

OPINION

Stouffville Sun-Tribune

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

New recycling fee step in right direction

Re: New recycling fees annoying, but needed, editorial, Aug. 7.

Thanks to The Sun-Tribune for supporting this fee, which is at least going in the right direction.

My grandchildren, if they were old enough to know what was going on, would thank you, too since it's their world and they will especially feel the devastation of what previous generations have done to the planet.

Making people pay a little extra if they're using things that hurt the planet is a way of reminding us to be aware of the cost in terms of the environment.

A world famous economist who spoke not so long ago in Canada alerted us to the fact that if we don't pay to make things different now, we will end up paying way more in the future.

We won't like this higher price on things harmful to our world, but we can realize it's the only responsible thing to do.

One way to ease the burden of the extra costs is to use less by making things last longer.

Another way of looking at it is to say to ourselves, "We're paying a little extra so that

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our children and their children can have a world even remotely as good as the one we have."

Surely we can afford that.

People in time of war sacrificed greatly since they knew their lives and the values they held dear were in peril.

Many see the situation we're in as much the same; we're fighting to save our world as we know it.

Look at in this light: this fee is the least we can do.

Most of Europe is far ahead of us in making the shift to a more sustainable world and has been using these kinds of fees to encourage 'greener' behaviour and greater personal and corporate responsibility for years.

Let's get on with it.

J. THOMAS
RICHMOND HILL



Protecting half of forest may not be enough

Are Canadian politicians finally paying serious attention to the environment?

Recent events and announcements give us reason for optimism.

Last week, we wrote about the federal Sustainable Development Act and how all the political parties put aside their differences to support this important new law.

We've also seen a lot of progress lately on the part of some provincial governments regarding global warming.

The Ontario government's recent commitment to protect 50 per cent of its intact boreal forest offers further hope governments are getting serious about protecting the planet.

On July 14, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty committed to preserving 225,000 square kilometres of northern boreal forest under the province's Far North Planning Initiative. That's an area 1.5 times the size of the Canadian Maritimes. It's a significant commitment and it's something more than 1,500 of the world's scientists had asked for, including us.

The boreal forest stretches across the northern part of Canada, touching almost every province and territory and covering 35 per cent of the country's total land mass. It represents about one-third of the world's circumpolar boreal system and one-quarter of all intact forests remaining on the planet.

The region supports three billion migratory songbirds and more than 200 species of animals, including dozens of threatened or endangered species such as woodland caribou, grizzly and polar bears, wolverine, lynx and white pelican.

The announcement is significant, not just in terms of conservation, but also because it marks the first time a government in Canada has explicitly recognized the role nature conservation must play in combatting global warming.

The boreal's forests and peatlands absorb and store massive amounts of carbon, making them a hedge against global warming caused by emissions from human activity.

Scientists estimate Ontario's northern boreal alone absorbs 12.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide



David Suzuki

emissions a year.

It's difficult to describe the global significance of Canada's boreal forest.

It's one of the last places on Earth where human activity hasn't yet upset critical predator-prey relationships, natural fire regimes and hydrological cycles.

And economists conservatively estimate that the ecosystem services provided by the boreal, such as water filtration, pollination and carbon storage, have 2.5 times the economic value of market resources extracted each year, such as oil, minerals and timber.

As significant as the Ontario government's announcement is, we have to be cautious in our optimism.

For one thing, we don't know if protecting 50 per cent will be enough to conserve the region's biodiversity, particularly species such as caribou that depend upon vast tracts of intact habitat. And we have yet to learn what areas will be put off limits to development.

Fortunately, the government has committed to working with First Nations in the region to develop comprehensive land-use plans.

We must also ensure that the government doesn't use its announcement to protect the sparsely populated and largely unthreatened northern boreal as justification for further expansion of industrial development in the southern boreal, which is far more attractive to industries such as forestry and mining.

Already the southern boreal has been heavily fragmented by logging, mining and roads, leading to steep declines in populations of some sensitive species such as caribou.

The areas not slated for protection under this plan – in both the northern and southern boreal – must be managed in a sustainable way based on sound scientific principles.

Furthermore, the government should reverse its recent decision to give the forest industry a one-year exemption from new habitat-protection regulations under the province's Endangered Species Act.

Still, with this announcement, Ontario has taken an important and courageous step, one we hope other provinces will follow.

For example, Quebec has protected less than 5 per cent of its own boreal forest, and although it has plans to increase this, it has yet to make a commitment as visionary as Ontario's.

The recent attention governments have been paying to the environment are positive signs.

But successful conservation efforts can't be limited to aspirational goals announced at news conferences. We all have a responsibility to make sure governments live up to their commitments.

LETTERS POLICY

The Sun-Tribune welcomes your letters. All submissions must be less than 400 words and must include a daytime telephone number, name and address. The Sun-Tribune reserves the right to publish or not publish and to edit for clarity and space.

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