

“Being Prepared” in a Climate of Change

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Fifty-three years after Bert Bolin, a meteorologist at Stockholm University, suggested that the effects from increasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere “might be radical”, a couple of things have become evident.



First, as a global community we have collectively failed to rein in our CO₂ emissions, the main driver for our warming climate. In the past decade, world CO₂ emissions produced from the burning of fossil fuels have increased by 27 per cent.

Second, climate change is a reality. Not only is it a statistical reality –The World Watch Institute reports that 2000 - 2010 was the warmest decade on record and that temperature extremes, severe weather events have been increasing in both frequency and intensity over the last 30 years—but climate change is a lived reality.

Take for example of the mountain pine beetle. This temperature-sensitive species has taken advantage of warmer winters in British Columbia to infect and kill pine trees in record numbers. Over \$20 billion dollars of timber has been destroyed which has directly affected nearly 25,000 families working in the forest industry.

Boreal forest jack pines may also be susceptible to this beetle. What would be the economic impact of a similar outbreak on the Ontario forest industry?

This crisis provides a perfect illustration of why adaptation needs to join mitigation at the top of the agenda for dealing with climate change. Adaptation means planning now in order to moderate the inevitable impacts of climate change in the future. In the case of the pine beetle, an adaptive plan that included modified silvicultural practices such as thinning and more aggressive management techniques such as prescribed burns may have reduced the impacts of the infestation.

There are many reasons to be planning now for the impacts of climate change. One important reason, considering the current economic downturn, has to do with dollars and cents. In 2006, the most comprehensive review on the economics of climate change was completed by the British economist Nicholas Stern. The findings were clear. After strong and prompt mitigation, the single most cost effective way to deal with climate change is to invest in adaptation early.

Adaptation Conference

An upcoming conference in Thunder Bay - “Climate Change: Moving Towards Adaptation” - will be focusing on climate impacts in Northwestern Ontario and some of the adaptive strategies

necessary to manage them. The conference is being organized by Environment North, Northern Connections, the Lakehead University Student Union and the Faculty of Education.

The public is invited to this free full day event. The morning will focus on adaptation research and will include talks from Dr. David Pearson the Co-chair of Ontario's expert panel on Climate Change Adaptation and a number of other speakers whose research programs include temperature and precipitation trends, climate modeling, impacts to food systems, adaptation in forestry, and preparation for climate change in the city of Thunder Bay.

Elizabeth May, the Leader of Canada's Green Party, will provide a lunch time address from Vancouver on political leadership in the face of climate driven crises.

Afternoon sessions are more interactive with workshops on the role of the education in adaptation, building adaptive and resilient communities and a field trip to the Thunder Bay water treatment plant. The event ends with a chance to unwind and meet others interested in adaptation over refreshments and snacks.

Climate Change: Moving Towards Adaptation will take place March 3rd at The Outpost, Lakehead University from 8:30 am to 6:00 pm. For more details and to register visit: www.environmentnorth.ca

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