

## MOSCOW-PULLMAN DAILY NEWS

### HIS VIEW: Soil, water and climate thoughts for Earth Day

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By Al Poplawsky



Spring is in full bloom, and Earth Day is here once again.

Here on the Palouse it's critical that we increase our efforts to use our soil and water resources more sustainably. Our agriculture depends on fertile soils which have been half depleted by erosion due to tillage. Of even greater concern, less than one percent of the prairie that formed these soils remains, and part of that is threatened by the U.S. Highway 95 Thorncreek Road to Moscow Project south of Moscow ([paradise-ridge-defense.org](http://paradise-ridge-defense.org)).

Our sustenance of life - water - comes from a deep aquifer which continues to decline each year and has no known recharge.

Thus, soil and water conservation are both critical to our continued habitation of the Palouse, but clearly not sufficient. New and innovative efforts to rebuild these resources are badly needed. Bigger than the Palouse is the sustainability of human civilization as a whole.

Unfortunately our economic system thrives on continued growth, which results in continued growth in our use of finite Earth resources, and continued growth in the pollution of our Earth environment, which has a finite capacity to absorb this pollution. Although our continuous growth must be addressed eventually, one of its most critical consequences, climate change, must and can be addressed immediately. Most people accept the conclusions of 97 percent of climate scientists: The climate is changing far more rapidly than ever before, and fossil fuel use is a major contributor to this problem. When every week brings new and shocking natural disasters such as floods, droughts, heat waves, fires etc., it's hard not to notice.

However there are still vocal skeptics, the most significant of which are politicians in higher office. The challenge with them is: 1) they collect contributions from the fossil fuel industry to fuel their political campaigns, and 2) their political party has made it unacceptable for its members to acknowledge climate change. It is this group of individuals on which we must really focus our efforts.

The fee and dividend proposal ([citizensclimatelobby.org](http://citizensclimatelobby.org)) is a beneficial and logical solution to our fossil fuel addiction which is workable within the framework of our economic system. It would charge a gradually rising fee for carbon fuels at their source - essentially charging for the damage their combustion does to our environment. Although this would result in higher prices, they would be neutralized by monthly dividends returned to the citizens. The increased cost of carbon-based fuels would spur the market

to develop carbon-free alternatives, and encourage the average person to use energy more efficiently.

A tariff on incoming goods from other countries without similar carbon fees would maintain an even playing field for American companies and encourage other countries to develop their own fee and dividend programs.

Regional Economic Models Inc., a leading independent economic forecasting and policy analysis group, found that if such legislation were enacted, after 20 years premature deaths due to fossil fuel pollution would be reduced by nearly a quarter million people, real annual income would increase by \$800 per person, 2.8 million new jobs would be created and U.S. carbon emissions would be cut in half.

We must make this legislation politically acceptable for it to pass in Congress. We must make fee and dividend legislation acceptable to skeptical politicians by emphasizing its health and economic benefits. We must make the premature deaths of 230,000 people, and the stifling of economic development unacceptable. In this dawning era of shuttering coal plants and fossil fuel disinvestment, we can do this. Oh, and just in case 97 percent of the climate scientists are right, an additional benefit would be saving human civilization from the ravages of climate change.

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**Al Poplawsky** came to the Palouse 25 years ago to study yellow bacteria, and has broadened his horizons considerably since then.