

Women for Nature focuses on diversity, broad engagement

Project Learning Tree is an environmental education program to ensure we have future leaders who care about nature and our forests. It's about diversity and about the strength that comes with it—diversity and strength not just for a community or an enterprise, but for all of nature.



Canada's federal Environment Minister Catherine McKenna, pictured in this file photo on the Hill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

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It's widely accepted that there's great strength in diversity, and that our world improves because of it. We see proof virtually everywhere we live, work and play—whether in nature, in the community sphere, or in the broader economy.

One initiative that exemplifies that work is Nature Canada's Women for Nature. As our country celebrates its 150th year, it's especially apt that we shine a light on this innovative initiative of the country's oldest conservation organization.

Nature Canada's Women for Nature initiative is poised to bring more than 150 women together to raise awareness of Canada's wealth of biodiversity and the importance of connecting youth to nature.

Over the past 75-plus years since its founding, Nature Canada has helped protect more than 63 million acres of parks and wildlife areas in Canada and countless species that depend on this habitat as well as engaging hundreds of thousands of Canadians—especially children—in nature through its activities.

Nature Canada today represents a network comprised of 55,000 members and supporters, and more than 350 nature organizations across the country.

Following Nature Canada's vision, Women for Nature brings together women of influence from a wide range of backgrounds who demonstrate their passion for nature and for driving change. And diversity is a crucial part of the concept.

At the Sustainable Forestry Initiative's (SFI) annual conference recently, we enlisted Inger Andersen, director general of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, a leading world conservation organization to become the 151st *Women for Nature* which gives this initiative global reach and connection.

Andersen emphasizes the importance of nature conservation in achieving sustainable development. And like the rest of the group, she envisions much broader, more diverse engagement. Nature, she has said, is not an obstacle to human aspirations, but rather an essential partner, offering valuable contributions toward all our endeavors. Her strong interest in engagement with diverse partners to build community support for nature conservation is a key aspect of her work.

Under Andersen's leadership, IUCN's Commission for Education and Communications launched #NatureForAll and the #NatureForAll Playbook, modelled after the Canadian Parks Council's the NaturePlaybook, to help build community support for nature conservation by engaging more individuals to take action for nature at the local level.

Others in the IUCN membership are similarly focused on broader engagement, so much so that progress has been nothing short of amazing. Now a global movement with more than 175 partners such as Nature Canada, Parks Canada, SFI and Project Learning Tree, #NatureForAll connects people to nature across 36 countries around the globe.

Part of its success has been in empowering emerging young nature leaders who implement nature-based projects, inspired by the NaturePlaybook.

Women for Nature also champion various efforts to inspire youth and families to spend time in nature, to learn and experience our natural heritage and in doing so, to ensure the health and well-being of our Canadian society. Women for Nature continues to focus on the future by engaging with young people on nature and conservation.

Our founding members are up to the task. I'm proud to be part of an initiative that includes amazing women such as Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, Sharon Johnston (former vice-regal consort), Senator Diane Griffin (Honorary Chair of Women for Nature), Environment Minister Catherine McKenna and Dawn Carr, executive director, Canadian Parks Council, to name just a few.

As a sustainability leader dedicated to the future of our forests, my organization focuses on well-managed forests, and how they clean our water, sequester carbon and conserve biodiversity. We're also strongly focused on community engagement and, in particular, elevating environmental education for youth. That's why we are so thrilled to oversee a brand new program called Project Learning Tree which is an environmental education program to ensure we have future leaders that care about nature and our forests.

It's about diversity and about the strength that comes with it—diversity and strength not just for a community or an enterprise, but for all of nature.

Kathy Abusow is president & CEO of SFI Inc., which works to show how responsible forest management can maximize the environmental, economic and social values that matter to all of us. Ms. Abusow is also a founding member of Women for Nature.

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