

## Good Forest Management Vs the Carbon Initiative 1631 – Who Does It Better?

By Elaine Oneil, Executive Director



I for one am delighted that fall is here. Our smoky summer is gone – replaced with the fresh breezes of autumn. According to Cliff Mass' weather blog, the worst smoke days in Seattle hit an Air Quality Index of nearly 100 which was a record. In talking to people over in Okanogan County that were in the thick of it, they only had to endure 1 1/2 weeks with an Air Quality Index of 400 or 4 times as bad. But on the bright side, other years have

been much worse for them; on a relative scale they were pleased. So is this the 'new normal' of extensive wildfires every summer and pesky smoke crossing boundaries from the northern British Columbia fires AND from the California fires so regardless of which way the wind blows we receive a direct hit? And can the proposed Initiative 1631 Carbon Fee (Tax) on this November's ballot make a dent in it?

There is a very interesting debate about Initiative 1631 that aired August 28th on TVW. It recorded the [Seattle Times Editorial Board as they interviewed both the pro and con sides of initiative 1631](#). You can also view it by navigating to TVW at [www.tvw.org](http://www.tvw.org) and searching [Initiative 1631](#) under the archives tab. We also highly recommend you take a look at the 38 page Initiative 1631 yourself – as your vote will determine if it becomes law in November. If you don't want to struggle through that, Heather has provided a brief synopsis on page six of this Landowner News.

My initial read of Initiative 1631 left me with some takeaways. If it were to become law, it would establish a 15 member board that is made up of agency staff from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Ecology, Department of Commerce and the Recreation and Conservation Office, non-voting agency staff plus four members appointed by the Governor that must include a tribal representative and a member of a vulnerable population. These agencies and all others named in the initiative are directed to cooperate and support this new board. More importantly, "All State Agencies shall

complete their duties under this chapter and otherwise drive its implementation with a sense of urgency," which suggests that if passed this initiative would advance carbon mitigation, carbon pricing and carbon implementation near the top of the priority planning for all agencies.

There are also panels that report to this oversight board. The panel leading the healthy forests investment fund must be co-chaired by a tribal representative and an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) representative with up to seven additional members, NONE of which are forest landowners – large nor small. These people get to make decisions on how the forests portion of the 25 percent of the total Clean Up Pollution Fund allocated to water and forests will be utilized on forest land that may include your forest land.

As a side note, the clean air and investment energy fund can be used to support carbon sequestration activities, including those on forest land, but explicitly excludes funding for the Forestry Riparian Easement Program (FREP) because anything that is regulated under the Forest Practices Act is not eligible. Note that the Forest Practices Act was the ONLY regulatory program so called out in the initiative. That means it eliminates your potential to get recognition/payment for the trees you have left in riparian zones as carbon storage on the land because they were required to be left there as part of the Forest Practices Act. Essentially what this does is negates the open door created by House Bill 1531 on FREP that we helped get passed in the 2017 legislative session. The carbon sequestration projects will pay for the government to acquire forest land, or the rights to forest land through conservation easements, but will dictate how it is managed.

There seems to be some splitting of hairs as to whether Initiative 1631 is a tax or a fee. It is called a fee but acts like a regressive tax, which is why if you make less than 80% of the median income for your census tract you are eligible for rebates on the additional costs that are expected to occur as a result of this fee. So yes, it is a fee on large emitters (except that 8 of the 12 largest emitters are exempt), but there is an

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expectation that the additional costs will be passed down to the consumer through higher fuel and energy prices which will also propagate through your everyday expenses. That means it acts like a tax.

Regardless of what it is called, will this massive re-allocation of wealth in the state leave us better off than before and address climate change which is its intended goal in 'tackling carbon pollution'? Probably not. Remember that most of our smoke this year didn't even originate in the state – it came from elsewhere, including British Columbia, a province with a first in its nation carbon tax, and California, a state with a first in the nation cap and trade policy. Carbon, smoke, rain and everything else transported by the air is not constrained within our boundaries – which makes any kind of policy to tackle climate change or carbon pollution something that requires local thinking but considers global impacts.

Implementing a regressive carbon fee, which chases energy intensive manufacturing elsewhere where the energy grid emits more carbon per BTU than our hydro-powered grid, means that overall the global carbon footprint increases for the same production of goods and services. Likewise, constraining forest management to increase carbon storage on the land, while reducing the opportunities for forest product manufacturing in a region that can grow forests like no other, contributes to increased carbon emissions rather than reductions because



we end up importing goods that we could produce here with a lower carbon footprint.

So how might we think about this complex issue? Start with the assets we have at hand and think about how to do the very best we can with them. As tree farmers we have our land and our trees – which by managing for healthy vigorous forests provide a tremendous carbon benefit, both standing and harvested. For it is when we harvest them and put them into products they continue to store carbon AND provide an offset when used in place of products with a higher carbon footprint. More importantly we PLANT again to repeat the cycle of renewal and regeneration. So the best thing we can possibly do for carbon mitigation or climate change is to be Stewards of the Land – For Generations to Come.