

Proposed Resolution #5: Restore and Preserve Canada's Peatlands

Club Name

CFUW North Delta/Surrey

Title of Proposed Resolution

Restore and Preserve Canada's Peatlands

Resolved Clauses

RESOLVED, that CFUW urge the Government of Canada to work with provincial, territorial, regional, municipal, and Indigenous governments to:

- implement legislation/policies to protect and restore degraded Canadian peatlands and take immediate concrete steps to prevent further destruction of all Canadian peatlands,
- adhere to the principles of the Ramsar Convention Guidelines for Global Action on Peatlands (2002) to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve, through wise-use and management, those that remain,
- designate funding for research to urgently identify all peatlands in Canada and study how peatlands benefit our earth and its inhabitants.

RESOLVED, that CFUW urge the Government of Canada, provincial, territorial, regional, municipal, and Indigenous governments, and educational institutions to:

- educate the public and protect our Canadian peatlands in order to:
 - recognize that these ecosystems are ancient and irreplaceable;
 - mitigate climate change;
 - improve food and water security;
 - reduce forest fire severity;
 - enhance coastal management;
 - decrease ecological concerns regarding peatlands' flora and fauna;
- develop relationships with industry to find sustainable agricultural and horticultural alternatives to peat in order to protect, conserve and restore healthy peatlands.
- engage with industries such as, but not limited to, mining, forestry, road construction and urbanization for the purpose of preventing direct or indirect damage to peatlands.

Background

CFUW has an obligation to influence Canadian governments, universities, leaders, organizations, and businesses to address the ongoing threat to our peatlands with an opportunity to protect earth and its inhabitants. We acknowledge the CFUW 1990

adopted policy, Preservation of Wetlands. We now move forward presenting the **Resolution: Restore & Preserve Canada's Peatlands.**

Why care about peatlands? Peatlands are one of the most valuable ecosystems on earth. They serve many functions such as improving water quality, facilitating coastal security, supporting plant and animal livelihoods, and helping regulate global climate (Ramsar, 2021). Peatlands, commonly bogs, swamps, mires, muskeg, are neither solid ground, nor water, but something in between (Wilson et al, 2020). Healthy wetlands are carbon sinks which play a crucial role in our fight against climate change (FAO, 2024). Peatlands, of all wetlands, are the most endangered and are critical to preventing climate change.

Peatlands are carbon rich ecosystems that store more carbon, about 30% of the land-based carbon, than any other type of terrestrial ecosystems (International Peatland Society, 2022). Located in every climate zone and continent, except Antarctica, they cover 4.23 million square kilometers or 3% of the earth's surface (United Nations Environmental Program, UNEP, 2022). In Canada, peatlands (that have been identified) cover about 13% of the country's surface area (Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss, 2017). Canada's peatlands are the second largest in the world (Heywood, 2023).

Across Canada and around the world we are experiencing catastrophic events due to climate change. As a result of fires and floods, infrastructure has been destroyed, resulting in multibillion dollar insurance losses. Our governments pride themselves on tree planting. Trees absorb carbon through photosynthesis, but dollar for dollar, a climate-mitigation investor would get a bigger return by growing and accumulating peat, re-wetting peatlands that have been degraded, and conserving the healthy peatlands that still exist (Struzik, 2024). Investing in peatlands provides multiple returns to normalizing climate, enhancing people's lives, improving water quality, restoring our ecosystems and the planet earth.

The wildfire season of 2023 was like no other in Canada. Since 2016, wildfires in B.C. have burned an area far larger than Vancouver Island and levelled the town of Lytton (Heywood, 2023). Fires can start accidentally on drained peatlands. They can be started deliberately for land clearing and management. Peat fires can burn for weeks or months below the surface, unexpectedly rekindling into dangerous surface fires (Landscape Finance Lab, 2024).

Called the kidneys of the Earth, peatlands have a remarkable capacity to purify the water that flows through them. They are nature's gift to agriculture, regulating water flows, improving water availability for crops, mitigating flood risks, and sustaining forest ecosystems which provide homes for species and livelihood for people. They are essential nurseries and habitats for diverse freshwater species which are crucial to maintaining the delicate balance of aquatic ecosystems and supporting inland fisheries and freshwater aquaculture which provide livelihoods to millions (FAO, 2024).

