

North America

2006 was a mixed year for the environment in North America. The United States set aside the world's largest Marine Protected Area. Rising public concern about climate change motivated states and provinces to move ahead on mitigation initiatives, despite their federal governments' reluctance to cap greenhouse gas emissions.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS BYPASS KYOTO PROTOCOL

In per capita terms, North America emits far more carbon dioxide than any other region in the world, and in absolute terms is second only to much more populous Asia. Yet, at the end of 2006 neither the US nor the Canadian governments are engaged in the Kyoto process.

Canada ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 2002 and committed to achieve a 6 per cent cut in emissions over the 1990 level by 2012. However, between 1990 and 2004, total Canadian emissions grew by 26.6 per cent (EC 2006) (**Figure 1**). Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, part of the Office of the Auditor General, released a report urging the country intensify its efforts to combat—and to prepare for—climate change (OAG 2006). The Commissioner noted that rising emissions from booming oil sands projects in the province of Alberta will compromise efforts to reduce overall emissions. The report spelled out some of the risks from climate change, including drought in the Prairies, rising sea levels, more intense coastal storms, and increased smog levels in cities. It called for a believable, clear, and realistic plan to significantly reduce GHGs with short and long term national goals, as well as for new targets and specific time frames for achieving them.

In 2006 Canada's new Conservative federal government recognized the country's inability to achieve the Kyoto Protocol's goals and responded by discontinuing 15 Climate Change action projects, with a promise to develop a new "Made in Canada" approach (Ambrose 2006, Isaacs 2006). On 19 October, Canada

introduced its proposed new plan in the House of Commons (**Box 1**) (Conservative Party of Canada 2006).

In the US, total GHG emissions increased by 15.8 per cent between 1990 and 2004 (EPA 2006). Rather than impose national limits on emissions, the United States continues to support voluntary reductions, market-based approaches, and the development of new technologies. In this spirit, the United States with Australia, China, India, Japan, and the Republic of Korea founded the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate. The partnership's inaugural meeting in January 2006 established eight public-private sector Task Forces covering cleaner fossil energy, renewable energy and distributed generation, power generation and transmission, buildings and appliances, steel, aluminium, cement, and coal mining. Each task force was charged to develop an action plan identifying specific opportunities for co-operation, ambitious but realistic goals, and means of achieving them (APCDC 2006). The task forces released their plans in October 2006.

States and Provinces Take Action

Advocating stronger action, a coalition of 12 US States and several environmental NGOs sued the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for failing to regulate carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from vehicles under the national Clean Air Act. Under the Act, the EPA must regulate emissions from mobile sources that endanger public health or welfare. In November 2006, the US Supreme Court heard arguments about whether the EPA is obliged to regulate CO₂ and other GHG emissions, and whether the plaintiffs have legal

Box 1: Canada's new approach to climate change

The Conservative government proposed a new Clean Air Act as the centrepiece of Canada's green agenda. The Act will allow the setting of short, medium, and long term upper limits for emissions of air pollutants, which polluters will be compelled to respect. The aim is that these fixed targets will be at least as stringent as those in countries that are environmental leaders.

For greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, short term targets will be set based on intensity which encourages efficiency but allows emissions to grow if output grows, an approach used in the United States Global Climate Change Initiative of 2002. There will be a longer term goal of cutting GHG emissions by 45 per cent to 65 per cent of 2003 levels by 2050. No mention is made of Canada's Kyoto commitments.

Opposition parties and environmental groups agree with a number of elements in the Act, but have been critical of the very long deferral of GHG emission limits and the lack of a compulsory timetable for cutting GHG emissions. They also note that some toxic substances are re-defined as 'air pollutants', which may weaken powers of regulation, and suggest that some of the measures are already covered in the existing Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Since the government does not command a majority of seats in Parliament, the Act may not pass into law without major revisions.

