



Economics and environment:
The hidden cost of jobs

Description

Rarely are the underlying costs of government job creation discussed

By **Georges R. Dupras**

There are times when we ask ourselves whether jobs are more important than the environment, whether traditions, even cultural interests, should impact on legislation designed to preserve the natural environment and if so, to what degree given our rapidly changing times.

Governments at all levels take great pride in the number of economic opportunities they have enabled. Rarely do we openly discuss the hidden costs that come with these jobs. One thing is certain, nothing is free; there is a price to everything but unfortunately our political leaders are taught to seize the moment. This, all too often, translates in to what is best for the party, not the people or the environments that sustain us. There is an underlying cost that goes well beyond the jobs they create whether we are speaking of pipelines dedicated to bitumen, the sale and control of natural resources to foreign powers (water, minerals, lumber etc.), or even the off-handed disposal of Canadian values by the supply of light armoured vehicles (L.A.V.s) to countries with dismal human rights records.

Where there is an action, there will be a reaction

Recently we were advised that the endangered orca population off the west coast of British Columbia has been denied protective status by the Government of Canada. No surprise in that decision as the Liberal Party of Canada, elected with only 38% of the vote, is moving ahead with its decision to allow for increased commercial use of these waters, including the shipping of oil and bitumen. Obviously protecting the endangered orca would mean protecting these waters as well. Every day we hear of critical habitats being fragmented, even eliminated, in the interest of jobs.

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Popular rhetoric

Do Canadians really care about animals or species at risk in particular? If caring can be defined by what significant steps people have taken to change their lifestyles and protect animals, then Canadians, along with the rest of the world, don't care beyond popular rhetoric. We still hunt, fish, trap and lock-up animals for our enjoyment. Our dietary preferences take precedent over even the starving human masses. We think nothing of financing rodeos, aquariums, circuses and horse drawn carriages. This we do despite knowing that these activities counter the wellbeing of the animals forced to indulge in our flights of self indulgence. I guess that in these cases, the word "caring" has been re-defined along with other popular terminology to mean whatever suits us.

Will future generations miss the elephant, black rhino or polar bear more than we do the mastodon or woolly mammoth? Are we counting on the genetic reproduction of lost species as we would a rabbit pulled from a party hat?

Playing the game

I have often argued that those above the age of 40 who support the more conservative wildlife organizations do so for three basic reasons. Firstly as a matter of popular image, secondly, because these well endowed outfits do not ask them to change their lifestyles in any significant way (business as usual) and thirdly, they issue tax receipts.

Conversely, groups that actively advocate for change do not always supply a tax receipt, and they do encourage their members to lead through example. This they do by suggesting a more coherent environmental lifestyle (OUCH!). This does not go over well with the "all talk no walk" legions.

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Tears shed and clones, an illusion

As for the genetic reproduction for species already lost, this only cheapens the value of life by removing all responsibility. It will pose increased pressure on those remaining species vying for the few supportive habitats that the clones will require. This of course is conditional depending on why we're bringing lost species back in the first instance.

Despite having already lost 60% of the world's known wildlife in the past 50 years, I remain optimistic that individuals, deeply committed to change, will influence others through their leadership and lay the groundwork for the development of a new way of thinking. This new perspective must not be predicated on the premise that you can both protect and exploit animals simultaneously anymore than a lawyer can both prosecute and defend a suspect at the same trial. We must avoid any mindset mired in the 50s, one that preaches while standing beneath the latest trophy bagged on safari.

Though certainly not a defeatist, I'm a realist when it comes to the long-term survival of wildlife. Our conditioning, one that dictates that we should never be satisfied with what we have, isn't always based on motivation as much as it is on greed.

The challenges we are ignoring

Survival of any species has nothing to do with strength, dominance or even numbers. It has everything to do with that species' ability to adapt to rapid environmental changes. Unfortunately, non-human animals and plants haven't that ability. No one is arguing the importance of jobs, but unlike our addiction to fossil fuels, sustainable opportunities that benefit both man and the environment are more important.

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Where does this leave us?

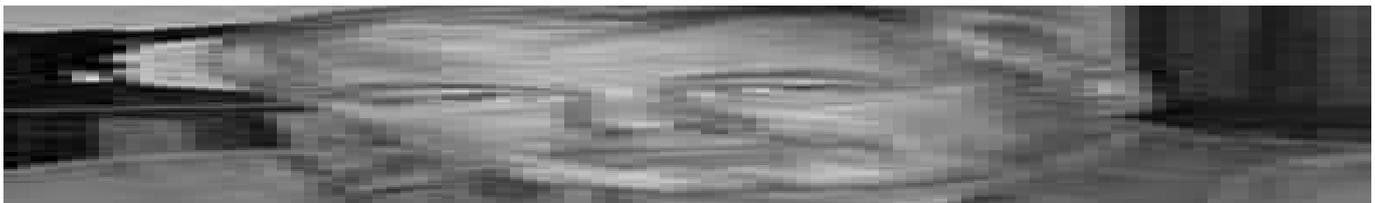
The world will go on as it has for some 90 million years. Species will disappear and mankind will adapt to environmental changes by dismissing extinction as inevitable collateral damage. As to economic justification for our greed, it would be wise to remember that amassing stock market profits is much like raking leaves into a pile. It takes only a slight autumn breeze and an apparent economic windfall is scattered into the mists of time – much like mankind's legacy!

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Georges R. Dupras has advocated for animals for over fifty years. A member of the International Association for Bear Research and Management (IBA), a Director of the Animal Alliance of Canada (AAC), Quebec Representative of Zoocheck Canada and past Board member of the Canadian SPCA, he worked on the original Save the Seal campaign in 1966 that culminated in the founding of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) in 1969. Georges Dupras has published two books, *Values in Conflict* and the eBook *Ethics, a Human Condition*, and currently lives in Montreal, Canada.

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