

CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 29

Declaration of a Climate Change Emergency

In the next several weeks various community groups will be approaching local elected leaders in the Comox Valley asking them to declare a Climate Change Emergency. (See the dates below). The same thing is happening in many communities in B.C. I honestly, absolutely and without hesitation agree that such a declaration is essential. Why am I so convinced of this? Because my wife and I could be facing such an emergency.

The Dangers and Risks

Last summer we downsized and bought a condo next to the Northeast Woods in Comox. We love these woods. They have hundreds of tall trees and numerous walking paths, some of which we walk every day. But ever since the April showers failed to happen in our area, I've been asking myself a question.

What if someone walked along one of the trails and their boot or walking pole clicked a rock and made a spark? A spark is all it would take to start a fire in the tinder-dry underbrush. A fire which unnoticed might easily turn into a roaring inferno. What would I do? At this point I don't have a clue. But I see these large pine trees breathing down on the roofs of our houses and I'm hoping they never breathe down fire.

What would be the reaction if I knocked on the doors of the forty-seven other condos in our cluster and told each person that there was a fire in the woods and they had to evacuate? And if I said they had five to ten minutes to evacuate and asked them where they could go, how could they get there, who would help neighbours with walkers or in wheel chairs, what would they take with them? These are questions most of them would be unprepared to answer.

And it is not only our community complex we are worried about. We are one of three similar complexes lined up in a row on our street. All three, along with an elementary school and a high school, back onto the Northeast Woods.

So what is the evidence that such an emergency might be imminent? Two recent scientific studies lay out the case. The first, from the [UN in October 2018](#), notes that because of increasing effects of climate change we have to make radical changes by 2030 or we will be in desperate straits by 2040. The [second study](#) by the Government of Canada published in April of this month notes that Canada is warming twice as fast as most other countries...with the Arctic warming three times as fast as the rest of Canada. There can be no doubt that the world's climate is changing, whether or not most of the changes are humanly induced.

If we turn on our TVs today there are numerous stories about the unprecedented floods in New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario. Two months ago it was the floods in the

American mid-west. Several years ago it was the record breaking floods in Manitoba and Saskatchewan that reached the highest level ever and forced thousands into evacuation. But there is more.

In late summer we can watch stories on TV about the storms racing across the Caribbean, picking up steam in the warming waters of the ocean and slamming into the southern United States. Sometimes they work their way up the coastline to New York and New Jersey. (Remember the devastating hurricane Sandy that hit New Jersey and parts of New York in October of 2012?)

Of major concern for those of us who live in Beautiful British Columbia is the threat and reality of forest fires. As of November 9, 2018 wildfires in B.C. had surpassed the previous record high set in 2017. In 2018 a total of 2,092 wildfires burned 1,351,314 hectares (3,339,170 acres) of land.

Forest fires have been raging not only in Canadian provinces but also down the Pacific coast. I remember Arnold Schwarzenegger, the then governor of California saying, "We used to have a forest fire season. Now every season is forest fire season."

How to Get Ready

We need two plans: an immediate emergency plan to deal with the next few months and a plan for the longer term. Climate change will be a problem for generations to come.

We need a plan for all geographical areas of the Comox Valley and all political bodies.

We need a plan that will be developed both by elected officials and members of the public.

We need a plan that will identify the most vulnerable areas of the Comox Valley and introduce practical approaches—local community exercises the way we have fire exercises for hospitals and schools.

We need a plan with direct access to provincial and federal emergency resources.

We need a plan that will train first responders to work cooperatively with one another.

We need a communication capacity that will keep politicians, first responders and public informed on a regular basis.

We need a budget, a sacrosanct budget, set aside for emergencies only.

So now is the time to approach the current elected leaders. Fewer politicians are saying there is no such a thing as humanly induced climate change. But time is important and a show of public support is essential.

Times and Dates of Upcoming Meetings

Next full meetings to discuss proposals for a Declaration of Climate Change Emergency are:

- 1) City of Courtenay- Regular Council (May 6 at 4 pm)
- 2) Cumberland - Regular Council (May 13 at 4pm)
- 3) CVRD- Committee of the Whole (May 14 at 4 pm.)
- 4) Town of Comox - Regular Council (May 15 at 5:30 pm)

Conclusion

Jay Inslee, the current Democratic Governor of Washington State, is running for U.S. president in the 2020 election. He is unique because he really is a “one issue candidate”—climate change. When asked how he could possibly run on this alone he responded, “My issue, Climate Change, is affecting all aspects of life as we have come to know it. If we can’t deal with this, the rest won’t matter”.

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