

Canada invests \$9 million for nature conservation across southern Ontario

As the world faces the twin threats of climate change and rapid biodiversity loss, protecting more natural spaces across Canada supports iconic biodiversity, while helping to fight climate change by storing carbon and making our communities more resilient to its impacts. King-Vaughan MP Deb Schulte, Minister of Seniors, on behalf of the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, announced \$9 million in funding for Conservation Ontario to better conserve lands across southern Ontario. Through approximately 63 projects, Conservation Ontario and regional conservation authorities will implement a variety of conservation activities on grasslands and wetlands, including protecting more land, restoring wetlands, and enhancing agricultural management. This initiative, Bringing Strong Collaboration, Networks and Expertise for Integrated Nature-Smart Climate Solutions, will help fight climate change by capturing and storing carbon and making our communities more resilient. It will also support biodiversity, including species at risk and migratory birds. This initiative is among 14 projects to receive funding from the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund in 2021-2022. Collectively, they are projected to conserve up to 30,000 hectares; restore up to 6,000 hectares; and contribute to the enhanced management of up to 18,000 hectares of wetlands, grasslands, and riparian areas across Canada. This move supports Canada's goals to protect 25 percent of lands and 25 percent of oceans by 2025 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 to 45 percent of 2005 levels by 2030. "Ontarians are experiencing the impacts of climate change. In order to fight it and adapt to its impacts, we must embrace the power of nature. Protecting more nature in southern Ontario and across the country will make our communities more resilient, fight climate change, and support our iconic biodiversity," said Wilkinson. "Embracing the power of nature has many benefits; for climate change, our economy and for the health and well-being of people. To take care of ourselves, we must take care of nature. With the funding, our government is taking action to conserve Ontario wetlands and grasslands so that we not only preserve nature today, but that our children, grandchildren and future generations will be able to enjoy the outdoors too," Schulte added. "I am proud of the steps the Government of Canada is taking to protect Ontario's ecosystems. With this investment, Conservation Authorities will be able to implement nature-based projects that will ensure positive outcomes for our environment and Canada's future. This is a great example of how we are working to engage with local communities as part of our plan to get Canada to a nature-positive, carbon-neutral future," noted Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen. "Climate change is a rapidly growing challenge for all of us and it's very gratifying to see the federal government listen to practitioners and support nature-based solutions as one way to address and adapt to these impacts. Conservation Ontario and its member conservation authorities are very pleased to dig in and work with the federal government and other partners on so many valuable projects," said Andy Mitchell, chair of Conservation Ontario. Nature-based solutions are defined by the World Conservation Union as "actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges." Nature-based solutions have the potential to deliver up to one-third of the world's climate solutions. Over the next ten years (2021-2031), the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund will support projects to restore, enhance, and conserve inland and coastal wetlands, peatlands, grasslands, and forests to capture and store carbon across Canada. These ecosystems are also critically important habitat for Canada's wildlife, including migratory birds and species at risk. The Government of Canada is investing \$4 billion over the next ten years (2021-2031) in the Natural Climate Solutions Fund, which supports activities to build a more resilient economy and a healthier, greener future.