

# BC SOLUTIONS

News & Commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' BC Office | FEBRUARY 2022



## A torrent of questions: Was low staffing to blame for lack of early warnings by BC's River Forecast Centre prior to 2021's record floods?

BY BEN PARFITT

The BC government was clearly warned over a decade ago that staffing levels at its River Forecast Centre (RFC) were far below those at similar operations in Oregon and Alberta and that more than a doubling of employees was needed to provide effective flood-risk assessment and early notice to communities in harm's way.

The warning is contained in a 38-page report written by Jim Mattison, a former senior-ranking member of the provincial ministry of environment, who for years was BC's water comptroller. Mattison's report is noted in an investigation by the BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which was released late last year after record rainfall resulted in devastating flooding in Abbotsford, Merritt, Princeton and several isolated First Nation communities.

In addition to raising questions about the RFC's chronic understaffing, my investigation focused on the lack of accurate and timely warnings by RFC staff in the days and hours leading up to the historic floods, which devastated farming operations, destroyed and extensively damaged homes, and wiped out critical infrastructure. A former head of the RFC, Allan Chapman, provided key information for the investigation, noting the significant delay in warnings issued by the RFC compared to its counterpart in the US Pacific Northwest, where heavy →

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rains and flooding also occurred.

Mattison submitted his report to the provincial government in November 2010, after he had left government to become a consultant. The Mattison report noted that the RFC's staffing was 5.5 employees. He said at a minimum seven more people needed to be working at the centre if it was going to be able to provide effective early warnings to communities threatened by floods. The agency's employee levels were not increased, however, and remain unchanged to this day.

Not long after my investigation last year, a pair of farmers in the Sumas Prairie area near Abbotsford filed a proposed class action suit against provincial and local authorities, alleging that they failed to provide sufficient warning of the flooding that lay ahead.

/// Mattison's recommendations haven't been acted on for more than 10 years. There are still only five employees working directly on river forecasting to this day, managed by one other person who also has responsibility for flood safety.

Mattison's report noted that in Alberta, a province nearly 300,000 square kilometres smaller than BC, the number of people working at its Edmonton-based river forecast centre was 24. In the US Pacific Northwest, which is 200,000 square kilometres smaller than BC, its Portland, Oregon-based river forecast centre employed 16 people.

In BC, by comparison, the figure was 5.5 full-time employees, of which only two were actually tasked with the critical work of forecasting what might happen to rivers in the province in response to heavy rainfall events or rapidly melting snowpacks.

"The 5 forecasters working in Portland are supported by 5

hydrologists; the 6 forecasters in Edmonton are supported by 6 forecast technologists and 5 river engineers and technologists. BC has 2 forecasters with a single engineer," Mattison noted in his report.

He went on to recommend that "at least 6 and preferably more" river forecasters were needed in BC given the complexity of the province's terrain and its expansive river systems. That would mean hiring at least four more forecasters and then hiring at least another three support staff to assist those forecasters in their work. Hiring seven more staff, Mattison emphasized, "is the bare minimum needed to meet the criteria of adequate and timely forecasts in a time of changing climate and rapid growth."

Mattison's report stressed that more than doubling the River Forecast Centre's staff was critical given climate change. "Rain intensities will be higher and durations will be longer," he warned, adding, "community flood protection will require serious review with more floodplain planning, better flood protection works and floodproofing requirements behind dikes. Most importantly, there will be more emergency response planning and greater call for earlier and more accurate warnings of flood events."

But Mattison's recommendations have not been acted on for more than 10 years. There are still only five employees working directly on river forecasting to this day, managed by one other person who also has responsibility for flood safety. We need to immediately bump up that 5.5 staffing level. The River Forecast Centre is supposed to be there to provide critical early warnings that set in motion provincial emergency response plans that help communities in harm's way. The earlier and more accurate those warnings are, the more effectively coordinated provincial and local responses can be as rivers approach flood stage.

*Ben Parfitt is the CCPA-BC's resource policy analyst. Cover photograph via the Province of BC / Flickr.*

# Celebrating 25 years of research for hope and change

BY SHANNON DAUB

Welcome to a special edition of BC Solutions magazine. 2022 marks the CCPA-BC Office's 25th anniversary! We're kicking it off with this longer issue featuring our latest work and an exciting upcoming event with Dr. Cornel West—the great philosopher, activist and democratic intellectual—who we're delighted to co-host with the BC Black History Awareness Society. (See details on back cover, including how to register for this free virtual event.)



One of the (many) themes we'll explore in conversation with Dr. West is hope. Amid escalating crises and long-standing injustices, Dr. West calls on us to understand hope not as wishful thinking or blind optimism—but as something we embody through action and struggle. In a recent Vox interview, he said, "Hope is about everybody trying to contribute to the push, the motion, the momentum, the movement for something bigger than them that's better. The good, the beautiful. If you're not in motion, you're a spectator."

