

PART I

GENERAL TRENDS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Canada—An Overview

The Land and Its People

Canada covers 7 percent of the world's land mass and is bounded by three oceans. With the longest navigable coastline in the world, Canada is blessed with a large proportion of the globe's coastal and marine resources, which have contributed significantly to the nation's economic growth.

The country's population of more than 29 million is concentrated within less than 100 kilometres of the Canada–United States border. About three quarters of the people live in urban areas. Rural population away from the cities is declining and aging as the young move to urban centres.

Our substantial natural resource endowment is an important factor in our environment and economy. This endowment includes about 9 percent of the planet's renewable freshwater, 10 percent of its forests, and significant reserves of fossil fuels and minerals.

Canada's Climate

Canada is a land of climatic contrasts and extremes. Many unusual weather events occurred across Canada in 1995. Canada experienced the third warmest June–July period in 101 years. Towns in southern Alberta were inundated by 1 in 100-year floods (flooding that has one chance in one hundred of being equalled or exceeded in any given year). Severe summer storms contributed to our second worst year ever for forest fires in Canada. Some 1700 icebergs traversed Newfoundland waters.

In combination, these events provide some support to the prediction that climate is indeed changing according to global circulation models. These observations give dramatic illustration to the view held by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that human impacts on the environment, for example, the burning of fossil fuels, are a significant factor in causing climate change.

Canada's State of the Environment Report for 1996 will be accessible on Environment Canada's Green Lane on the Internet. This well-known publication provides up-to-date information for a variety of audiences including communities, corporations, academic institutions, and government and nongovernmental organizations. The full report will contain sixteen chapters, which will be released as they become available, commencing in early 1996.