Sources: Government of Canada 2006a and 2006b, Bueckert 2006, David Suzuki Foundation 2006, Environmental Defence, Pollution Probe and Clean Air Foundation 2006, USEIA 2003).

standing to bring the case. The ruling, expected in 2007, could have significant consequences for US climate change policy (Marshall 2006, Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. Environmental Protection Agency 2006).

In the meantime, lower tiers of government continued to make progress in regulating carbon emissions in 2006 (**Box 2**).

Table 1: Carbon dioxide emissions 1990-2003 (million metric tons of CO₂)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
GLOBAL VALUE	22210.00	22532.00	22174.00	22131.00	22538.00	22837.00	23515.00	23649.00	23285.00	23164.00	23693.00	23969.00	24849.00	26001.00
Canada	459.78	451.45	465.53	465.16	479.55	492.43	505.47	517.07	527.82	542.72	565.68	558.97	567.79	586.07
United States of America	5009.55	4969.26	5062.01	5177.35	5268.05	5319.38	5500.17	5579.98	5607.16	5677.97	5858.20	5744.78	5796.76	5841.50

Source: UNEP Geo Data Portal 2006 based on UNFCCC-CDIAC 2005.

Box 2: States and Provinces continue to lead in curbing GHG emissions

The State of California, the 12th largest carbon emitter in the world, passed a landmark climate change bill in 2006. The legislation limits the State's emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, representing an estimated 25 per cent overall reduction from current levels. It also establishes a mandatory reduction reporting system and sets up a 'cap and trade' program allowing businesses to buy and sell emission rights (Office of the Governor 2006).

Canada's Provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, and Manitoba are committed to implementing the Kyoto Protocol regardless of the federal government's stance. To help finance its efforts to meet Kyoto targets, Quebec announced it will introduce a carbon tax on all fossil fuels sold in bulk to retailers.

Sources: CBC 2006, Gouvernement du Québec 2006.

Public interest and knowledge about climate change grew over the past year. Signs that the US government acknowledges human-induced climate change stimulated media attention on the issue, accompanied by decreasing coverage of scientific scepticism. In a significant indicator of culture shift, a coalition of 86 evangelical Christian leaders advocated urgent action on climate change by government, business, individuals, and churches, committing to influence their congregations to limit GHGs (ECI 2006). Former US Vice-President Al Gore's cautionary documentary about climate change, *An Inconvenient Truth*, released in May 2006, became an unexpected box office hit (Svetkey 2006).

NEW MARINE PROTECTED AREAS CREATED

In 2006, the United States took an historic step in creating the world's largest contiguous marine protected area in the Hawaiian Islands (Box 3).

2006 also saw the creation of a new network of marine reserves off California's central coast. This network encompasses 29 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) representing over 52 800 hectares of marine habitat. About 8 per cent will be out-of-bounds to all fishing, while the rest will permit restricted fishing (DFG 2006a, Scheer 2006a). The MPAs will help in efforts to restore depleted fish stocks and to protect coastal marine habitat and biological diversity from the impacts of coastal development, water pollution, and other human activities (DFG 2006b).

A landmark US federal rule banned bottom trawling for fish in over 95.83 million hectares of sensitive ocean habitat extending into the Gulf of Alaska and surrounding Alaska's Aleutian Islands, a chain that reaches 2 200 km westwards from the Alaska Peninsula (NURP 2004, Oceana 2006).

Bottom trawling in Alaska generally involves dragging large weighted nets across the sea-floor to harvest commercial fish species such as Pacific cod and black rockfish. It devastates sensitive marine life, including slow growing cold-water corals and sponges (Enticknap 2002). An estimated 453 600 kilograms of corals and sponges are lost as by-catch in Alaskan waters every year (Roberts and Hirshfield 2004).



Source: Robert Stone, NOAA Fisheries

The common pink bubblegum coral (*Paragorgia arborea*) near the coast of Alaska's Tanaga Island.

These cold-water deep-sea corals provide important habitat for fish and other marine life. The ban, prompted by pressure from conservationists and scientists, is the most extensive of its kind in the United States (Roberts and Hirshfield 2004, Oceana 2006).

