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STATE OF THE  
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## The State of Canada's Environment '1996



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### A Holistic View of People and the Environment

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In the past, the [environment](#) was usually thought of as being external to our lives, as something "out there": a pool of resources to provide us with food, clothing, and shelter. We used the environment's resources to benefit humankind, and the success of that exploitation was often taken as a measure of progress. Throughout the world, resources ' land, water, fish, trees, and animals ' were managed and used in isolation. Now, it is increasingly apparent that, one way or another, all of these things are interconnected. The use of one environmental resource always has some immediate or long-term impact on the status of another resource or ecosystem.

Moreover, having once looked at the natural [environment](#) as something apart from ourselves, to be exploited or overcome, we now see ourselves much more as an integral part of it. We are part of an interactive global [ecosystem](#) 'the ecosphere. Success in maintaining the quality and productivity of our environment will depend on acknowledging this relationship and acting accordingly.

The world's population has multiplied almost fivefold since the early 1900s. During the same period, the world's economy has grown by 20 times, the consumption of [fossil fuels](#) by 30 times, and industrial production by 50 times. The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) has forecast that world industrial activity could multiply by an additional 5'10 times, given that many countries have yet to complete the industrialization process.

Such figures hint of profound impacts upon the ecosphere, as the world's people continue to invest in houses, transportation, and industries. Ecosystems have finite productive capacities and abilities to assimilate disturbance. The potential for [disturbance](#) becomes magnified as the population grows, resulting in greater demands being placed on energy supply and on [ecosystems](#). To come to grips with this situation, the global community has advocated that a holistic approach be followed, whereby environmental, social, and economic systems are collectively considered throughout decision-making processes (IUCN et al. 1980, 1991; UNCED 1992). The [conservation](#) of basic life support systems, the long-term [sustainability](#) of [species](#) and resources, and the acknowledgement of fundamental relationships between people and the [environment](#) are key elements in this approach.

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