

Environment and Climate Change

Climate change is among the biggest challenges of our lifetime. We are seeing the worsening effects every day, including air and water pollution, more extreme weather events, displaced communities, food insecurity, and biodiversity loss. The science is clear: we need urgent action to minimize future impacts, to keep global warming to 1.5 °C, and to help our communities adapt to the effects. In August, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report issued a dire warning, but there is reason for hope: it's not too late to act. And there is an opportunity to build a fairer, more just world in the process.

Liberal

While the Liberal government signed the Paris Agreement and implemented a carbon tax, it continued investing in, and offering subsidies to, the fossil fuel industry. In 2020, the government released its new climate plan, a key aspect of which is continuing carbon pricing. The plan commits \$15 billion to climate action in various areas, including renewable energy, clean transportation, energy efficient buildings, and conserving and restoring nature. The plan is comprehensive, but focused on incentives for consumers, homeowners, and industry, rather than on strong regulations. It also set a new target to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 40%–45% below 2005 levels by 2030, aiming to reach net zero by 2050. However, there is still concern that the Liberals aren't doing enough to meet those targets and are avoiding phasing out fossil fuel production.

The 2021 election platform repeats many of the commitments in this climate plan. In addition, it commits to phasing out fossil fuel subsidies by 2023, ahead of the previous target of 2025, even though subsidies have been on the rise. The Liberals have ramped up commitments in areas like methane reductions and zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) infrastructure. The platform also commits to setting up a \$2 billion fund for job creation in oil-producing provinces and to enacting Just Transition legislation, a commitment from the 2019 election.

Conservative

Under the Harper government, the Conservatives invested in fossil fuel subsidies and expansion, cut environmental protections, and scaled back the environmental impact assessment process. Erin O'Toole has promised to roll back the target for reducing GHG emissions below 2005 levels from 40%–45% to 30%.

The Conservative platform reiterates many of the commitments from its climate plan released in April. A key aspect is the Personal Low Carbon Savings Account, which puts a price on carbon and would have Canadians pay into an account to be used for green purchases. It has been criticized as a weak, more bureaucratic carbon-pricing system that shifts money from the poor to the rich. Other commitments are requiring companies to sell more ZEVs, lowering industrial emissions by tying a carbon price to that of the EU and US, and creating a tax credit for controversial carbon capture technology. The plan also promises to scale back environmental assessments, expand fossil fuel production, and criminalize protestors who disrupt key infrastructure. While this platform is seen as an improvement for the party, it remains seriously lacking.

NDP

The NDP supports carbon pricing, carbon budgeting, and a GHG reduction target of at least 50% below 2005 levels by 2030, but feels this is only part of what's needed. Its plan calls for new good jobs for a low-carbon future. Commitments to workers impacted by the transition

include employment support, retraining, retirement security, and investments in clean technology. The NDP would also create a Civilian Climate Corps and an Office of Environmental Justice. Legislation governing federal bodies like the Bank of Canada and the CPP Investment Board will be reviewed to ensure that their actions are aligned with a goal of net-zero emissions.

NDP proposals include green retrofits to all buildings by 2050, changes to the building code, and funding for adaptation and climate-resilient infrastructure. The NDP commits to net-zero electricity by 2030, establishing a Canadian Climate Bank, supporting community-owned and operated clean energy projects, and eliminating fossil fuel subsidies. The NDP commits to expanding public transit and incentives for ZEVs. Other environmental protection measures include enshrining the right to a healthy environment, conserving ecosystems, and protecting species at risk.

Green

The Green Party supports a GHG emissions reduction target of 60% below 2005 levels by 2030, aiming to be net negative in 2050. It commits to implementing a carbon budget and increase carbon pricing, to end fossil fuel subsidies, cancel new oil projects, and phase out oil and gas operations. The Green platform commits to a planned transition that involves affected groups, introduces a Just Transition Act, and implements programs for wage insurance, retraining, and early retirement.

The Greens would invest in a national electricity grid, ensure 100% of electricity is from renewable sources by 2030, and invest in building retrofits. They would also support green transportation, including expanding public transit and banning the sale of passenger vehicles with internal combustion engines by 2030. The platform commits to creating an Office of Environmental Justice, conserving and protecting ecosystems, and investing in “green innovation.” There are also sector-specific commitments on agriculture and local food, fisheries and oceans, and transportation.

Conclusion

The pandemic has demonstrated how crises expose and exacerbate the inequities in our society. The same is true of climate change, with front-line workers, Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) communities, and low-income communities bearing the brunt of its impacts. We have also seen a glimpse of what *is* possible in the face of crisis—not only communities coming together, but also governments mobilizing the necessary resources to address a crisis through a strong public sector and to ensure no one is left behind. The next government must heed these lessons and take the opportunity to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable future.

