a trap but need backing

This is a subject to be debated at COP15 and, more pertinently, at the fifty or so events planned by the Collectif Cop 15 [19]. "The Quebec civil society Collectif COP15 is an alliance of 100 organizations, other environmental organizations, international development NGOs, unions, professional associations, youth organizations, financial organizations, research centres and charitable foundations that are joining forces to protect life on the occasion of COP15." but without some of them reputed to be more cutting edge, for example Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion. There is also an anti-capitalist and ecological Coalition against COP15 whose slogan is "Let's block COP15" while that of the Collective is "For living generations". While pledging, in the name of the diversity of tactics, not to criticize each other, each coalition will organize its own demonstration. We can think that the Canadian government would certainly be unhappy if there were clashes but would be even more so if COP15 took place without the traditional well-supervised parallel activities and events.

In the absence of significant international participation and even barely a Canadian one, it is worth emphasizing the other side of the coin, namely the integration of specifically urban and indigenous struggles for biodiversity. One thinks of Technoparc Oiseaux, which is taking part with a participant from the Coalition of Golf Courses in Transition, in a "conference and round-table [that] will discuss the biodiversity and ecological value of the natural environments of the Montreal Technoparc and adjacent federal lands, north of Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport." One thinks of the more publicized struggle of Mob6600-ParcNature-HochelagaMaisonneuve for the conversion into a nature park of a vast industrial wasteland invaded by the Port of Montreal, under federal jurisdiction, and a private underling, Ray-Mont, who is building a noisy and polluting rail-truck transshipment logistics platform 100 meters from a nursing home and a housing cooperative. And let's not forget the indigenous peoples who will hold a few workshops, including the Innu Council of Pessamit on the

subject of caribou protection.

Transforming the temporary Collective COP15 useful to the State into a permanent tool to fight against it

We think that the Collectif and the Coalition could continue, while collaborating, following COP15 to become a coalition for Montreal and Quebec biodiversity using a variety of tactics, from lobbying to blockades and even strikes. Its goal would be to force the federal government to expropriate Ray-Mont Logistique, to demolish the viaduct under construction linking the port to the wasteland — the Mirabel airport fiasco cost Ottawa 10 to 100 times more —, to transform the airport technoparc into a park, to force Ottawa and Quebec to legislate on the transformation of urban golf courses into community gardens and nature parks while subsidizing the municipalities to do this and not to mention the support for citizen groups defending urban woodlands and wetlands.

Outside urban areas, this coalition would focus on supporting indigenous and Inuit peoples, and neighboring village communities, in their fight for the ecological management of our forests and against the looting of logging to make paper to be thrown away after a single use or lumber for export to the US. Increasingly, these struggles are against the wound, which is going to become gaping, of the open pit mines, especially of graphite and lithium. There is no point in changing four 25 cents of hydrocarbon extractivism for a dollar of all-electric green capitalist extractivism renewing mass consumption through the proliferation of hydroelectric dams and wind farms, promised by the Quebec government which wants increase electricity production by 50% by 2050, just like the orgy of private electric vehicles and server farms powering wasteful 5G technology.

Finally, we must fight for active and full free public transport, without private vehicles, serving a dense and humanized urban fabric of collective and energy-efficient public housing, without individual or row houses, local services accessible on foot, urban agriculture, nature parks and short journeys based on organic and vegetarian agriculture maximizing the return of forests and wetlands. It is this ecosocialist perspective of a simple life of “buen vivir” and rich in solidarity, which the banks and the States in their service reject with horns and cries, which will give the working people the energy, the courage and the fearlessness of the Burmese, Iranian and Ukrainian peoples fighting for their freedom and for their national liberation.

Oh yes! Where is Québec solidaire in this mobilization around COP15, an international event of primary importance, or which should be, to fight against the sixth great extinction? A political campaign, participation, any speaking out? Three days before the start of COP15, it is very discreet... except for a small question in the National Assembly that went almost unnoticed by the deputy responsible for the environment on the protection of the Magpie River in Innu territory. The leadership tries to hide this political passivity with a call to its members to participate in the Collectif COP15 march. Where has the party's major climate-ecological priority gone?

