*Wetlands play a major role in maintaining the health and livelihood of human communities, yet in the Lower Mainland we continue to lose wetlands each year. Our declaration commits us to expand our partnership with each other, local governments and the public to work closer and protect our valuable wetlands.*

# Values of Wetlands

Wetlands serve numerous, valuable, environment, social and economic functions, and contribute significantly to the health and well-being of British Columbians, and as such, wetlands are a priority for conservation and achieving sustainable development.

We recognize that wetlands include a range of communities that include bogs, marshes, fens, swamps, shallow water, intertidal wetlands, wet meadows and ephemeral wetlands. Each with their unique attributes and values.

Healthy wetlands filter our water and ensure safer drinking water for our communities, moderate the effects of droughts and floods, store carbon, reduce the impact on our atmosphere, provide homes for plants and wildlife, improve air quality, reducing local ambient heat, and are natural getaway places.

Over 50% of North American bird species rely on wetlands throughout their lives. Wetlands are a crucial component of rapidly growing ecotourism and birding businesses that provide valuable revenue for our communities.

But wetlands are in trouble, and one of the most endangered ecosystems. Up to 70% of Canada’s wetlands have disappeared in settled areas. Shallow wetlands, salt marshes and upland buffers provide some of the most valuable, but threatened green infrastructure.

Whereas most wetlands were once lost to large-scale agricultural drainage schemes and water diversion projects, today BC is steadily losing wetlands to draining and filling for new subdivisions, industrial development, shoreline protection projects (rip-rap), removal of streamside vegetation, and invasive species.[[1]](#endnote-3) What wetlands remain are often heavily degraded by hydrological alterations, sedimentation, and pollutants[[2]](#endnote-4).

Even now, the effects of climate change have impacted the remaining wetlands, most dramatically through changes in rainfall, temperature, and seasonal flows.[[3]](#endnote-5)

These land use changes that result in the loss of wetlands affect the recharge of our groundwater. In urban regions, about 60 per cent of rainwater is discharged into storm drains and drainage ditches. Compare this rate to vegetated areas where only five to 15 per cent of rainwater runs off the ground[[4]](#endnote-6).

Wetlands provide these services for FREE and they maintain themselves. Replacing their functions with human engineering substitutes such as water-infiltration plants, dikes and retention walls will cost billions of dollars in the future.

# Wetlands in the Lower Mainland

Despite the multitude of values that wetlands provide to society, we have lost over 70% of estuarine habitat in the Fraser River Delta to draining and diking.[[5]](#endnote-7) In addition, we have lost some significant wetlands such as the 11,700 acre Sumas Lake wetland in the Fraser Valley that was drained to create farmland and control flooding.

And we continue to lose wetlands directly through conversion of wetlands to other land uses such as urban and industrial development, transportation corridors, agriculture and indirectly via degradation of wetlands such as changes and loss of water flow to surface water and ground water.

In a study conducted between 1989 and 2009, of the remaining 320 wetlands in the Lower Mainland nearly 5% of the wetlands were negatively impacted resulting in the loss of 1,352 acres of wetlands and continued degradation of the wetlands.[[6]](#endnote-8)

Recent studies demonstrate the economic value of wetlands to the Lower Mainland is significant to our community. In the document Natural Capital in BC’s Lower Mainland, the value of wetlands was $128 million per year[[7]](#endnote-9), while a separate study found that the economic value of wetlands ranged between $38 million to $4.8 billion per year in Valuing the Aquatic Benefits of BC’s Lower Mainland.[[8]](#endnote-10)

Despite the high value of wetlands to the public, no legislation exists in BC to specifically protect non-fish-bearing wetlands from destruction. Action is needed to maintain the benefits provided by wetlands for economic development and the livelihoods of people

# A Call to Action

To protect our valuable wetlands, we need to:

*achieve a state of no net loss of wetlands in the Lower Mainland and where possible restore our lost wetlands through the following steps:*

Ensure There is Clear and Comprehensive Information About Wetlands

Goal: Utilize the existing wetland database for the Lower Mainland (maps.ducks.ca/cwi) to support effective planning, law-making, and policy development at the local government level.

Goal: Increase public, industry, and government awareness of the importance of wetlands for the ecosystem and in sustaining community health and wellbeing.

Goal: Increase awareness at a local level of the variety of options and mechanisms to protect wetlands beyond solely acquisition.

Provide Effective Legal and Planning Tools

Goal: Enhance legal protection of wetlands through effective and effectively enforced laws and policies that include policies founded on principles of avoidance and minimization of harm[[9]](#footnote-3) and as a last resort, compensation.

Goal: Ensure that bird and amphibian conservation considerations are factored into wetland buffer policies.

Goal: Ensure wetland protection and restoration strategies are embedded in local planning processes and that integrated watershed management planning processes are promoted.

Undertake Effective Actions and Incentives for Wetland Protection

Goal: Secure the protection of priority wetlands and the conservation and restoration of natural wetlands and pursue options to for expediting securement

Goal: Improve coordination and strengthen partnerships to maximize effectiveness in expedient, feasible wetlands protection and restoration through:

* + 1. The Wetland Stewardship Partnership
    2. Metro Vancouver Ecological Health Plan
    3. Local government Initiatives
    4. South Coast Conservation Program
    5. Stewardship organizations, land trusts and local governments
    6. Other joint government and non-government partnerships
    7. Expansion of this declaration to other partners

# Signatures

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|  |  |  |
| Ducks Unlimited Canada |  | David Suzuki Foundation |
| World Wildlife Fund |  | Fraser Valley Watershed Coalition |
| Pacific Salmon Foundation |  | BC Wildlife Federation |
| ??? Nature Trust of British Columbia |  | ???The Land Conservancy of BC |

?? Ecojustice

# References

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4. P. Bolund and S. Hunhammar. 1999. Ecosystem services in urban areas. Ecological Economics 29 (1999), pp 293–301. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
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7. Wilson, S. 2010. Natural Capital in BC’s Lower Mainland: Valuing the Benefits from Nature. 66 pages. Prepared for The Pacific Parklands Foundation. http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
8. Molnar, M. M. Kocian and D. Batker. 2012. Valuing the Aquatic Benefits of BC’s Lower Mainland: Nearshore Natural Capital Valuation. David Suzuki Foundation. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
9. Best Management Practises include: Green Bylaws Toolkit, Wetland Ways guidelines, Develop with Care: Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in BC [↑](#footnote-ref-3)