A Look Back at Nature on the Hill 2025

By Ruiping Luo, AWA Conservation Specialist

It started in the meeting room of an Ottawa hotel.

In fact, it started much earlier, with the planning, virtual meetings, and scheduling with parliamentarians, but the meeting room was the first time we were all gathered in one place. From across the nation, environmentalists had arrived to speak up for nature and ensure our priorities were considered in Canadian politics.

This year's Nature on the Hill event, Nature Canada's seventh annual, was the biggest yet, with 70 reported participants speaking with 45 Ministers, Members of Parliament, and Senators over two days.

I was one of those 70 participants, representing AWA and speaking on behalf of Alberta's interests at meetings. We approached these meetings with the intent to remind government officials that Canada's identity is closely tied to nature (nearly 90 percent of Canadians saw nature as a symbol of national identity) and request that they invest in our identity, economy, and society by protecting and restoring nature. We also wanted to see action towards, and the implementation of, *Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy*.

Of course, the meetings didn't always go as planned, though even in disagreements, we had constructive discussions and found common ground.

My first meeting of the event was with the Honourable William Stevenson, a Conservative Member of Parliament for Yellowhead, Alberta. His extensive district covers the western border, extending from Grande Cache down to Kananaskis, and including Jasper, Banff, and Rocky Mountain House. I was joined in this meeting by Cheryl Bozarth Soll and Stephanie Weizenbach from Nature Alberta, and Max Fritz from the Western Sky Land Trust.

MP Stevenson proved to be engaged and supportive, agreeing with our points on the ecological importance of his district, the value in protecting our wildlife and lands, and the vital role of ecosystem health in the quality and quantity of Alberta's water. He showed interest in engaging further, and even indicated he would try to attend local events, such as Nature Alberta's Family Nature Night.



Left to right: Max Fritz, Ruiping Luo, William Stevenson, Stephanie Weizenbach, and Cheryl Bozarth Soll.
Photo © N/A



Left to right: Brennan Merasty, Akaash Maharaj, Claude Guay, Corey Hogan, Ruiping Luo, Nancy Flood, Emmanuelle Vallieres-Leveille, and Lawrence Martin.
Photo © N/A

Following this, I joined Emmanuelle Vallières-Léveillé (Nature Quebec), Nancy Flood (BC Nature), Lawrence Martin (Mushkegowuk Council), Brennan Merasty (Métis Nation Saskatchewan) and Akaash Maharaj (Nature Canada) in a roundtable with Liberal Members of Parliament, the Honourable Claude Guay (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun) and Corey Hogan (Calgary Confederation). MPs Guay and Hogan are Parliamentary Secretaries for Natural Resources Canada, and we sought to understand how the Department of Energy and Natural Resources would be involved in *Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy*.

We shared concerns on how the *Building Canada Act* would impact environmental protections and Indigenous consultation rights, expressing worry about the projects already under consideration and the discretion the government would have over projects deemed nationally important. We were told that these projects would not necessarily be destructive, and could benefit the environment through accelerating restoration, though we would have to wait and see how this Act would be implemented. On a more positive note, MPs Guay and Hogan expressed willingness to work with Indigenous nations and provinces, and agreed to a meeting with the Mushkegowuk Council and the Government of Ontario.

Finally, I met with the Honourable Jeremy Patzer, Conservative Member of Parliament for Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley in Saskatchewan. Once more, this district extended over an ecologically important area, covering the unique ecosystem of Cypress Hills, as well as Grasslands National Park, one of the few protected areas in the Grasslands region. Peter Brown (Nature Saskatchewan) and Max Fritz joined me for this meeting.

The meeting began with a disagreement over protected areas and land trusts, though after working through a few misconceptions on both sides, we found understanding in enjoying Canada's natural landscapes and accepting that there are suitable and unsuitable areas for different land uses. MP Patzer, like the environmentalists in the room, wanted to have well-managed and working landscapes, where the local residents and all Canadians could benefit from the land. We agreed that grazing was important to maintaining the grasslands, and that the idea of removing all people from an area in the name of protection was outdated. Sometimes, the most important conversations are these, where different opinions can be shared, and a respectful conversation can be had.

In between meetings, we had the chance to attend a fireside chat with the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Liberal Minister for Canadian Identity and Culture and Official Languages, where we heard his optimism that environmental protection and the Nature Strategy would continue to be prominent in Canadian politics. We finished the three-day event with a reception, where speakers reaffirmed the importance of our work and we celebrated the agreements and connections that had been made.

The value of Nature On The Hill is not just as an opportunity to get our priorities for nature on the federal agenda, but a reminder that there are many who care for nature. Nature is so often disregarded in the name of progress, but there are those willing to fight for it, and together we are not so easily ignored.

