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The Blue Dot Movement is growing

Louise Bell

Now in its second year, the Blue Dot Movement is a country-wide, grass-roots lobby group of citizens who are asking all levels of government to recognize the right of Canadians to a healthy environment. The ultimate goal is to achieve an amendment to the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to guarantee the right to breathe clean air, drink clean water and consume safe food.

The Blue Dot Tour

Over six weeks last fall, David Suzuki travelled across Canada, visiting over twenty communities and meeting with citizens in cafeterias, school gyms, public parks and concert halls. At each stop, Suzuki was joined by well known performers, artists and leaders. The message was clear: stand up and demand protection of the basic elements of our survival—clean air, drinkable water, and unpolluted land.

After the tour, Suzuki said it was the most important thing he has ever done. He said, 'I have been both humbled and energized at the outpouring of support Canadians are showing.'

Growing 'The Blue Dot' Movement

Citizens are asked to 'sign on' to this from-the-ground-up movement. They are also asked to contact their locally elected representatives to ask that their local government adopt a declaration recognizing the right to a healthy environment.

The plan is to grow a national movement of Canadians who recognize the importance of this right and stand together in pressing legislators to do the same.

Once local governments across the country have signed declarations, the results will be taken to the decision-makers of our provinces and territories. With so many communities calling for action, the provinces and territories will be compelled to follow suit and pass environmental bills of rights.

Federal legislation sets out that when seven of the ten provinces and two of the three territories, including a representation of 50% or more of the Canadian population, are on side on an issue, the federal government must address it. Once the number of provinces formally recognizing the right to

a healthy environment reaches this tipping point, the Blue Dot Movement will approach the federal government and seek the ultimate goal: amending the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Importance of 'Blue Dot' Movement

Around the world, countries are faced with the realities of water scarcity, deteriorating air quality, and climate change. In face of these challenges, more than 110 countries have recognized environmental rights, but not Canada.

We are among the world's wealthiest nations. Canada boasts 25% of the world's wetlands, 20% of the world's fresh water, and 20% of the world's remaining wilderness. However, our wealth is not equitably distributed.

Many northern and Aboriginal communities suffer from limited access to health services, affordable food, clean water, and proper housing. A sizable number of these communities have lived with a boil-water advisory for decades. In addition, many people live in areas exposed to industrial air pollution at levels known to be hazardous to human life.

The Blue Dot Movement recognizes these inequities and knows that enjoying a healthy environment is multi-factorial. Not only does it include breathing clean air, drinking clean water and consuming safe food, but it also necessitates the right to access nature, to know about the pollutants released into the local environment, and to participate in government decisions that will affect the environment.

Who Has Signed On Already?

Go to www.bluedot.ca/take-action to see the numbers and geographical distribution of individual signatories and local government declarations. Supporters are represented pictorially by an array of blue dots spread across the map of Canada. Just under 70,000 Canadians have signed on, with the number increasing daily. Many are from northern communities that lack

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the clean water that we take for granted. Over 500 are residents of the Islands Trust Area.

Twenty-nine local governments have made declarations, including Richmond, Vancouver, Victoria, Saanich, Duncan, Ladysmith and Cumberland and extending as far east as Montreal.

On March 11, the Islands Trust Council became the latest local government to sign on, declaring that 'all residents in the Trust Area have a right to live in a healthy environment.' Trust Council also directed the Executive Committee to vote at conventions of the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities (AVICC) and of the Union of British Columbia (UBCM) in support of resolutions to press the Government of BC to advance the right to a healthy environment.

Why 'The Blue Dot'?

For those unfamiliar with the expression, the 'blue dot' is a tiny, pale blue spot in a photograph of the Earth taken in 1990, by the Voyager 1 spacecraft. The shot was taken from a distance of 6

billion kilometers as part of a series of images of the solar system.

Carl Sagan, one of the best known astronomers who worked for NASA, persuaded the mission specialists, as the Voyager left our solar system for outer space, to turn the spacecraft's camera around for one last look at Earth, now just a blue dot. You can see the photo at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pale_Blue_Dot.

How Do I Sign On?

It's easy. All you need to do is provide your name, email address and postal code at www.bluedot.ca/sign-in/.

To learn more, visit www.bluedot.ca. Be sure to watch 'Today is the Day We Decide' on the home page. Against a backdrop of dramatic images, this video presents a persuasive case for recognizing environmental rights at the same priority level as the fundamental freedoms and democratic rights. Another video worth watching is 'Shoulders' by Shane Koyczan.

Many thanks to Jean Gelwicks and Peter Lamb of Salt Spring for bringing the Blue Dot message to the islands. ✍