

PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador
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Mr. Chris Hogan
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Dear Mr. Hogan:

Thank you for writing on behalf of the Newfoundland and Labrador Environment Network to provide a set of environmental policy recommendations and a provincial election questionnaire. You asked that we respond to questionnaire by September 19 and indicated you will be publishing all responses received on your website (www.nlen.ca). I am providing the following responses to your questions in the order in which you posed them.

Protected Areas

1. In 2011, the provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia unveiled their plans to protect 12% of their provincial landmass by the year 2015. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity recommends 17% protection as a target for terrestrial protected areas coverage. What is your party's protected areas target, and when will you achieve it? How will your party accelerate the establishment of protected areas in NL? (Question from: Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Newfoundland and Labrador and Protected Areas Association of Newfoundland and Labrador)

Since the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act* was introduced by a PC government in 1980, our province has created eighteen wilderness and ecological reserves. Until 2010, when all protected areas, including provincial and national parks, were measured, 4.6 per cent of the province was under some kind of natural-heritage protection. We said more could be done to complete a system of protected areas that truly preserves examples of all of our ecosystems, species and natural features. In 2009, we expanded the Mistaken Point Ecological Reserve, established the Lawn Islands Archipelago Provisional Ecological Reserve and established the Main River Waterway Provincial Park. In 2010,

we partnered to establish a new National Park Reserve in the Mealy Mountains and announced our intent to establish the Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park adjacent to the proposed national park reserve to form the largest contiguous protected area in the province. This will raise the percentage of land protected in the province from 4.6 per cent to eight per cent – a significant step in the right direction. Our record demonstrates our strong commitment to protecting our natural heritage, and we will continue to move progressively in this direction.

2. Will your party initiate a province-wide land use planning process? (Question from: Nature Newfoundland and Labrador)

We will proceed with the development and implementation of a new Natural Areas System Plan. As the discussion document for the development of a new strategy for coastal and ocean management makes clear: “The Department of Environment and Conservation is responsible for establishing and managing provincial protected areas. Currently, 57 protected areas are managed by the department, and 34 of these have coastal components. The department is developing the Natural Areas System Plan, a major initiative designed to expand our protected areas network to include representative portions of all natural regions. In many cases these will include coastal areas and will, therefore, increase protection of green spaces along the coast. The department will conduct public consultations on the draft Natural Areas System Plan prior to releasing a final plan and implementation strategy. The Plan will ensure a carefully designed and managed system of protected areas, including coastal regions, for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.”

3. Establishment of the Little Grand Lake Ecological Reserve has been stalled at the “provisional” stage for many years. Will your party commit to full establishment of the Little Grand Lake Ecological Reserve within one year of the 2011 election? (Question from: Protected Areas Association of Newfoundland and Labrador)

Little Grand Lake currently enjoys certain protections under the *Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act* as a Provisional Ecological Reserve. For example, a person cannot within a provisional reserve construct a structure or reconstruct or add to a structure or build a road, path or track, or engage in the cutting or logging of trees, agriculture, mining, prospecting or claims staking; alter the course of or amount of flow of water; use motorized vehicles or equipment; fish, hunt, trap, net or snare an animal, use motorized vehicles or equipment, remove or destroy or impair a plant, animal, fossil or object of historical or scientific interest; introduce a plant or animal species; and more. We maintain this special status to protect extensive bogs and barrens, plus mature boreal forest that is prime habitat for the endangered Newfoundland marten.

4. In 2011, the federal government allocated \$5.5M to establish the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve over the next 5 years. Will your party make an equivalent budget allocation to establish the Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park in Labrador, as a companion investment? (Question from: Protected Areas Association of Newfoundland and Labrador)

On February 5, 2010, we announced our intent to establish a waterway provincial park to protect the Eagle River, adjacent to the proposed national park reserve. The proposed waterway provincial park encompasses almost the entire length of the spectacular Eagle River (approximately 140 kilometres long) and a significant portion of its headwaters. The total area of the waterway park will be approximately 3,000 square kilometres. The waterway provincial park will protect a natural and cultural landscape that is important to all Labradorians. At over 13,000 square kilometres, the Mealy Mountains National Park Reserve and the Eagle River Waterway Provincial Park will form the largest contiguous protected area in the province. When established, these two areas will raise the percentage of land protected in the province from 4.6 per cent to eight per cent.

