Preface

At its eighth session in the spring of 2000, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will be reviewing global progress made with respect to Chapter 10 of Agenda 21, "Integrated Approach to the Planning and Management of Land Resources". For Canada — the world's second largest country in land mass — the issues associated with the sustainable development of land resources are intimately entwined with Canadian history, in addition to being pivotal to its future well-being. As a contribution to the land use dialogue, Canada has prepared a series of six monographs describing its experience and the challenges that remain in the integration of sustainable development.

Agriculture and forests will be particular themes at CSD 8. Canada is world famous for its prairie wheat, and sustainable agricultural practices, both within Canada and internationally, have global implications. Canada presents its experiences in its first monograph on sustainable agriculture. As with the prairies, images of vast Canadian forests and the rugged Canadian Shield rich in minerals are familiar Canadian icons. For this session of the CSD, Canada has updated monographs on forests and on minerals and metals originally prepared for the five-year review of Agenda 21 in 1997.

Canada, along with its circumpolar neighbours, faces extraordinary challenges in the sustainable development of its Arctic regions and is working to this end directly with Indigenous peoples and territorial governments, including the newest territory, Nunavut, which came into being on April 1, 1999. Along with fellow members of the Arctic Council, Canada is looking for means to ensure that the world has a better understanding of the impact of southern activities on the vulnerable Arctic environment. In this regard, a monograph addressing sustainable development and Indigenous peoples in the Canadian Arctic has been prepared.

Key to successfully implementing sustainable development policy is a clear understanding of the issues to be addressed. The role of science cannot be underestimated in this search for understanding. In this regard, Canada has developed two additional monographs. One provides an overview of the applications of earth sciences to the gathering and interpretation of scientific information to contribute to policy development. Finally, Canada concludes its monograph series for CSD 8 with a review of its experiences of an ecosystem approach to the development of sustainable development principles.

This monograph explores how earth sciences in Canada contribute to the sustainable and integrated management of land and resources by generating, analyzing, and disseminating information that is critical to land use decision making on local, regional, and global scales. The earth sciences are critically important to making balanced decisions regarding sustainable land and resource management for several key reasons. First, the unknown cannot be managed. Second, Canada faces growing and competing pressures on land use.