

Media Backgrounder

At its 2018 Annual Conference in Ajax, Ontario, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative created a Mayors' Council on Nature and Communities (MCNC), chaired by Mississauga Mayor Bonnie Crombie.

The Council's mandate is to:

- i. contribute to people's connection with nature within their own municipality;
- ii. contribute to the national CBD target of 17% protected land and freshwater;
- iii. contribute to the connectivity and biodiversity of habitat and migratory pathways specific to the Great Lakes St. Lawrence region.

i) Connecting Nature to Communities and Communities to Nature

- There is an increasing call for connecting people to nature in our towns and cities. Protected natural spaces serve a number of important functions. They can:
 - i. Support species and their habitat in urban setting and connecting to natural spaces adjacent to urban spaces;
 - ii. Promote people's regular access to nature, regardless of socio-economic background, which is particularly important for children's mental health;
 - iii. Strengthen resiliency to climate change, e.g. through their tree canopy and ability to absorb stormwater during heavy rainfall.
- Many of our member cities already have greening/ protected spaces strategies and natural heritage protection policies on which to build.
- *The Council will support further work in its member cities to preserve areas within the city and on the fringe of development that are identified as important habitat for certain species.*
- *The Council will encourage member mayors to reach out to residents, businesses and not for profits (land trusts, conservation authorities, utility companies, etc.) to encourage them to offer land or other resources towards securing and protecting these natural spaces.*

ii) Contributing to the national 17% CBD target

- Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) is leading the national effort to meet the International Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Target 11(the Aichi target): protection of 17% of land and inland freshwater. behind achieving the CBD target. See <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/rationale/target-11/>

- The 17% target will largely be achieved through the designation of lands and inland waters in the far north. However, there is interest in designating a small percentage in areas that are more visible to Canadians in the south, including marine conservation areas,
- *The Council will work with federal authorities and NGOs contributing to the national effort to identify and protect natural areas that contribute to the CBD 17% target.*

iii) Supporting connectivity and biodiversity in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence region

- While natural spaces within towns and cities are important in their own right, there is also interest in connecting these spaces to larger protected areas in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence region, to support habitat and migratory pathways of species unique to the region. Connecting terrestrial and bird species to shorelines and nearshore habitat is particularly important.
- This connectivity could be achieved in a way that support both natural spaces in urban areas and protected spaces that contribute to the 17% national target.
- *The Council will prepare an inventory of natural spaces within and adjacent to its member municipalities. Working with conservation experts, the Council will help identify important spaces to contribute to connectivity in support of species and habitat in the Great Lakes St. Lawrence region.*