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Ontario to spend nearly \$80M on 50 million trees to battle climate change
By MICHAEL OLIVEIRA

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OAKVILLE, Ont. (CP) - Ontario is setting an ambitious example for the rest of the world by committing \$79 million to plant 50 million trees to fight climate change and create a greener landscape for future generations, Premier Dalton McGuinty said Monday.

Ontario is supporting a United Nations campaign to plant a billion trees worldwide by making the largest pledge in North America, with planting in the province to be phased in with about five million new trees a year through 2020.



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photo OF THE DAY



The Ontario tree project will remove an estimated 3.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by 2054 - the equivalent of 172 million cars driving about 100 kilometres.

The additional trees will also mean more natural beauty across the province, more shade for homes to help conserve energy, and healthier ecosystems and wildlife habitats, McGuinty said.

"There's an old saying: 'The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago; the second-best time is right now,'" he said.

"It seems to me we have a special responsibility to the future to do our share, to lead by example."

Ontario should be commended for its commitment to plant so many trees, which is a good investment and should be emulated around the world, said Elisabeth Guilbaud-Cox of the United Nations Environment Programme.

"Planting trees remains the cheapest, most effective means of drawing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere," she said.

The mass planting is not only good news for Ontario residents, but for everyone on Earth, said former astronaut Roberta Bondar, who served as chairwoman for a government review of environmental education in Ontario.

People can't take for granted that Earth is the only known planet that sustains life, and everyone should appreciate that they can breathe and walk around without a spacesuit, said Bondar, who went into space in 1992 aboard the space shuttle Discovery.

Bondar said she wishes everyone could see the "gorgeous, pastel-coloured planet" from space to appreciate the uniqueness of our world and to be reminded of the importance of protecting the environment.

"It would embed in you the commitment for your life to be passionate and caring and give respect and have dignity for all the life that exists on (Earth)," she said.

"From space you don't feel the wind, you don't hear birds, you don't see the colours of the forest changing - so much we take for granted."

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society executive director Janet Sumner said



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Monday's announcement is good news, but she called on the Ontario government to do more to protect existing forests.

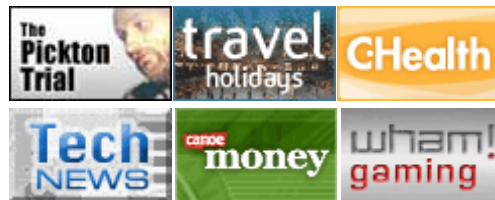
"It's going to ring hollow if there's not an accompanying announcement to protect our natural forests," Sumner said.

It's estimated logging companies harvest more than 200,000 hectares of Ontario's public forests each year - an area three times the size of Toronto, she said.

The government must also work to conserve existing forests, otherwise planting millions of trees will have no impact, Sumner said.

"Ontario should also be coming up with rules for development in the boreal forest located north of the 51st parallel as Mr. McGuinty promised to do four years ago."

McGuinty said consultations are continuing to come up with a plan to better protect the boreal forest.



opinion

Public interest in global warming still high

Six months ago, a friend told me that public opinion and media fascination with global warming would be over in six months at most because the public is fickle and the media are obsessed with latest trends. [Full Column](#)

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