

# LONG-TERM DIRECTION PROJECT



David  
Suzuki  
Foundation

SOLUTIONS ARE IN OUR NATURE



*“For me, the rewards of getting involved are that I will be able to look my children in the eye and say, ‘I did the best I could.’”*

*—David Suzuki*

## Overview & purpose

In 2008, the David Suzuki Foundation initiated the Long-Term Direction Project in order to determine the path the Foundation will follow in its third decade and beyond. This document is both a consensus of the project results and the beginnings of a strategic plan, and is based on input from interviews with thought leaders across Canada, discussions with board members, and goal-setting exercises with staff.

The results reflect what we believe to be the role that DSF can play in a sustainable future for Canada that acknowledges the interconnectedness of people and nature. It is being shared outside the Foundation in the hope that it will aid others in their thinking and work.

Our motivation to be clear on our direction and focus is compelling for a number of reasons. We see increasing and alarming signs from all directions that many natural and human systems are being pushed to “tipping points” beyond which our ability to react and adapt will rapidly decrease. And although polls show that Canadians have high levels of concern about the natural environment, this has yet to translate to significant behavioural change or policy shifts.

This document includes a discussion of:

- ▶ Our mission and vision,
- ▶ Long-term outcomes we hope to achieve (by ourselves and with others),
- ▶ Our principles for social change,
- ▶ Our values and competencies and,
- ▶ Our priority areas of focus and intervention for the next 10 years.

The outcomes of the Long-Term Direction Project are not intended to be the end of discussion; our exploration and testing will continue.

## *What we did*

The methodology of the LTDP was comprehensive but straightforward. We sought to survey ourselves, our colleagues, our supporters, the general public, and the latest academic findings on how best to chart our way forward through the next decade and beyond. The steps of this process, which happened in a roughly linear though overlapping manner, are as follows:

1. **SCOPING:** We identified the broad project objectives and parameters beginning in January 2008. Some of the questions we explored included:

- ▶ What is the time frame for our planning; do we need different time frames for our trends analysis, goals, and strategies?
- ▶ How can we go about answering the questions we have? And who outside the Foundation could best help us?
- ▶ What is the process for engaging the staff and board?
- ▶ What will we do with the results?

**2. STAFF AND BOARD ENGAGEMENT:** In the winter and spring of 2008, we began a series of meetings with DSF staff and board members to explore future trends, strategy options, and DSF's positioning. Using that, we started to informally imagine what our work and organization might be like 10 years from now.

**3. EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT:** We met with about 50 "thought leaders" from a variety of sectors across Canada, including business, academia, the nonprofit sector, the media, and government. We also talked to a small number of people in the U.S. and Europe. This took place from March through June 2008.

**4. BEST PRACTICES REVIEW:** We referenced the latest literature regarding highly effective nonprofits and social-change models and strategies, with a particular focus on youth engagement and communications.

**5. SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE REVIEW:** We engaged in a review of the latest sustainability science to guide our visioning for the next decade and beyond.

**6. PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH:** The public's perception of DSF and of key environmental and social-justice issues was summarized in a number of recent research studies, including supporter, subscriber and donor research, and public opinion research from Angus McAllister, Angus Reid, Environics, Harris-Decima, the Frameworks Institute, and James Hoggan and Associates. In all, we received feedback from more than 7,000 Canadians.



Photo: doviende / Flickr

**7. SUMMARIZING THEMES:** Staff and board members worked during the summer of 2008 to pull together all the information and insights described above into a detailed summary document.

**8. CHARTING DSF'S HIGH-LEVEL DIRECTION:** The board worked during a two-day retreat in September 2008 to set the high-level direction for staff to work with in developing draft long-term plans. The direction the board provided included the DSF mission and vision, long-term outcomes and strategies, and core DSF competencies.

Finally, the LTDP project recommendations were presented to and approved by the DSF board on February 19, 2009.

## *Our proposed strategic direction*

*Mission: "To protect the diversity of nature and our quality of life, now and for the future."*

*Vision: "Within a generation, Canadians act on the understanding that we are all interconnected and interdependent with nature."*

DSF's new vision is first and foremost about people. It assumes that our mission (diversity of nature and quality of life) will only be achieved when people feel inseparable from the natural world. It acknowledges the disproportionate impact that one species — humans — has on the planet.

Until now, DSF's vision was informally captured in our report titled 'Sustainability Within a Generation,' which was intended to provide strategic direction for Canada and in particular our federal government. 'Sustainability Within a Generation' contained nine critical societal 'challenges' that were in essence policy guides.

