

Proposal for an *Environmental Justice Charter* for New Brunswick

Background

- In 2004, the Conservation Council initiated a Environmental Justice Campaign for northern New Brunswick.
- The campaign in northern New Brunswick is focused on addressing four decades of heavy metal contamination in the region.
- The goal of the campaign is to have environmental contamination in the region cleaned-up.
- Many other regions and communities in New Brunswick also experience a disproportionate amount of industrial pollution and environmental abuse.
- To support individuals and communities fighting for fair treatment and protection from environmental contamination and destruction, the Conservation Council is proposing the following Environmental Justice Charter.
- The format and text of this proposed charter is the product of reviewing numerous “charters”, “bill of rights”, “manifestos” and other such documents dealing with environmental, ecological, social and health justice from around the world.
- Environmental justice charters differ from earth- or wilderness-oriented charters in that they tend to be human-centered rather than ecologically-centered. Environment justice charters tend to focus on addressing historical patterns of community/environmental abuse, discrimination and opportunism rather than the status or health of ecosystems and its connection to global well-being. Environmental justice is essentially about addressing peoples’ right to a clean and healthy environment. Since the role of governments is to manage public-owned resources and protect people and wildlife from the effects of industrial pollution, charters focus on the rights of citizens and restates the role and responsibility of government in upholding those rights.
- Environmental injustice is often framed or described in the following way:
 - a community of people (which could refer to a neighborhoods, towns, regions, rivers, nations, etc) has been unfairly (unequally) exposed (damaged) or subjected to environmental “dangers” (e.g., waste dumps, destructive land use practices, natural resource exploitation, etc);
 - these unfair practices have resulted in economic disadvantage (poverty), environmental degradation, poor health, and have burdened future generations;
 - the reason why these inequities and damages have occurred is because economic/political interests have dominated over human/environmental interests and people have been disenfranchised from the political/regulatory process due to a lack of democratic or meaningful participation in decision-making.
- An environmental justice charter re-asserts citizen’s rights and provides a “foundation” for empowering people to take action. A common list of citizen’s rights can be found in every environment justice charter. They are:
 - the right to live in a clean and healthy [sustainable] environment, now and in future generations;
 - the right to fair and equal protection [treatment] under environmental laws
 - the right to know
 - the right to participate in democratic and meaningful decision-making;
 - the right to have problems fixed.
- If enough people are signatories to the charter, it can be used to call for institutional, governmental and regulatory change.

New Brunswick Environmental Justice Charter [*draft*]

Whereas we, the people of New Brunswick, our communities and future generations depend upon a healthy environment with all its rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure water and clean air for our economic, social and cultural survival

Whereas we, the people of New Brunswick, regardless of race, culture, geographic location or income have a right to a clean and health environment and to a life free from the effects of industrial pollutants and destructive methods of production and consumption that are causing a deterioration in air and water quality and a decline in terrestrial and marine resources and species

Whereas we, the people of New Brunswick and our communities have a right to participate fairly, equally and directly in decisions regarding the local use [consumption] and allocation [distribution] of public-owned natural resources including air and water

Whereas we, the people of New Brunswick remind our government that they have a responsibility to fully and consistently protect publicly-owned resources such as air, water, trees and wildlife and prevent the generation and release of pollutants that are threat to human health and wildlife [and the food chain]

Whereas we, the people of New Brunswick expect government decision-making to be free of political and corporate influence

We the undersigned call on our government to:

restore and conserve publicly-owned natural resources including air and water to ensure that current and future generations can fully enjoy, benefit and share in the natural bounty of our Province

protect us and our communities from laws, policies, regulation or rules that result in unfair environmental degradation and destruction between and within communities and regions of the Province

uphold our right to fair and equal access to decision-making concerning all publicly-owned natural resources including air and water

inform us and our communities publicly and promptly when concerns and evidence of environmental contamination, destruction and waste are identified or reported

institute effective and independent procedures to address the degradation of natural resources including the contamination of people, wildlife, air and water; and

eliminate corporate and political influence and fully accept its role in protecting the public interest.