

Key Issues for Environmental Justice in the Ontario 2022 Election

This is a key election for the environment and the future of Ontario. We can no longer afford to wait for the government to catch up on meaningful climate action. Sierra Club Canada Foundation is demanding stronger legislation that prioritizes people, the environment, and a liveable future.

Below you will find the actions our members are calling for. [You can reference this document for discussion when local candidates come to your door.](#) Ask your local candidates [what they plan to do](#) to tackle the issues Ontarians are facing.

Ban burning plastics and introduce stronger standards for reduction and re-use of plastic products.

- We are facing one of the biggest threats to our world: plastics. But burning plastics is not a solution.
- The provincial government recently [put forward an idea](#) that would make it easier for facilities to get permits to burn plastic under the guise that this is a “green solution” to our plastic problem. **It is not.**
- Ontario must **reject** plastic incineration and [set high standards](#) for re-use and recycling that would require refilling or recycling 90 per cent of beverage containers.
- The process of converting plastic waste to fuel demands considerable energy, which is supplied by burning fossil fuels. When plastics are burned, they release air pollutants (such as particulate matter), heavy metals (such as lead and mercury), and toxic chemicals such as [PFAS](#) and dioxins. These pollutants contaminate the nearby air, water, and food supplies, posing a health risk to local communities. Dioxins, in particular, are extremely harmful, even at very low levels. [Experts agree that it's important to minimize exposures to dioxins as much as possible.](#)

Cancel Highway 413 & the Bradford Bypass and uphold the cancellation of the Mid-Peninsula Highway on the Niagara Escarpment.

- Highways increase greenhouse gas emission rates, endanger wildlife, and jeopardize Ontario’s greenspaces, forests and wetlands. Yet we are constantly seeing proposals for new highways throughout Ontario. **We do not**

need more highways. Instead, Ontario should be investing in both [active](#) and public transportation options.

- [According to a letter](#) that 59 scientists sent to the federal Minister of the Environment and Climate Change,
“Emissions from transportation are the largest and fastest-growing source of GHGs [greenhouse gas emissions] in Ontario. Nearly all these emissions come from fossil fuel use in vehicles. A new 400-series highway [Highway 413] — which will incentivize car-use — will make the climate crisis worse.”
- We are calling for Ontario to cancel both Highway 413 & the Bradford Bypass. Furthermore, it’s important to uphold the cancellation of the Mid-Peninsula Highway on the Niagara Peninsula.

Fund affordable co-op housing to support liveable cities and social equity.

- Failing to protect existing housing can also result in [increased GHG emissions](#) and wasted resources. Compared to retrofits, new builds require more energy (and energy-intensive materials). [Embodied carbon](#) emissions from the building sector already produce 11% of annual global GHG emissions.”
- Embodied carbon, in the context of buildings, refers to emissions associated with the materials extracted for construction, transportation, manufacturing, on-site construction, as well as decommissioning (including demolition, recycling, and landfill).
- In urban areas, we need to halt the pattern of replacing affordable neighbourhoods with new developments or [“demovictions.”](#) In addition to the environmental impacts, we are very concerned about this course of action displacing racialized and working-class communities and making housing [even less affordable](#).
- Ontario needs to implement and fully fund an affordable housing strategy that prioritizes the creation and protection of cooperative housing, low-income and affordable housing, accessible communities, and protects green spaces. It must also value embodied carbon in existing building stock, particularly when comparing with new build options.

Develop and Adopt Rights of Nature Legislation.

- The Rights of Nature is a philosophical and legal approach that originates from Indigenous perspectives. According to the [Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund](#), adopting the Rights of Nature means “securing the highest legal protection and the highest societal value for nature through the recognition of nature’s rights and associated human rights.”
- Mother Earth — and all life — has an inherent right to flourish, independent of the value people place on it. Furthermore, we depend on nature for our basic needs, our livelihoods, our security, and our continued survival.
- Yet our current systems generally consider nature as property to be used solely for human benefit, rather than a rights-bearing partner with which humanity has co-evolved.
- Granting an ecosystem legal personhood can enable any citizen to go to court to protect it.
- Globally, countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, New Zealand, and India have granted nature rights and legal protections. Last year, Canada joined the growing movement when the Innu Council of Ekuanitshit and the Minganie Regional County Municipality declared the Magpie River (Muteshekau Shipu) in Quebec [a legal person](#).”
- We are asking Ontario to recognize the Rights of Nature and enshrine them in law.

Strengthen Ontario air quality standards and lower air pollution exposure limits to align with the World Health Organization’s guidelines.

