

taxes. We hear much of the economic costs of protecting our last remaining pristine grasslands, forests, rivers and wetlands, but too little attention is directed to how much we have lost of the original Earth and what it means environmentally if we should also let these vestiges go.

This being the case, it can be argued that the concerns related to completing Canada's pristine areas system are misplaced: **the issue of priority is not whether preservation will constrain the economy but whether ecological survivability will be threatened by society's failure to safeguard sufficient lands from development.**

Clearly, we must begin to reconsider our priorities if we wish to endure as a civilization. This means we must act promptly to complete the pristine areas agenda. To do so we must move to update many of our institutions which evolved to facilitate development to the detriment of wild spaces. For topics such as ecosystem valuation, resource rights allocation and tenure, taxation policy, etc. we must find the tools to facilitate rather than impede natural areas protection.

ENCOUNTERING LIMITS

The vast majority of southern Canada is already allocated to economic development. Given the rate at which our nation's lands have been altered, the limits of available new land and resources for extraction will soon be encountered (regardless of whether or not further areas are preserved). By this time our society, our economy and our industry will have had to adapt to better stewardship of our lands and to more efficient use of our resources or they stand to face collapse.

That the finite limits of our productive lands will soon be reached is certain. Satellite imagery confirms the rate at which intact Canadian resource lands are being utilized. It's only a matter of when. The question is whether we will display the foresight and discipline to have protected sufficient lands by this time to meet the ecological sustainability and even survival needs of all future Canadians.

If we try and postpone the inevitable by choosing not to preserve further land areas, we will not buy much time before the limits are encountered. For example, in British Columbia a choice made now to cut rather than preserve all those coastal stands being proposed for preservation, would extend the time when the logging industry will run out of old growth timber by less than a year. Yet allowing industry to consume the last remnant stands of big trees could jeopardize the survival of this ecosystem and its potential biodiversity benefits to all future generations of British Columbians.