

Cost of ignoring science

By **Doug Skeates**

Our materialistic world has provided a powerful reminder of the cost of doing nothing or at least of putting our priorities in the wrong place. Debt begets debt. If one takes out a loan, failure to pay the interest increases indebtedness. Unless the debt is paid down. How many folks have noted that a loan has increased despite efforts to pay back the original amount, due to the accumulation of interest? How many countries particularly in the third world have become bankrupt on the same basis.

The major problem facing the planet today is no longer financial but ecological but the same principles apply. Human induced global warming has resulted in the melting of ice conditions world wide, which in turn is the basis for major changes in climatic patterns. The impact on humanity shows up with drought conditions hence severe wildfires destroying vast areas of the world including complete destruction of communities and loss of life. In the process thousands of square miles of forest have been lost. Nature's inability to absorb carbon from the atmosphere a major cause of increasing heat world-wide is restricted.

Mankind has shown us many examples of endeavouring to correct the situation. The latest issue of the National Geographic has evaluated the status of forests in different regions of the world, not an encouraging picture. The article provided one strong note. The government of China has banned the harvesting of forests on the basis that standing trees were of greater economic value to the nation than in the form of logs at a sawmill. It was recognized that lack of forest cover failed to control dust storms from the Gobi Desert reducing society's manufacturing capability as well as causing severe erosion of land inhibiting agricultural potential. Sawmill operations were converted to tree nurseries and a pledge was made to reforest the land base with the planting of billions of trees over the next 50 years, a target apparently on course.

The Great Green Wall of Africa is proving to be a means of limiting encroachment of the Sahara Desert. Various reports have indicated increased agricultural productivity due to improving ground water balance due to stabilization of ecosystems, On the Canadian scene new forests on Ontario's Oak Ridges Moraine helped to eliminate the region's desert conditions hence becoming ecologically productive, contributing to the nation's prosperity. One note in 'Getting to Zero, Canada confronts global warming?' (Tony Clarke, 2018) outlined the success of one not-for-profit aboriginal enterprise, Aki Energy, in Manitoba. At time of publishing the company had converted 150 homes from heating with fossil fuels to geothermal energy and had contracted to change another 850 tribal homes over the following five years.

Those who live closest to the natural world have shown the value of balanced harvesting of forests ensuring social benefits while maintaining Nature's capacity for providing ecological well being. Community forests have illustrated the potential of land to serve commercial and ecological purposes, proving the basics of human life do not preclude economic growth.

Various reports in the media have shown efforts made to convert from fossil fuel energy to renewable sources. A recent Facebook item outlined Denmark's conversion of rail transport to electricity. Hundreds of workers commuted to work daily without emissions of carbon to the atmosphere. Many leaders have pledged to increase their county's level of forest cover in order to absorb more carbon emissions from the atmosphere. The cost of creating increased levels of renewable energy and reducing global warming has decreased steadily over many years while producing new sources of fossil fuels has increased.

The current lesson, debt reduction, to be learned from the commercial world applies as well to the environmental field as the impact of global warming illustrates a similar pattern. What we inherited from policies established by past generations now is on loan from our children and grand-children. Today's occurrence of severe drought conditions, flooding from impacts of more severe hurricanes, loss of forest ecosystems, encroachment of deserts etc. represent debts which future populations will have to repay.

Creating balance, reduction of ecological 'debt', is only part of the story. The 'interest' must also be addressed. Correcting the results of human caused abuse requires even greater effort.