However, we didn't develop a compelling narrative to bring the

idea of ‘sustainability within a generation’ to life for more Canadians (i.e., beyond policy makers). Nor did we articulate what our mission and vision means to our organization in terms of the outcomes in society and nature we seek, how we do our work, what organizational goals we strive for, who we collaborate with, and the kind of organization we want to become.

We wish to see the mission, vision and the idea of ‘sustainability within a generation’ as inclusive and compelling, not just for policy-makers, but for wide segments of the Canadian population. We seek less the hard fought, incremental policy changes and more the social transformation that today’s situation demands. While we will continue to do policy and advocacy work, we will also greatly increase our engagement with people.

## *Our desired outcomes: fast forward to 2020*

To establish a clearer understanding of the future place we wish to help create, the Board has established three interconnected and interdependent Long-Term Outcomes. The intent was to clarify the high level direction towards our mission and vision, within the context of a focus on Canada.

Our starting focus is the next 10 years. The outcomes will ultimately be made tangible and measurable. DSF will explore, describe and act on the interrelationship of these outcomes.

**OUTCOME #1: NATURE—RESILIENT AND DIVERSE NATURAL SYSTEMS.** This speaks to the entirety of non-human systems with which we are interdependent. The outcome we seek is a future situation where these systems (which are also human life-support systems) are no longer in decline through processes such as species depletion, loss of forests, accumulations of toxics, climate change, etc. This outcome is about not only ‘natural capital’ but also non-financial values like the inherent value of ‘wilderness.’ It represents not only all habitats and ecosystems, but species and genetic diversity.



Photo: istockphoto.com

**OUTCOME #2: HUMAN SYSTEMS—LIVING WITHIN THE LIMITS OF NATURE.** This outcome addresses those human-created systems that enhance our quality of life (transportation, energy, food supply, manufacturing, water and wastewater, making cities workable, etc.). As these systems all use nature-based inputs (ecosystem goods and services) and energy, as well as create waste, we envision human systems that are no longer using materials and creating waste in a way that systematically degrades nature (i.e., the larger web of life upon which we depend).

**OUTCOME #3: JUSTICE—THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET BASIC HUMAN NEEDS.** When human justice is lacking, nature suffers. This outcome means having a society that allows us the opportunity to live a high quality of life and meet our basic human needs. This implies fair and adequate access to resources or environments that allow healthy living for all (e.g., free of air pollution, toxic pesticides, etc.). The intent is to ensure that the impacts of environmental deg-

radation are minimized and aren't disproportionately borne by certain segments of society. Solutions must also be applied equitably. This outcome also focuses on ideas such as genuine wealth (i.e., not just financial wealth), human rights and responsibilities, and global equity considerations.

These three outcomes provide a long term direction for our work. The Board purposely kept them at a high level. They are intended to imply an invitation to others who share a desire to see them realized. The invitation is to co-create solutions, and there is incredible potential for creative results (renewable energy, toxic-free products, sustainable seafood practices, more liveable neighbourhoods, etc.).

## *Our strategic approach: DSF as a catalyst for social change in Canada*

DSF has built a strong foundation for its science-based education, advocacy and policy work. Going forward, we will advance our communications and outreach from a one-way platform (DSF to public, largely opinion leaders in government, business and media) to a more cooperative platform (many to many). We will shift from relying on the sheer force of our arguments and research to change behaviours, to engaging all Canadians in conversations and solutions about our shared future. Our new science-based narrative will inform these conversations, but not dictate them.

We believe that this approach will both instil a sense of urgency among and give hope to Canadians. In turn, this force for good will measurably improve the Foundation's existing leverage with decision-makers.

We believe The David Suzuki Foundation is uniquely positioned to be a major catalyst for social change in Canada. We recognize that just as important as the vision and outcomes we wish to see are the ways we help to bring them about — i.e., our principles of social change. We have identified three strategic approaches that will

increasingly guide our work. In essence — they constitute our model of social change:

**1. CO-CREATE A NEW SCIENCE-BASED NARRATIVE ABOUT THE FUTURE.** Creating a new narrative will be central to our work in Canada. We know that this means a narrative based on principles and science — but this narrative is also distinct from traditional, one-way education efforts. It is based on recognizing that people often do not respond through strictly rational motivations; we need to understand how major change really happens. It is a narrative about the place of humans in nature, about where we have come from and where we are going. It is a positive picture of the future.

