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## Conservation successes outweighed gloom in 2011



The Canadian Boreal forest covers two-thirds of the country's landscape, stretching from Labrador to Yukon in a tract that is 1,000 kilometres wide. The Boreal forest is home to hundreds of Aboriginal communities, the world's largest water source, billions of migratory birds and important populations of large mammals.

By MEAGAN WOHLBERG, SRJ Reporter • Tue, Jan 17, 2012

In a rare diversion from the typical end-of-year environmental doom-and-gloom reports, the Canadian Boreal Initiative (CBI) argued that positives outweighed negatives in 2011 in terms of boreal forest conservation efforts.

Proclaimed the "International Year of the Forest" by the United Nations, 2011 saw important work by government, First Nations and industry across the country that could provide solutions for protecting Canada's boreal forest, the largest intact forest ecosystem on the planet at 1.2 billion acres, said CBI.

"In looking back over 2011, we felt that overall it was a good year," said Larry Innes, executive director of CBI. "In the last 10 years we've seen a strong evolution of the Canadian public's understanding of the boreal forest and its value to our economic, cultural, and ecologic spheres. 2011 has stood out in terms of proactive and thoughtful moves by Aboriginal communities and other governments to act as stewards of the land, across the country."

Only one item on the list sounds the alarm for potential disaster: the fact that woodland caribou are on the road to extinction unless their habitat is protected. Last year, the International Boreal Conservation Science Panel released a report showing woodland caribou have vanished from half of

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their historic range in North America due to expanded human settlement and resource exploitation from logging to oilsands development.

The nine remaining highlights of CBI's report are resoundingly positive. At the top of the list is the province of Quebec's Plan Nord legislation introduced to protect 50 per cent of its northern territory. Plan Nord followed the recommendations of top scientists to enact the single largest land conservation plan in history, combining conservation and development measures to "create a new global model for sustainable development," praised CBI. It is currently making its way through the legislative process with participation from Aboriginal communities.

Similarly, the list highlights land use agreements between Taku River Tlingit, a northern BC First Nation, and the provincial government laying out "an ambitious ecosystem protection plan covering over two million hectares." The agreement ensures 26 per cent of Taku River's ancestral lands are protected from mining and mineral exploration.

CBI also named Poplar River First Nation's achieving a land use plan with the Manitoba government granting legal protection of nearly two million acres of the First Nation's traditional territory - the size of Yellowstone National Park - as a major success in 2011.

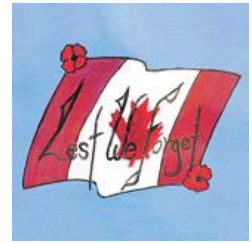
The Doig River First Nation's 90,000-hectare "tribal park" in northeast BC and northwest Alberta as a new "indigenous protected area" was also praised by CBI.

Further items include the release of a report confirming the boreal forest as home to the world's largest water source, containing a quarter of the planet's wetlands; a value assessment revealing the forest's natural capital to be in the billions of dollars with respect to the free services it provides; and a report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature that frames the boreal forest as a key weapon for the country in the fight against climate change.

Innes said CBI will continue to monitor Plan Nord in Quebec along with First Nations-led land-use planning across the country in 2012.

"We're interested to see the thoughtful way that new parks are being designated, moving beyond simply taking into account traditional uses such as hunting and fishing towards full participation by Aboriginal people in management decisions," he said. "We'll also be very interested to see how industry leaders working in the energy, mining and forestry sectors work to implement best practices on the Canadian landscape."

The Canadian boreal forest covers nearly 60 per cent of the country's land surface - a 1,000 km-wide tract stretching from Labrador to Yukon - and is home to hundreds of Aboriginal communities, billions of migratory birds and vital populations of large mammals.



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