

## Julia Langer, Chief Executive Officer, Toronto Atmospheric Fund

Toronto, Canada

*What event most shaped the course of the global environment?*

**Ms. LANGER:** So many “events” have shaped the environment of our incredible, improbable planet. Bam! A meteor strikes, sparking tidal waves of climatic and biological evolution. Oops . . . genes mutate and previously unheard-of life forms emerge from the slime. Whoosh! Water vapor and carbon dioxide rise up and create our comfy envelope of life. But in a more modern context, it has been the ax and plow, seeds and pumps: agriculture has shaped our global environment in a pervasive way. The direct physical manifestations are obvious, having encroached on much of the world’s forests, mangroves (aquaculture), and riparian zones. The indirect, downstream effects are increasing with scale—chemicals, soil erosion, loss of genetic diversity, and massive use of fossil fuels. Earth’s population would certainly not have approached current levels without domestication and cultivation, and we all need to eat, so now it’s about how, what, and how much.



*If we are to meet environmental challenges on a global scale, what one policy initiative do you think would have the most significant impact?*

**Ms. LANGER:** Given entrenched interests and expectations, habits and inertia, the most important policy initiative for addressing environmental challenges is “policy courage.” As Al Gore is alleged to have said about solving climate change: there is no magic bullet only magic buckshot. Whether that’s pricing carbon/pollution/waste/etc., banning carcinogens/low-density development/clear cutting old-growth forests/etc., setting energy efficiency/restoration/etc. standards, it requires policy makers to be principled, informed, and brave leaders.



*Given that the public and governmental debates on environmental issues are mired in indecisiveness, what do you think is the most constructive path to achieving active working relationships with all members of society?*

**Ms. LANGER:** We'll get there by doing because the antidote to indecisiveness is to see, feel, and understand that we'll have a better life and planet by facing the challenges, that living within the planet's means works better for most of us. "Most" is an important distinction because there will be winners but also some big losers (unless they can adapt and find the winning proposition) and that's where the courage comes in. People are increasingly concerned and affected by environmental challenges, and there is so much inspiration and creativity for solutions. Now it is about the will to act.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Julia Langer is CEO of the Toronto Atmospheric Fund (TAF), an arm's length agency endowed by the City of Toronto to advance low-carbon solutions for cities. While at World Wildlife Fund (WWF) she led campaigns to address climate change, protect marine turtles, and ban toxic chemicals. Julia served as a policy advisor to Ontario Minister of Environment Jim Bradley, and has worked and volunteered with many non-profit organizations including Friends of the Earth, Pollution Probe, Great Lakes United, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. She holds a degree in Environmental Sciences from the University of Toronto. Julia is a year-round cyclist, an avid vegetable gardener, and a wilderness canoeist.