



Forest Fires and the Tragedy of the Horizon: How to make the costs of climate change real today

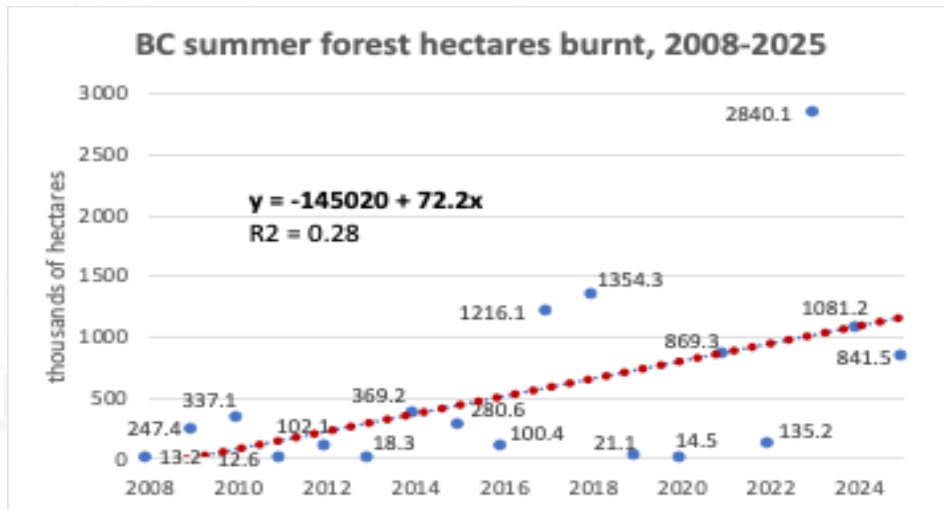
By John Richards, Professor Emeritus, School of Public Policy, Simon Fraser University

Context

- “Tragedy of the Horizon” depicts barrier to implementing climate policy
- Public sees issues well into the future less important than those of today
- Cognitive dissonance: identify two or more outcomes, highlight only one
- Debate over carbon tax a prime example of cognitive dissonance
- “Axe the tax” became a powerful rhetorical political weapon
- Action now (tax) to reduce emissions and future climate impact
- Canadians unwilling to accept mitigation policy to address future problems
- Policy challenge: How to address the Tragedy of the Horizon

Considerations

- Rising GHG emissions create economic and environmental costs
- Consequences seen as well into the future, reducing need for action now
- A prime example of impact today is rising forest fires during summer
- Data from B.C. shows steady and dramatic increase in forest fires



- The economic and fiscal costs for dealing with fires being felt now
- In 2023 direct costs to B.C. government was \$1.1 billion

Questions

- Why was the “Axe the Tax” campaign so politically effective?
- What factors created opposition to the carbon tax?
- Who should bear the costs of climate change impact?
- How can policy makers address the tragedy of the horizon?
- What are arguments for/against a new bitumen pipeline?