Peatlands naturally filter out many pollutants and nutrients in surface and groundwater, lowering the burden on water treatment facilities. Peatland degradation increases the amount of dissolved organic carbon in water, giving it a brown colour and increasing the cost of water treatment (Landscape Finance Lab, 2024). Peatlands can slow down the flow of water, releasing it gradually over time, aiding in the prevention of flooding. They are known to have a cooling effect on local climates during hot periods through cloud formation and evaporation (Heywood, 2023).

Efforts have been made to estimate peatland areas and determine the amounts of organic carbon (Tarnocai et al, 2011). The Peatlands of Canada Database was last updated in 2011. In 2021 there was another attempt to assess Canada's peatlands and encourage interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration. The Global Peatlands Initiative was formed to begin dialogue to develop policies for peatland conservation, restoration, and sustainable management (Van Offelen, 2021).

In 2019, the Government of Canada joined hundreds of Canadian municipalities, the European Union, and many other countries in formally declaring a national climate emergency, acknowledging that "climate change" is a real and urgent crisis (Heywood, 2023). The Canadian Security Intelligence Service warns that climate change poses a profound, long-term threat to national security and prosperity, food and water supplies, infrastructure and coastal communities – and the risk of rising domestic and international conflict (Heywood, 2023).

The Indigenous peoples across Canada historically have a deeply rooted connection to peatlands within traditional territories (hunting and gathering). They remain culturally connected and rely on peatlands as a basis for their social community and economic values. The Indigenous peoples remain key in the protection of peatlands.

Professional gardeners have long used peat. Many gardeners have started to call for the use of alternatives and a ban on using peat in gardens. The Royal Horticultural Society, a United Kingdom (UK) based organization which is the largest of its kind in the world, has reduced their peat use by 98%. It has pledged to become peat-free by 2025. (Heywood, 2023). Peat is often used as a soil improver. Peat has low nutrient value and it takes significant periods of time to regrow. It is an improper use of a horticultural resource (Heywood, 2023). Peat-free alternatives are available such as compost and sea soil.

The evidence demonstrates that urgent action is necessary to preserve and restore our peatlands in Canada. It is imperative CFUW take steps to meet the challenge.

For Peat's Sake! Don't Use Peat!

Implementation

CFUW Members and their Clubs:

1. request the Federal government, with partners, to develop both master and management plans to preserve and restore peatlands in Canada.
2. advocate and educate themselves regarding the need to protect, preserve, restore peatlands and wetlands in Canada by:
 - hosting kitchen table writing parties (individual and personal hand-written letters are proven to be much more effective than pre-written letters), reading printed materials (articles, books),
 - investing in groups supporting Peatlands, such as Peatlands Protection Society,
 - joining organizations/societies i.e. local environmental groups, such as Sierra Club, Ducks Unlimited,
 - watching documentaries, online videos, or listen to podcasts,
 - attending presentations, seminars i.e. 2024 World Wetlands Day,
 - participating in informal chats, group sessions, book clubs,
 - preparing a presentation (delivering to a community group, local council, etc.).
3. support the banning of peat in horticultural practices. Encourage the use of alternative products for gardening; such as, contacting local garden centres, garden clubs and businesses selling gardening products. Use sea soil, coir, or compost instead of peat.
4. request the Advocacy Committee meet with Federal Ministries of Agriculture and Environment, and Fisheries to engage and encourage further legislation in order to identify, protect and preserve all peatlands in Canada.
5. collaborate with Provincial Ministries of Education to include within related curriculum, the importance of preserving peatlands as well as their value to all Canadians.
6. meet with local city, county, or municipal representatives to confirm that relevant by-laws ensure the preservation and restoration of their peatlands.
7. meet with local partners i.e. Ducks Unlimited, Nature Trusts, Peatlands Protection Society, Indigenous or other groups within communities to develop an education package ensuring the preservation and restoration of their local peatland area.
8. contact various universities and research-related societies to encourage further research into the preservation and restoration of peatlands.

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