



A Bad Budget For Nature and Climate

To say I'm disappointed with the new federal budget would be the understatement of the year. Truth is, I'm frustrated and angry, not just because of what's *in* the budget but by what has been cut and what is glaringly absent.

In the glaringly absent department are the environment and nature. That's reflected in the decision to axe the 2 billion tree fund which did exemplary work in helping to expand urban forests to enhance climate resiliency. Add to that the fact that there are virtually no assurances that other municipally targeted programs like the Nature Smart Climate Fund will continue, and you begin to appreciate just how little nature matters to this government.

So why are those Trudeau-era programs significant? Well, the 2 billion tree money made available to Winnipeg meant we eliminated our 80% backlog in boulevard tree replacements. It also helped to fund the city's Homegrown program, which provides funds to communities to expand their neighbourhood canopies.

And given that 85 scientists from around the world recently published an open letter proclaiming that "urban forests are among the most effective, equitable nature-based solutions available" to help cities mitigate and adapt to climate change, that money was not only needed but well spent.

The Nature Smart Fund, meanwhile, offered matched funds to cities to buy and restore natural urban lands, like intact forests and wetlands, that have managed to survive the urban onslaught of concrete and asphalt. Urban remnants of Nature that can form a bulwark against climate change, by mitigating heat island effect as well as reducing the risk of flash floods.



The Nature Smart Fund helped cities buy and protect natural areas like Winnipeg's LeMay Forest

Right now it's crickets on whether or not that fund will continue. Ditto for the 30 by 30 target established by the Trudeau government, which aimed to protect 30% of our lands and water by 2030.

Worse still, for Canadians, there are no new funds for energy retrofits or green homes, and no further incentives for consumers to purchase electric vehicles, which in turn negatively impacts the expansion of electric charging stations.

Then there's the weakening of environmental and greenwashing regulations which means it will now be easier for corporations to make specious claims about the environmental friendliness of their products, technologies and projects. Which, I presume, also includes the greenwashing done by fossil fuel corporations that have spent billions to try and convince us that climate change is a figment of the imaginations of 99.9% of the world's scientists.

So how is it that a guy who wrote a book claiming that the transition to a net zero economy represented "the greatest commercial opportunity of our time" could present a budget that offers subsidies for the production of liquid natural gas and the elimination of carbon emission caps.

Is it possible that his book was an exercise in greenwashing his own image in anticipation of a new career in politics?

That assessment may be unduly harsh, but you really do have to wonder, based on this budget, if the banker, technocrat and corporate CEO in Carney far outweighs his enthusiasm for green jobs and renewable energy.

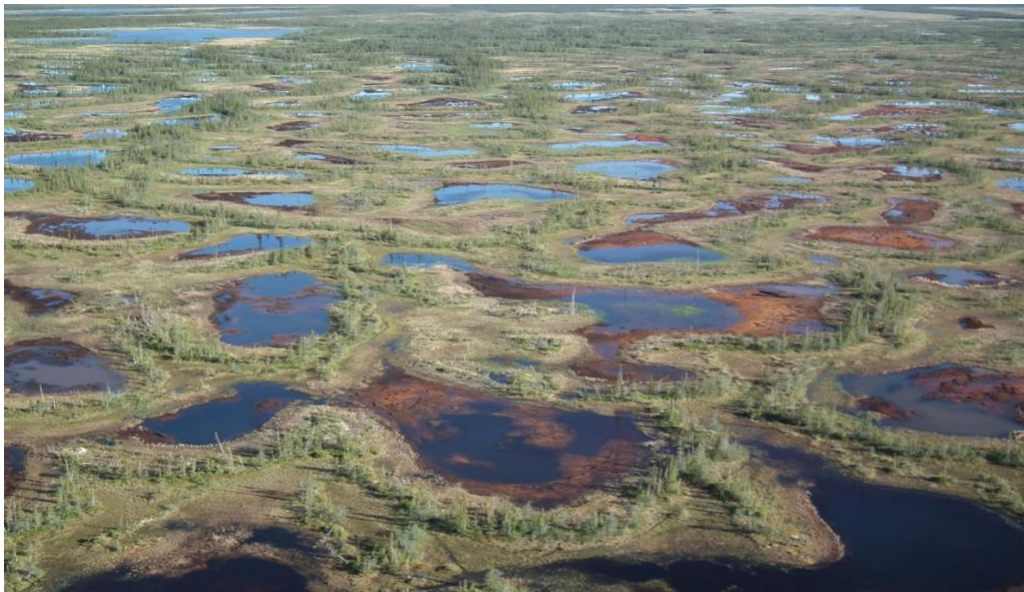
The fact that a conservative MP crossed the floor to join his liberal ranks just after the budget's release - with others reportedly poised to follow - kind of says it all.

And the incentives for carbon capture - a technology that thus far has accomplished zero in terms of emission reduction and will likely have little impact on slowing the rate of climate change in the future - is equally telling.

But still, is it possible that I'm missing something? Is there a climate agenda buried in amongst the fossil fuel subsidies and industrial investment incentives in this budget that I'm missing?

Well, the head of the Pembina Institute, an environmental think tank, says there is, because Carney wants to up the levels on carbon pricing, which to date hasn't exacted a high enough cost to encourage industries to switch to renewables.

The head of the Canadian Climate Institute concurs, adding that methane regulations and money to modernize the electrical grid also represent climate forward policies.



The peatlands in Ontario's Ring of Fire - one of world's largest carbon sinks

But in my humble opinion, it's just not enough. So, I tend to agree with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives which has observed that "this is the most climate negative budget we've seen in a decade."

Moreover, it sets a tone that lulls Canadians, fearful of a trade war, into believing that defence spending, foreign investors and mining in one the world's largest carbon sinks will maintain their standard of living - when that standard of living could be blown to smithereens by repeated seasons of megafires, flash floods and drought, thanks our governments' failure to take decisive action to radically cut emissions and protect the natural systems that protect us.

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