- Each year, health impacts from air pollution [cost](#) Ontario roughly \$49.2 billion and cause 6,600 premature deaths.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recently [lowered](#) limits for several air pollutants, including particulate matter (PM2.5), which is responsible for [most](#) negative health effects.
- Improving air pollution can lead to almost immediate benefits, and will help to mitigate climate change. As the WHO [explains](#), “By reducing air pollution levels, countries can reduce the burden of disease from stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases, including asthma.”

- Ontario's [acceptable](#) levels of air pollutants like PM2.5 are roughly **2x** as high as the WHO's Air Quality Guidelines recommend.
- We are calling on Ontario to set stricter targets for air pollution to better [align with](#) the World Health Organization's guidance and improve the health of our citizens.

Strengthen the Ontario Endangered Species Act (ESA).

- More than 200 species of plants and animals are being pushed to the brink of extinction by humans in [Ontario](#).
- Ontario used to have one of the strongest endangered species laws in the world. But we have seen a continued de-evolution of Ontario's key environmental laws, like the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Environmental Assessment Act (EAA). This trend jeopardizes Ontario's species at risk by making way for dangerous developments, which harm or destroy these species (or their habitats).
- It is unacceptable that the amendments made to the ESA give the Minister of the Environment the power to suspend protections for the growing list of at-risk species. These decisions should not be left in the hands of politicians, but experts who are not involved in the land development industry. Ontario must **reverse these provisions** and **protect the ESA** from any further attempts to by-pass important environmental standards.

Protect the Southern Ontario Greenbelt from sprawl and contamination.

- We are calling on Ontario to set up stronger protections to stop urban sprawl, development, and highway construction from encroaching on the Greenbelt.
- We are also calling on the Ontario government to set up frozen urban boundaries for the [Oak Ridges Moraine](#) area, similar to those established for the Escarpment Urban area (administered by the Niagara Escarpment Commission).
- The Southern Ontario Greenbelt consists of over 2 million acres of protected land that provides Ontarians with clean air, water, local food, and recreation. Yet, the Greenbelt remains under threat from urban sprawl and contamination.
- [Sprawl](#) adversely impacts the environment, human health, climate change and the economics. The latest [IPCC](#) report found that urban sprawl could

consume as much as 5% of current cultivated land by 2050 (five *times* the current footprint of cities themselves).

Develop renewable electricity sources *instead* of new gas plants and small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs).

- According to the [Clean Air Alliance](#), Ontario has been backsliding since it took the historic step of becoming the first jurisdiction in the world to phase out coal-fired electricity.¹
- Investments in nuclear energy are a dangerous distraction from real climate solutions. We need Ontario to end investments in nuclear energy and cancel the plans for [an expensive](#) new small modular reactor in the Greater Toronto Area.
- Similarly, we need a commitment to phase out the use of natural gas for power generation.
- We must restart community-based renewable energy projects for wind and solar power in Ontario and create energy savings through increased investments in energy efficiency, [which saves Ontario ratepayers \\$2.50 for every dollar invested](#).

Begin an Indigenous co-led assessment process for the Ring of Fire Project.

- In 2021, Sierra Club Ontario conducted [research on the Ring of Fire Project](#), which focused on the social, environmental, and economic impacts of the Ring of Fire Development Project in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Project leader Joe Duncan found that 71% of participants had not been informed about the development project. **This is not okay.**
- Neskantaga Nation is currently challenging the approval of an access road in the region because of a failure to obtain Free, Prior, and Informed Consent to accelerate mineral extraction in the region.
- The terms of reference for the regional assessment for the Ring of Fire were developed by the federal and provincial governments without any First Nations involvement.

¹ In 2019, Ontario's electricity generation came from the following sources: 59% from nuclear, 24% from hydroelectricity, 8% from wind, and 1% from solar. The remaining 8% is generated by natural gas and biomass.
(<https://www.cer-rec.gc.ca/en/data-analysis/energy-markets/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles/provincial-territorial-energy-profiles-ontario.html>)



- Recently, the Neskantaga, Eabametoong, Fort Albany, Kashechewan and Attawapiskat First Nations [called for](#) a “mutually and equally co-developed and co-led and co-enforced” regional assessment for the Ring of Fire.
- We support these calls for an Indigenous co-led (and co-enforced) assessment process for the Ring of Fire Project.

Make each vote more powerful.

- The single-round, winner-take-all political process has its problems for representing the diversity of views people have about the issues they care about.
- Globally, when power is allocated in proportion to how votes are counted, we tend to see better outcomes for [the environment and democracy](#).
- We want candidates to support alternative electoral methods that better reflect the diversity of public opinion.