

Sustainable BC

The NDP vision for a British Columbia of healthy people and communities, a clean, productive environment, and a vibrant, diversified economy.

Prepared by the NDP Standing Committee on the Environment for
an Ecologically and Economically Sustainable Future (SCOEE)

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What *Sustainable BC* means to our Province and our Party

**The very essence of leadership
is that you have to have a vision.**
- Theodore Hesburgh,

Sustainable BC is the NDP vision for our Province in which dedication to a sustainable future supports healthy people and communities, a clean, productive environment, and a vibrant, diversified economy.

We believe that **Sustainable BC** reflects the hopes and dreams of the majority of British Columbians. Often motivated by the immense implications of climate change, citizens from diverse backgrounds recognize that sustainability is the fundamental challenge of our era.

Sustainable BC brings NDP values together in one clear statement of purpose, intention and commitment. It provides a bold vision of what an NDP government could do to sustain people today, while ensuring that the world we enjoy will remain healthy and productive for generations to come. It provides a “lens” through which policies and projects can be assessed for compatibility with principles of sustainability. It can bring communities, labour, business, government and the non-profit sector together in a powerful consensus that includes all British Columbians.

Sustainable BC was adopted unanimously by delegates from across the province at the November, 2007 convention of the BC NDP. Delegates also called on the party’s executive to draft an action plan for consideration by Provincial Council that will engage British Columbians in a discussion of **Sustainable BC**, and develop practical strategies for its implementation by an NDP government. (Both resolutions are attached as an appendix to this document)

Through province-wide discussion and consensus-building, **Sustainable BC** can become a persuasive central theme of the 2009 provincial election campaign.

Sustainable BC proposes to British Columbians a vision for a future we can choose and a province we can create

SUSTAINABLE BC

Vision

Sustainable BC is the NDP vision for our province where dedication to the principles of sustainability secures for present and future generations the benefits of a healthy environment and a decent, just and sustaining society.

Where there is no vision the people perish
- Book of Proverbs

Characteristics of *Sustainable BC*

- ❖ **Environmental stewardship** through public, corporate and personal actions that restore and maintain ecosystem health; reduce human impact on our planet's life support systems; and preserve the diversity of plant and animal species.
- ❖ **A diversified economy** that operates within the environmental carrying capacity and serves the needs and aspirations of people and local communities, thereby contributing to genuine socio-economic progress for the Province as a whole.
- ❖ **Equity** in sharing the wealth of the Province fairly amongst all British Columbians through principles of justice and compassion, while recognizing that what we leave to future generations is a sacred trust and the best measure of who we are.
- ❖ **Individual and community well-being** that results from all of the above and that is built on mutual respect; co-operation; economic, social and political democracy; and the shared enjoyment of natural, constructed, creative and spiritual elements of our common heritage and sense of place.

The significant problems we face cannot
be solved at the same level of thinking we
were at when we created them.
- Albert Einstein

Guiding principles are essential when we create the policies and programs needed to realize the vision of *Sustainable BC*

Principles of *Sustainable BC*

Ecosystem Protection: As the life support system for all species including humanity, the environment must be protected from pollution or other degradation of air, water or soil exceeding that which can be safely absorbed or renewed by nature.

Resource Conservation: The principles of “reduce, reuse and recycle” must govern the use of all materials and energy. Renewable resource use should be less than the rate of replenishment, while non-renewable resource use must be decreased in order to conserve and share equitably with future generations.

Biodiversity: Protection of the diversity of plant and animal species is essential if ecosystems are to thrive and maintain the resilience necessary for adaptation and survival.

Resilience: As in nature, diversity needs to be fostered in communities and in economic, social and infrastructure systems in order to lessen vulnerability to risk, uncertainty, and surprise; to maintain flexibility; to aid adaptation in the face of adversity; and to facilitate future innovation.

Protection for the “Commons:” Shared public trusts like water, air, fish and wildlife; our heritage of parks and protected areas; cultural and intellectual assets; and amenities such as health care, education, public utilities and infrastructure, must be held and managed in the public interest over and above any private or individual interests.

Food Security: Healthful food for consumers and increased local and provincial food self-sufficiency are essential for a sustainable society. This requires a protected agricultural land base, environmentally sustainable farm practices and economic viability for food producers.

Social Equity: The resources and benefits derived from the natural environment and from social and economic activities should be equitably shared, recognizing that every British Columbian has the right to clean air and water, healthful food, adequate shelter, quality education and health care, safe surroundings, a sustainable livelihood, and active participation in the economy.

Full Cost Economics: Short and long term environmental, social and economic impacts need to be taken into account at both the local and the provincial level. This requires true costs to be accurately reflected in the price of all goods and services in order to discourage pollution and resource waste, and encourage innovation, socially and environmentally responsible behaviour, and true progress toward sustainability.

