

2. THE NEED TO COMPLETE CANADA'S PRISTINE AREAS SYSTEM

PROTECTING THE ORIGINAL EARTH: A GLOBAL PRIORITY

a) The Danger: Loss of Biodiversity

The issue of preserving intact pristine landscapes is of premier global priority due to the rapid rate at which human activity is impacting on the natural environment. The following examples indicate just how extensively development activity is changing natural landscapes.

- Before humans invented agriculture there were 6 billion hectares of forest on Earth. Now there are 4 billion, only 1.5 billion of which are undisturbed primary (old growth) forest. Half of all forest loss has occurred between 1950 and 1990. ¹
- Recently logging activity has dramatically increased; half of all trees logged in British Columbia, Canada's prime forest region, have been cut in the past 15 years. ²
- Worldwide, since 1970 farmers have lost 480 billion tons of topsoil. In Canada the cost of soil degradation to farmers is calculated at \$1 billion/yr.³

Driven both by technology and population growth, the rate of natural landscape alteration is growing exponentially. Clearly the present pace of development cannot be continued, if only because at this rate virtually all natural areas will have soon been altered within the populated zones of the planet. The result will be drastic disruption to original ecosystems, with a resultant catastrophic extinction of species. Currently, it is estimated that 10 - 100 species are going extinct **each day**, due primarily to habitat alteration by activities such as logging, roading, agriculture, dam construction, and urbanization. ⁴

As species disappear, the genetic information they represent - intrinsically and for possible future human use - is also lost, forever. Indeed, if present development trends continue unabated, the majority of Earth's species are vulnerable to possible extinction, ...including our own.

In response to this global danger, in 1987 the United Nations Brundtland Commission recommended that at least 12% of the global landbase must be preserved intact to retain the biologic diversity of the planet so as to ensure