Sustainable Resource Development

5. Will your party take measures to insure that ecosystem-based forestry management becomes a reality throughout the Province and the adequate habitat is maintained for all caribou populations? (Question from: Nature Newfoundland and Labrador)

We have invested considerable sums of public money in investigating the status of caribou herds on the Island and in Labrador. Populations in both regions are in decline. The hunting quota decisions we make will continue to be guided by the facts and the application of sustainable development principles. If scientists tell us the populations cannot supporting any hunting at this time, then hunting will be closed. Our forests have immeasurable value to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. They are vital ecosystems that sustain life in incredibly complex ways, whether by giving wildlife, fish and plants a place to thrive, or by helping to filter our atmosphere and drinking water, or by producing and safeguarding our soil. They are spectacular attractions for tourists, hunters and recreation enthusiasts, providing a means for people employed in these sectors to earn a living. They are classrooms where students and researchers engage in the sciences and pursue valuable research and development work that may lead to important scientific and technological advances. They provide resources we can harvest to sustain economic activity and employment in many communities. The key principle guiding all our actions in the forestry sector is sustainability. To apply this principle effectively, we must continually advance our understanding of the dynamics at work in our forest ecosystems. We will continue to require timber resource analyses and forestry development plans to assess and manage our forestry resources responsibly, strategically and sustainably in the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will complete the establishment of the Centre for Forest Science and Innovation to draw together the expertise and research activities of the provincial and federal governments, Memorial University, College of the North Atlantic and other entities. We will continue to partner in the Model Forest of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue to invest in developing our province's expertise in forest management and research.

6. Will your party oppose concessions to the mining industry that allows the destruction of freshwater ecosystems? (Question from: Nature Newfoundland and Labrador)

As a government, we apply the Environmental Assessment Act to mining developments. The proponents must demonstrate that reasonable measures will be taken to protect our environment from undue harm. By its very nature, mining alters the natural environment. There are actions that can be taken to reduce and mitigate the impacts. A thorough environmental assessment of a proposed mineral processing operation on the southern Avalon determined that using a freshwater pond to reduce the impact of byproducts on the environment was a responsible course of action. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians value our natural heritage, and we also value natural resource development projects that employ our people. We believe it is possible to achieve a healthy balance, and we are working diligently to ensure we achieve that balance.

Wetland protection

7. Wetlands are crucial to flood control, clean water and healthy habitats, and are also a major source of stored soil carbon. The carbon storage in the soils and peatlands of Newfoundland and Labrador is equal to 118 years of all of Canada's emissions at 2006 levels. If your party forms the next government will it produce and implement a wetlands policy that protects these sensitive areas from development and degradation? (Question from: Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program and Ducks Unlimited Canada)

As our 2005 Climate Change Action Plan states, wetlands and coastal zones are particularly vulnerable to increased climatic variability and given that most Newfoundland and Labrador communities are located along the coastline this can have potentially devastating socio-economic implications. The Water Resources Management Division (WRMD) of the Department of Environment and Conservation is proactively participating in research and development on climate change impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptation strategies by carefully monitoring the results from its hydrometric, water quality and climate networks. These three environmental quality-monitoring networks provide valuable insights into the impacts of climate change on water resources. Recent analysis of data from the water quality network indicates changing trends in the water quality of water bodies located in pristine environments. These trends in major ions, turbidity, and colour have no other reasonable causal factor other than climate change. Through the WRMD, we will continue to be vigilant, keeping a close watch on trends in stream flows, lake levels, rainfall, snowfall, water quality and flood frequency to identify any climate change impacts, identify vulnerabilities and to design adaptation strategies.

8. The Northeast Avalon is experiencing unprecedented economic growth and development. If your party forms the next government how will it set about protecting the ponds, rivers and wetlands that are crucial to the area's environmental health? Will this include establishment of more protected areas within the region? (Question from: Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program)

Again, the Water Resources Management Division (WRMD) of the Department of Environment and Conservation is proactively participating in research and development on climate change impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptation strategies by carefully

monitoring the results from its hydrometric, water quality and climate networks. We will continue to be vigilant to ensure ponds, rivers and wetlands that are crucial to the area's environmental health are monitored and protected.

Food Security

9. Food security is a challenge in Newfoundland and Labrador. We currently do not produce enough food to feed our population and we are losing important knowledge and skills related to food. Our province also has some of the highest obesity rates, as well as food bank usage across the country. Considering these challenges, how would your party work to support community-based solutions to food security? (Question from: Western Environment Centre)

I invite you to read the Agriculture section of our policy blue book when the document is released. We are strongly committed to growing our agricultural industry and improving our food security. In the years ahead, our government will continue to provide targeted incentives and assistance to enable farming initiatives to grow and prosper. We will implement our new five-year Agriculture and Agrifoods Action Plan entitled “Our Farms, Our Food, Our Future”. We will work to increase the production of food to enhance food security and reduce the carbon footprint associated with food transport. We support the “slow food” movement, which aims to promote increased supply of local food demand with locally-grown food products. We will work with farmers to ensure Newfoundland and Labrador is able to supply increasingly more of the foods we consume, thereby increasing food security. We will work to encourage Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to purchase and consume more locally-produced food products. We will promote the purchase and use of Newfoundland and Labrador-produced foods by Newfoundland and Labrador schools, hospitals and other public institutions. We will promote the growth of a local food security network, develop domestic produce markets and assist growers. Please refer to our other commitments on this important issue.

