

SAVING NATURAL WORLD SAVING OUR HOME

A frightening new United Nations report that discovered an unprecedented decline in the Earth's natural world leaves humanity with one big question.

It's not whether we're wrecking the planet upon which our very existence depends - we already knew we were and the UN report's finding that one million species of plants and animals face extinction only adds further confirmation to this tragic reality.

No, the only question that matters is: What are we going to do about it?

What will we do with the revelations of a stark present and dangerously uncertain future that are found in the report written by 140 authors from 50 countries for the UN's Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services?

What can we do to curtail the human activity that has "severely altered" 75 per cent of the world's land masses and 65 per cent of its marine environments?

What will we do to stop the massive die-off of so many kinds of flora and fauna at a rate that, depending on the species, is 10 to even hundreds of times greater than was witnessed on average over the past 100,000 years?

Today no fewer than one in four species of plants and animals faces extinction, the report says. How can we live with their deaths?

How can we prevent human intervention from destroying so much genetic diversity in ways that reduce our food security and could limit the development of new, life-saving pharmaceuticals that come from rare biological compounds?

And if we look beyond our own self-centred interests, won't we recognize these endangered or disappearing life forms have their own intrinsic value?

It's not that this UN report is the first indication humankind's advanced technological civilization is taking a devastating toll on the environment.

Anyone who follows the news knows human-caused climate change is transforming the physical world. What we're doing to the living planet is merely another chapter in this sobering story.

And no wonder it's happening.

There are now 7.7 billion of us populating this Earth.

The farmland we cultivate, the forests we clear, in part, to grow more food, the mines and oilfields we exploit and the cities we build - all of these make our lives not only secure but more convenient and comfortable than at any other time in history.

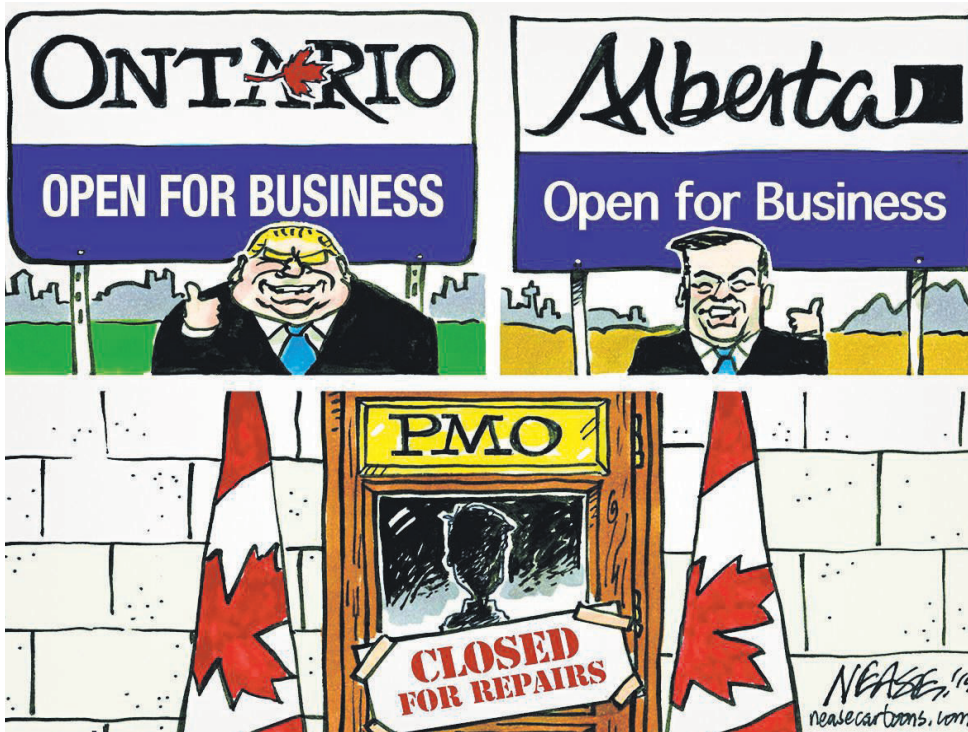
Yet all this human activity has the natural world in retreat.

That's really the nub of the challenge facing us. How do we hang on to what makes modern life so good for so many billions of people while ensuring the survival of the plants and animals that share our home and make it livable?

One of the scientists who participated in this UN report insisted the world must rethink its infatuation with economic growth.

That's sound advice and surely we'll need to regulate human activity in new ways that preserve the living environment even if that makes some of the luxuries we want more unaffordable or even unattainable.

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KAREN MICELI
Column

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Karen Miceli is managing editor of the Oakville Beaver, Burlington Post, Milton Canadian Champion, Georgetown/Acton Independent and Free Press and Flamborough Review. We welcome your questions and value your comments. Email our trust committee at trust@metroland.com.

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