**2. TWO-WAY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PUBLIC, GOVERNMENT, AND THE MARKETPLACE.** The term ‘engagement’ includes solutions towards our vision, outcomes, and areas of intervention. Because we will never have the resources to take on a two-way engagement approach on a massive scale by ourselves, we will need to become part of powerful partnerships with others who share similar goals and outcomes.

**3. LEARNING, UNDERSTANDING AND ADVOCACY.** Our traditional advocacy methods will become part of a more inclusive approach to social change. In some cases, there will remain a strong, clear stance while building more on the solutions-finding we stand for. Learning and understanding will be targeted on individuals and groups (population segments) depending on context and goals. In general, there is an opportunity to focus some of our work with school-age youth.

## *Our values, characteristics and competencies*

To achieve the outcomes and strategies outlined above will require specific organizational characteristics and competencies. We intend to demonstrate the following organizational characteristics:

- ▶ Embody the essence of David Suzuki: his vision, ability to bring meaning and sense to science, and capacity to communicate curiosity, passion, respect, trustworthiness.
- ▶ Model the change we want to see.
- ▶ Ground our work in science (natural and social).
- ▶ Stay independent and non-partisan.
- ▶ Keep our primary focus on Canada, and act strategically locally and internationally.
- ▶ Take actions that address both short-term and long-term outcomes.
- ▶ Act in a financially sound manner.

We will also demonstrate the following organizational competencies:

- ▶ Act as a catalyst for social change.
- ▶ Work through diverse networks, alliances, and partnerships.
- ▶ Be exceptional communicators, bringing meaning and sense to science.
- ▶ Demonstrate disciplined execution and follow-up.
- ▶ Strategically select projects —use diverse expertise to identify projects that have the highest likelihood of achieving our outcomes.
- ▶ Develop and advocate for appropriate policy — policy is a path to change, more than it is a means to itself; policy without support won't be accepted.
- ▶ Have the capacity to work in the cultures of important key audiences — such as new Canadians, youth, first nations, etc.
- ▶ Celebrate, leverage, and meaningfully engage volunteers and members.
- ▶ Have the capacity to work in French and English.

## *A critical choice—what will be DSF’s focus over the next 10 years?*

Each of the following represents an area of focus, point of intervention, or combination of issues, where we intend to apply our three Strategic Approaches in order to help bring about transformational change towards all three Interconnected Outcomes.

The following were selected based on our considerable conversations and research during this project. Some represent new opportunities, or areas we’ll grow into through new competencies and characteristics, while others remain true to our roots. Each is interconnected with the others.

In line with the global challenges we face, these areas of focus are all deemed ‘urgent’, and DSF will play a major role (except for playing more of a ‘support’ role with “Reconnecting with Nature”). They are also either on-going, or intended to be phased in over the next 1 to 3 years, subject to creating the necessary organizational capacity.

While the exact wording may be refined from time to time, the intent described below for each of following intervention points or areas of focus should be maintained.

**RECONNECTING WITH NATURE.** Canadians, with a special focus on youth, are engaged in active, experiential learning that inspires and reconnects them to their profound interdependence with nature.

**PROTECTING NATURAL SYSTEMS.** Effective systems are in place to protect the diversity and resilience of Canada’s marine, fresh-water and terrestrial ecosystems. Natural capital valuation is applied as a key tool for education and protection.

**TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY.** Canada's vibrant economy stimulates progress towards increased well-being, fairness and quality of life, while increasingly recognizing and responding to the finite limits of nature. This leads to a more productive, low carbon economy that demonstrates efficient resource use, technological innovation and closed loop processes.

**LIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS.** In communities — the places people call 'home' — engaged citizens are empowered to live healthier, more fulfilled and 'just' lives. Model 'living neighbourhoods' lead the way through the transformation of infrastructure, including energy, transportation, water/wastewater and food systems.

**PROTECTING OUR CLIMATE.** Canada is doing its fair share to avoid dangerous climate change and is on track to achieve a safe level of greenhouse gas emissions.



Photo: istockphoto.com

We see the future as being filled with many challenges and many opportunities. We hope you will join us in working toward a world in which humans can find their place in nature and in which resources are shared in an equitable and sustainable way. The next 10 years will not be easy, but they will be exciting. By working together, we can make them years of progress rather than crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Robinson', with a large, stylized initial 'P'.

Peter Robinson  
CEO, The David Suzuki Foundation  
604.732.4228  
[www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)

