

An old solution to a new problem, can trees really save the planet?

Written By MARNI WALSH

In their August news letter, the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Task Force (NDACT) presented studies on mass tree planting as one possible part of a campaign to combat global warming.

There has been growing global enthusiasm for this 'new' solution to the looming issue of rising temperatures in recent months.

'Experts suggest we may need to plant one trillion trees on one billion hectares of land, the size of the US, and let them absorb the vast amounts of carbon dioxide we produce,' noted the grass roots organization. NDACT also shared studies that shed light on a global approach to the concept of mass tree planting to garner the best results.

NDACT Chair Karren Wallace told the Free Press, 'This is a 'new' idea as old as time, or at least as old as farming.' She says, 'For generations farmers have known that trees help lessen soil erosion. Wind and rain are two of the main forces that erode bare soil. Bare areas exposed to strong winds can lose significant amounts of soil if the ground is dry and there are no roots present to hold the soil in place; the leaves and branches of trees create coverage reducing the force of wind and rain. As you drive north of Shelburne on County Road 124 you will see most of the farms have bush lots for this very reason.'

Additionally, Ms. Wallace says, 'Trees remove carbon from the air at an astonishingly high rate. One tree can absorb as much as 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year and can sequester one ton of carbon dioxide by the time it reaches 40 years old. NDACT knew the importance of trees and were the first to raise the alarm when the Highlands Company began clear cutting bushes on lands with the intent to establish a 200 foot below the water table open pit mine.'

In its July 2019 issue, the American Association for the Advancement of Science posted: 'The restoration of forested land at a global scale could help capture atmospheric carbon and mitigate climate change.' The article suggested a 25 percent increase in forestation could potentially cut the atmospheric carbon pool by about 25 percent. This makes restoration of trees among the most effective strategies to date for fighting climate change in a world where, currently the tree canopy continues to shrink at an alarming rate.

Writer Crawford Kilian, a contributing editor of the online site The Tyee, states in a recent article entitled, 'Yes, Planting Trees Can Fight Climate Change If We Do It Right', that 'planting trees as a solution to climate change requires a thoughtful global approach.'

He writes, 'Reforestation will be futile if we continue to increase our emissions at the same time as we plant trees. And it matters where we decide to plant these trees - reforestation would be more effective in the tropics.'

Kilian writes, 'Efforts are already under way to reforest Central America. Mexico is spending \$100 million US dollars in El Salvador and Honduras on reforestation projects.'

He suggests the best way for Canada to help reduce CO2, may be by financially supporting the reforestation of Central America, Haiti and other tropical countries, as well as our own temperate regions.

Meanwhile, here in Ontario Premier Doug Ford and the Conservatives cut an approved planting program for 50 million trees in the province. Karren Wallace says, 'It shows the Ford government does not really believe in climate change and the importance of protecting our fragile eco-system to support farming initiatives or climate change.'

Dufferin County Warden and Mayor of Melancthon, Darren White says as the Ford government was elected on a mandate to cut, he 'was not surprised to see cuts coming swiftly and in many directions.' But, he says, 'One can only hope that in some cases, sober

second thought, public input and data can bring some common sense to some of these cuts.?

Warden White told the Free Press, ?The County currently owns and manages almost 1,100 hectares of forested property with a varying assortment of tree types and habitats, and actively looks for opportunities to increase the tree canopy in the area.? He says, ?Much of this is encouraged with partnerships with various conservation authorities and other groups like the Upper Grand Watershed Committee.?

?The County is also actively trying to convince landowners to add trees for things like the living snow fence program, other windbreaks and fence rows to prevent soil erosion, and increase winter safety while lowering associated costs,? he says. ?These programs rely on landowner participation and therefore are working in places and not in others.?

Currently, the Warden says, ?There is no plan to implement a large scale tree planting program in the County, likely for a number of reasons. Cost would be one and organizational capacity would be one as well. As lower tiers hold the planning power in their jurisdictions, retaining trees on properties being developed or redeveloped would fall to them.?

When asked if he would support the County providing free trees as an incentive for individuals to plant, the Warden said he could not really answer that without seeing a costing, but, in principle, he noted ?I would, providing we could quantify the results.?