Precautionary Principle: Given the best available information, where there is no scientific consensus on risks that specific actions or policies might pose to human health or the environment, decisions must err on the side of caution. Lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason to delay action to prevent harm, where a threat to health or the environment exists.

Adaptive Management: The use of best available practices and technologies needs to occur within a culture of continuous learning, adequate monitoring and a commitment to modify strategic directions in order to achieve sustainability objectives.

Democracy and Due Process: Access to full and accurate information concerning all elements of public policy, meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that effect them, and entitlement to fair treatment by the judicial system are fundamental rights of all citizens.

Just Transition: Mechanisms must be in place to manage the transition toward **Sustainable BC** so that everyone takes responsibility and no one bears an unfair share of the burden of change.

PREAMBLE to the Earth Charter

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Principles must lead to action if the NDP vision of *Sustainable BC* is to become reality. Here are some key directions.

Sustainable BC

Laying the groundwork:

Creating the tools

A *Sustainable BC* Act in which British Columbians make a formal and enduring commitment to social, environmental and economic sustainability.

Sustainability Benchmarks that include target dates and systems of measurement to ensure progress towards a sustainable environment, economy and society. A Commissioner for Sustainability would report annually to the legislature on accomplishment of benchmark goals.

Genuine Progress Indicators that measure progress toward a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society, supplementing or replacing the GDP which only measures total dollar expenditures irrespective of damage or benefit to society or the environment.

An Environmental Bill of Rights that empowers citizens to protect the environment, their communities and their health through the Courts.

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

- Aldo Leopold

Laying the groundwork:

Some Policy Guideposts

Comprehensive, integrated land and water use planning that develops sustainability strategies for all areas of the province. Included would be significant sectors such as:

- Forestry
- Food and Agriculture
- Transportation
- Energy
- Tourism and Recreation
- Community Planning
- Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Environments
- Mining
- Waste Management

Effective climate change initiatives that:

- ensure all BC policies and practices meet or exceed national and international commitments to reduce greenhouse gases;
- commit public and encourage private investment in energy efficiency and conservation, and facilitate widespread development of low environmental impact, renewable sources of energy such as geothermal, solar, wind and tidal;
- apply carbon taxes to motivate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by ensuring that prices of fossil fuels reflect the environmental and social costs of their production and use, while building in “just transition” measures to minimize impacts on low-income households; and
- develop adaptation mechanisms to cope with increasing vulnerability, uncertainty and surprise inevitable in a future dominated by climate change.

Tax shifting measures that support employment and environmental sustainability by re-directing taxes and tax subsidies to:

- discourage waste and mismanagement of natural resources, pollution of soil, water and air, and production of greenhouse gases; and
- encourage resource conservation, ecosystem protection, sustainable employment, innovation, social equity and environmentally responsible personal lifestyles.

Legislated standards and best management practices that achieve improved management of forest resources, food lands, water, wetlands and biodiversity; increased energy efficiency; and reduced emissions for industry, buildings, motors, and vehicles.

Producer responsibility legislation that applies to all products throughout their life cycles, including packaging used when products are sold, and the retrieval and recycling of materials after each use.

Community priority that ensures local, regional and First Nations governments have the expertise, resources and authority to design and implement community-based sustainability, ensuring clean air and water, influence over the exploitation and benefits of resource use, meaningful work, good housing, quality education and health care, and recreational opportunities.

Government-business cooperation that motivates business to invest in and benefit from **Sustainable BC**; this should include the encouragement of expanded ownership and other inclusive and democratic models of business enterprise.

Extension education programs that encourage all members and sectors of society (including Government, First Nations, Business, Labour, and Non-Profit Organizations) to recognize the opportunities of and contribute to **Sustainable BC**.

Trade policy that supports fair trade that is socially and environmentally sustainable. Trade agreements must protect the rights of governments and communities to act in the best interests of their citizens, without trade-related infringement on the rights of labour; social services such as Medicare; or security of water, food, energy, and resources.

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Useful references for further development of ***Sustainable BC***:

- **The Earth Charter**: a global consensus on the meaning and implementation of sustainability principles.
- **The Natural Step**: a concept providing competitive economic advantage for business by imitating natural systems in their diversity and resilience, while reducing waste and dependence on raw materials.
- **Environmental Footprint**: a concept that can measure and guide progress of individuals, corporations, communities and the province toward ***Sustainable BC***.

We have the capacity and ability to create a remarkably different economy, one that can restore ecosystems and protect the environment while bringing forth innovation, prosperity, meaningful work and true security.

- Paul Hawken, "The Ecology of Commerce"