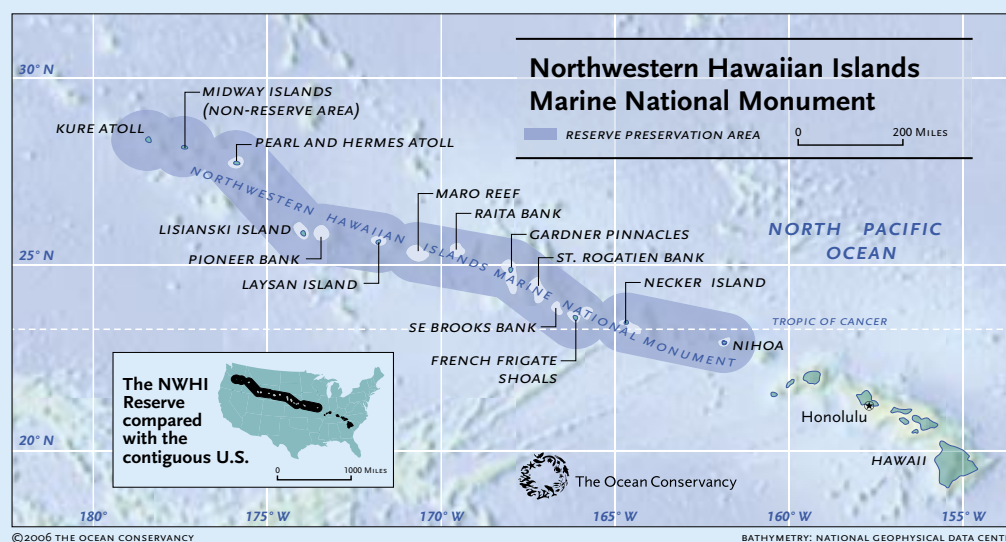
Leading up to United Nations negotiations on international efforts to ban or control unregulated bottom trawling, the US government called for an end to such destructive fishing practices (The White House 2006). Canada opposed an international moratorium and proposed creation of regional fisheries management organizations for unregulated ocean areas, with powers to identify and protect vulnerable habitats (DFO 2006). In November the UN Review Conference on the Fish Stocks Agreement decided against a moratorium, in favour of closer monitoring of the impacts and subsequent restricting of activities that damage sensitive marine areas (Mittelstaedt 2006).

Box 3: The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument

On June 15, 2006, US President George W. Bush created the world's largest marine conservation area off the coast of the northern Hawaiian Islands. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument covers nearly 36 million hectares of US waters, including 1.16 million hectares of coral reef ecosystem. The archipelago provides habitat to more than 7 000 marine species of which a quarter are endemic. It is home to nearly 1 400 Hawaiian Monk Seals—almost the entire world population of this critically endangered species—and to about 90 per cent of the threatened Hawaiian Island Green Sea Turtle population. The designation puts the area under immediate and permanent protection. Unauthorized ships, illegal recreational and commercial activity, resource extraction, and waste dumping will be prohibited and commercial fishing will be phased out over a five-year period.

Sources: NOAA 2006a, The White House 2006a.

Source: Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument, Map © The Ocean Conservancy; Bathymetry: National Geophysical Data Center





Bottom trawl roller-gear Source: © OCEANA / David Hall

PRESSURES GROW ON PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS

On land, by contrast, several years have gone by with little US action to set aside more parks, while protected areas in both Canada and the US face numerous and growing threats to their ecological integrity and beauty (Defenders of Wildlife 2005, Tourtellot 2005, NRDC 2005, NPCA 2006a, Bass and Beamish 2006, USDA 2006a). For example, the US has proposed selling more than 121 400 hectares of public lands in 35 states to fund rural schools and roads (USDA 2006b). Furthermore, it passed legislation allowing the construction of energy transfer corridors to supply electricity from 11 Western states to population centres in the Southwest. These energy transfer corridors will likely cross national parks and other public lands (DOE 2006, Scheer 2006b).