Investment in environmental protection

10. This year, Newfoundland and Labrador is projected to reap a windfall profit from oil production that could boost provincial revenue by \$600 Million. The royalties from oil and gas and mineral development will mean windfall profits for the province for years to come. Will you invest a portion of windfall profits into an environmental trust, to fund conservation, remediation and stewardship in the province? (Note: In 2008, Nova Scotia invested \$25 Million in such a fund). (Question from: Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program)

I do not see oil revenue as a windfall. Newfoundland and Labrador has significant reservoirs of oil and other nonrenewable resources with great wealth-generating potential. Such resource can be extracted and converted from potential wealth into actual revenue only once. We believe the generation that extracts such a resource ought to use the return on that wealth wisely in ways that will benefit, not only the present generation, but indeed Newfoundlanders and Labradorians for generations to come. With that principle

to guide us, we have made very deliberate decisions on spending that revenue. We have reduced Newfoundland and Labrador's net debt by nearly a third since 2003, from a high of almost \$12 billion to about \$8.2 billion – a reduction of nearly \$4 billion – and that has reduced our annual interest payments and removed a substantial burden from our children's backs. We have invested billions to address our province's infrastructure deficit, building such things as highways and hospitals to benefit our economy, attract new investment and generate new, sustainable growth. We are also investing to develop the hydropower resources of the Lower Churchill, in effect converting our nonrenewable wealth into renewable wealth that can sustain our province generation after generation. Some of those revenues we are indeed investing in conservation, remediation and stewardship

11. If your party forms the government how will it respond to the cuts in research and environmental protection being implemented by Environment Canada in this province? (Question from: Northeast Avalon Atlantic Coastal Action Program)

In government, we have demonstrated we are capable of working with the federal government on initiatives that benefit Newfoundland and Labrador, and we are also prepared to stand up and fight for Newfoundland and Labrador's best interests when the circumstances warrant such action. More than that, we have also stepped in to do more ourselves. In 2010, we announced the provision of \$11.75 million to establish the Centre for Fisheries Ecosystem Research at Memorial University's Fisheries and Marine Institute. This funding included \$6.5 million for human resources and operating costs of the centre over the next five years plus \$5.25 million to charter large vessels, such as the *RV Celtic Explorer*, for offshore research. We also announced \$2 million to fund the Canadian Centre for Fisheries Innovation (CCFI) plus \$200,000 for a highly-sophisticated inshore fisheries research vessel, the *RV Gecho II*, to study coastal bays with unique habitats, inshore spawning and nursery habitats, enabling the province to better monitor inshore and offshore species migration. Our total investment was \$14 million. This vital work will continue as we continue to invest provincial funding in our new fisheries scientific research initiative. In 2008-09, we launched our province's new Research & Development Corporation (RDC) to work with, and encourage collaboration among, R&D stakeholders including industry, academia and government agencies and departments. Through the RDC and the Innovation Strategy, we will continue to incubate vital new opportunities that will propel Newfoundland and Labrador toward new growth as we head deeper into the 21st century. We will also strive to increase the share of private sector R&D significantly as a proportion of total R&D. The government will partner with large industrial players active in the province to find mutually beneficial ways for them to increase significantly their research and development investments here. We will increase the budgetary provisions for operations and capital works for our public post-secondary institutions to ensure they remain competitive nationally and accessible for our people. We will invest to ensure students who pursue a post-secondary education in Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to have access to leading-edge laboratories and research facilities. Read more in our new Blue Book and related documents.

Investment in environmental education

12. How do you think the school system can teach students to better appreciate the need for sustaining a healthy environment in Newfoundland and Labrador? (Question from: Whale Release and Strandings)

In our new Blue Book and also in strategic plans our government has recently announced, we have placed significant emphasis on science and innovation, beginning in K-12. In our 2011 Coastal and Ocean Management Strategy And Policy Framework, for example, we commit to “promote local initiatives and educational programs aimed at enhancing marine education and increasing youth involvement in coastal and ocean stewardship activities across the province.” We will do more. We will consult with young people on the development of a new approach to engaging young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in green activism – an approach that will be the model for other jurisdictions around the world to emulate. We will make a special effort to engage Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal elders in developing this initiative in recognition of the strong connection to the environment that endures in Aboriginal cultures. Recognizing the opportunities available to graduates with a firm grounding in the sciences, we will work with school boards and teachers to encourage students – both male and female – to choose science courses. We will provide funding to invest further to update science laboratories and equipment. We will augment our high school curriculum in ways that will showcase the work of scientists and innovators working in Newfoundland and Labrador, highlight science-based career opportunities in our province, and identify development opportunities in our province that will be driven by leaders in science and innovation. We will encourage all schools – through posters, brochures, news clippings, professional literature and academic journals – to showcase notable advances in science, technology and industry, both locally and abroad that will motivate and inform students with interests in these fields. We will establish a scholarship that recognizes student innovators. We will sponsor, and encourage the private sector to sponsor, science and technology fairs that promote applied learning and showcase creativity. We will motivate students by sponsoring visits to our schools and classrooms (both in person and by video links) of pioneers, leaders and motivators in a range of disciplines, including the sciences.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the concerns of your members.

Yours sincerely,

Ross Reid
2011 Policy Chair
Progressive Conservative Party
of Newfoundland and Labrador