Marc Bonhomme, 4 December 2022

www.marcbonhomme.com ; bonmarc@videotron.ca

Footnotes

- [1] IPBES, Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented' Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating', May 2019: <https://ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>
- [2] Éric-Pierre Champagne, Une espèce sur cinq est menacée au pays, La Presse, 11/29/22 : <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/environnement/2022-11-29/biodiversite/une-espece-sur-cinq-est-menacee-au-pays.php>
- [3] Éric-Pierre Champagne, La nature n'est pas qu'une source de profit, La Presse, 7/12/22 : <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/environnement/2022-07-12/rapport-de-l-onu-sur-la-biodiversite/la-nature-n-est-pas-qu-une-source-de-profit.php>
- [4] IPBES, 50,000 Wild Species Meet Needs of Billions Worldwide, 7/8/22: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/hxi9rburqxu2gs9/AAAnRm7yyKOMiTw99yJsrpC6a/1 Media Release?dl=0&preview=Media+Release+IPBES+Sustainable+Use+of+Wild+Species+Assessment.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/hxi9rburqxu2gs9/AAAnRm7yyKOMiTw99yJsrpC6a/1%20Media%20Release?dl=0&preview=Media+Release+IPBES+Sustainable+Use+of+Wild+Species+Assessment.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1)
- [5] Convention on Biological Diversity, Aichi Biodiversity Targets, 2018: <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>
- [6] Patrick Greenfield, World fails to meet a single target to stop destruction of nature – UN report, The Guardian, 09/15/20: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/15/every-global-target-to-stem-destruction-of-nature-by-2020-missed-un-report-aoe>
- [7] The Economist, The World in brief, 2/12/22
- [8] Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, 2/11/21: <https://ukcop26.org/glasgow-leaders-declaration-on-forests-and-land-use/>
- [9] FAO, Global deforestation slowing but tropical rainforests remain under threat, key FAO report shows, 5/5/22: <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/global-deforestation-slowing-but-rainforests-under-threat-fao-report-shows-030522/en>
- [10] AO, FRA 2020 Remote Sensing Survey, 2022: <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9970en/cb9970en.pdf>
- [11] Global Forest Watch, Forest Loss Remained Stubbornly High in 2021, undated: <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/blog/data-and-research/global-tree-cover-loss-data-2021/>
- [12] Kelly Macnamara - Agence France-Presse, Protéger 30 % de la planète n'est que le début pour sauver la nature, La Presse, 29/03/22: <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/environnement/2022-03-29/selon-une-coalition-de-91-pays/protéger-30-de-la-planete-n-est-que-le-debut-pour-sauver-la-nature.php>
- [13] George Monbiot, From the Amazon to Australia, why is your money funding Earth's destruction?, The Guardian, 30/11/22: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/nov/30/amazon-public-money-earth-destruction-fossil-fuels-subsidies>
- [14] Government of Canada, Canada's conserved areas, 7/05/22: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-indicators/conserved-areas.html>

[ed-areas.html](#)

[15] Nicolas Lachance, Québec bonifiera ses aires protégées au sud, Journal de Québec, 17/06/22: <https://www.journaldequebec.com/2022/06/17/quebec-bonifiera-ses-aires-protegees-au-sud>

[16] Rainforest Rescue, A better way to protect biodiversity: strengthening indigenous rights!, undated: <https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/petitions/1263/a-better-way-to-protect-biodiversity-strengthening-indigenous-rights>

[17] Alexandre Shields, Plus de 200 millions d'arbres à planter chaque année pour respecter le programme du fédéral, Le Devoir, 9/11/22: <https://www.ledevoir.com/environnement/770054/plus-de-200-millions-d-arbres-a-planter-chaque-annee-pour-respecter-le-programme-du-federal>

[18] Ian Bickis - The Canadian Press, Canadian banks readying for carbon offsets to go big, even as doubts remain, Toronto Star, 6/11/22: <https://www.thestar.com/business/2022/11/06/canadian-banks-readying-for-carbon-offsets-to-go-big-even-as-doubts-remain.html>

[19] Collectif COP15.org, Events: <https://collectifcop15.org/en/events/>