Mining operations and oil and gas development are already allowed on and near protected areas in both Canada and the United States. A recent study estimates that these industries actively operate in 35 per cent of 1 855 parks and other public lands in 13

Western states of the US and expects the trend to increase (**Figure 1**) (EWG 2005).

Mining and energy industries also threaten Canadian Parks. A 2002 study showed that mining occurred inside or within 10 kilometres of almost half of Canada's National Parks (MAC and CNF 2002). In 2006, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites Committee reported that open-pit mining near Jasper National Park threatens grizzly bear habitat (World Heritage Committee 2006). Untimely water withdrawals from the Athabasca River for oil sands surface mining

operations affect fish populations and threaten the sustainability of the Athabasca River and the Peace-Athabasca Delta (**Box 4**). The river enters Lake Athabasca in Wood Buffalo National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the delta is one of the most important waterfowl nesting and staging areas in North America (Woynillowicz 2006).

Other commercial interests are increasingly encroaching on Canada's parks. In 2006, the British Columbia government eased the way for private resort development within 12 provincial parks, including Mount Assiniboine Provincial Park, part of the Canadian

Box 4: Mining the Athabasca oil sands near Fort McMurray Alberta, 1974 and 2004

In 1967 The Great Canadian Oil Sands Company began construction at its Mildred Lake site. In 1974 they were joined by the Syncrude Corporation in the same area (light grey area in the center of 1974 Landsat image, left). By 2004 the mining operations had expanded to cover an area roughly 30 km by 20 km (2004 ASTER image, right). Syncrude operates a second mine, the Aurora, approximately 30 km to the north of Mildred Lake (visible near the top of the 2004 image).

Source: UNEP/GRID Sioux Falls, from U.S Geological Survey data

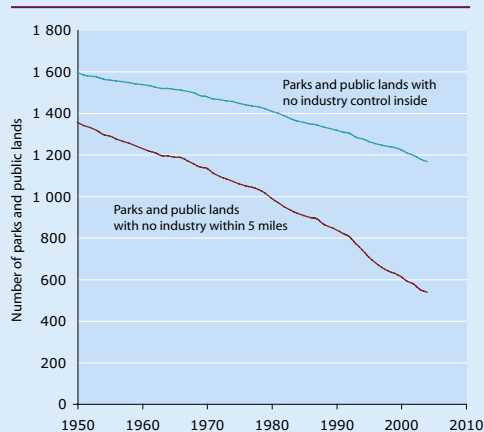


Source: UNEP/GRID Sioux Falls, from U.S Geological Survey data



The Syncrude mine in Alberta's Athabasca oil sands.

Figure 1: Industry access to US parks and public lands



Note: Number of US parks and public lands that remain free of operating mines and active oil and gas wells controlled by industry inside or within eight kilometres of boundary

Source: EWG 2005

Metadata: government land use data from the Bureau of Land Management (2004)

Rocky Mountain UNESCO World Heritage Site (BC Parks 2006). In addition, in 2006 the Quebec government planned to sell public land in the Parc National du Mont-Orford, created in 1938 and one of its oldest provincial parks; public outcry led to a compromise that keeps the land under development in public hands (MRC de Memphrémagog 2006).

Finally, exurban expansion (clusters of low density housing in the countryside) is threatening adjacent protected areas in both countries. The results of all these pressures include habitat fragmentation, biodiversity loss, and air pollution. Fragmentation creates remnant, isolated wilderness patches of varying size that constrain wildlife

movements and that may not be able to support viable populations of certain wildlife species (Forrest and others 2004, Bass and Beamish 2006, NPCA 2006b).

CONCLUSION

North American states, provinces, and cities are moving forward on regulations to reduce emissions, producing concrete results while also exerting political pressure on federal governments that aren't party to the Kyoto Protocol (the US) or deny its relevance (Canada). North America needs to set firm short term targets and time frames to reduce GHG emissions and to invest more heavily in energy conservation and renewables.

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Source: Catherine McMullen/UNEP

Exurban expansion fragments habitats along Lake Ontario's Hay Bay.