

## 8. ISSUES

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The agenda to complete Canada's pristine areas system raises a number of issues. These are discussed in this section.

### DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT: THE NEED TO REASSESS PRIORITIES

Throughout human history, the abundance of the natural world seemed limitless. For a hundred thousand years, the concern of *Homo Sapiens* wasn't whether there would be enough wilderness and natural resources to sustain human activity, but whether individuals and communities might be destroyed by the forces of Nature and wilderness. Our species, our psyche and our civilization evolved within this context. Not surprisingly, when we invented economics, this discipline placed prime value on human-created products and services, rather than natural abundance. So while timber cut to produce lumber was highly valued (both due to the human effort that had gone into its "manufacture" and its utility to create other human-built products), the forest ecosystem was not. Similarly, while the economic value of water used for irrigation was easily determined, the retention of intrinsic water quality in a river was not.

This bias has led to the current situation where values which cannot be priced via marketplace transactions are regarded by economists as non-economic "externalities" and are too often excluded from further consideration. Thus the worth of pristine landscapes, tranquillity, genetic diversity, and even human or societal survival have no valuation in economics. The intuitive part of our being says that this is absurd, yet the logical part of us continues to believe in the rationality of economics even when it encompasses such irrationality.

Therefore the economic incentive to develop lands and resources is given arbitrary precedence over the environmental necessity for sustainability and species survival. Most of our institutions reflect this prioritizing. For example, last year the federal government allocated a mere 1/4 of 1% of its overall budget to its park program.<sup>17</sup> What's more, only 40% was allocated by the Canadian Parks Service to actual conservation purposes. (The majority went to re capitalization of facilities, maintenance, and administration expenditures.)<sup>18</sup>

We provide tax reductions for private land owners to cut trees, even though in locations such as southern Ontario, samples of virgin Carolinian forests are almost gone. Ironically, should owners here choose to keep such stands intact for conservation purposes, they may be vulnerable to paying more