How does this understanding of hope relate to what we do here at the CCPA-BC?

As a research institute, we spend much of our time in the realms of research and ideas, of evidence and policy critique. But not simply for its own sake. We do this work to help catalyze root-cause social change and transformative policy-making by governments. We do it alongside progressive movements, to support struggles for social, economic and environmental justice. We do it to expose and challenge the dominant ideas and systems that favour the powerful, and to change what our society considers possible and desirable. We balance our efforts

between the day-to-day fray of public debates and longer-term original research. We have a longstanding commitment to challenging conventional economics and economic inequality—and we are committed to expanding our focus and relationships to engage meaningfully in struggles against colonialism, white supremacy and racial injustice.

"Hope is about everybody trying to contribute to the push, the motion, the momentum, the movement for something bigger than them that's better. The good, the beautiful. If you're not in motion, you're a spectator."

—Dr. Cornel West

You'll see these key elements reflected throughout these pages. From Indigenous jurisdiction and Land Back, to the climate emergency, gendered violence, wealth taxes and the living wage...solutions and hope abound. And of course, this is just a sample—the past year also saw us shine a light on the skyrocketing wealth of Canada's billionaires, analyze the highly unequal economic impacts of COVID-19 on different groups of workers (especially based on gender and race), develop a major new partnership focused on precarity, and demonstrate how the provincial government could lead a massive expansion of affordable non-market and co-op housing that pays for itself over time. And much more is already underway as we head into our 25th anniversary year.

I invite you as CCPA-BC supporters to join us in celebrating this milestone anniversary, and on behalf of our board and staff—thank you for making this vital work possible.

*Shannon Daub is the director of the CCPA-BC Office.*







# BC is subsidizing logging for pulp and pellet mills

BY BEN PARFITT

By almost any measure, the wood pellet industry is a highly problematic industrial enterprise, especially a 16-year-old government subsidy program known as “crediting.”

First, it generates very few jobs. Of the 13 wood pellet facilities operating in British Columbia, roughly only 300 mill workers are directly employed. Second, it has a huge and growing appetite for wood fibre. In 15 years, consumption has increased roughly fourfold. That means many old-growth trees are logged with the express purpose of turning them directly into wood pellets. Third, the earth’s dangerously overheating atmosphere cares not one iota whether greenhouse gas emissions come from combusting natural gas, oil, coal or wood.

No amount of greenwashing by Drax—the UK thermal electricity producer that owns half of BC’s wood pellet mills and burns 10 million tons of wood pellets annually—changes that inconvenient truth. So why is the BC government subsidizing this growing industry, especially now with BC’s forestry sector in dire straits, churning through the last vestiges of the province’s old-growth forests?

Unbeknownst to most British Columbians, successive governments have allowed untold millions of logs to be delivered to pellet mills through a subsidy program known as “crediting.” The program came into effect in 2006 and was ostensibly designed to incentivize logging companies to pick up and deliver “lower-quality” logs and woody debris from clear-cuts to local pellet mills and pulp mills. Until then, much of that allegedly poor wood was rejected by the major forest companies and burned on site. The companies did so because all that interested them were the higher-quality logs, destined for sawmills and conversion to lumber.

For decades, this strategy worked reasonably well for sawmills and pulp mills. After logs were run through sawmills and turned into lumber, roughly half of every processed log was left over in the form of wood chips and sawdust. That waste went to pulp mills where it was converted to wood pulp and paper

products. But with the emerging wood pellet industry clamouring for the same waste wood that was the pulp mills' bread and butter, there was no longer enough to go around. What the pellet industry needed, and by default what the pulp industry also needed because of increased competition, was logs.

The credit program aimed to solve that problem. Companies that delivered "lower-quality" logs to pellet and pulp mills were allowed to exclude that wood from the tallies used by the provincial government to limit their total logging activity—limits that ostensibly ensure that logging rates are sustainable. Those lower-quality deliveries generated credits, providing the companies with more trees to log.

/// The earth's dangerously overheating atmosphere cares not one iota whether greenhouse gas emissions come from combusting natural gas, oil, coal or wood.

And that is what happened over and over again for 16 years. How many millions of additional trees fell as a result? The CCPA tried to find out, but the government declined to provide an answer saying it would only consider doing so after receiving a Freedom of Information request, a process that may eventually yield an answer but not for many months or years down the road.

To date, the government has said almost nothing about the subsidy program. But what it did say recently in *Modernizing Forest Policy in British Columbia*—a document outlining its new "intentions" for BC's forests—was that the program could put future "timber supplies" at risk.

In a recent speech in the Legislature, Prince George-Mackenzie MLA Mike Morris warned that BC's vast interior region is effectively out of harvestable trees. And, if what does remain is logged, spawning salmon, endangered species and community watersheds will be relegated to the trash heap. It may be possible to avoid that grim reality. But concerted government action will be required to do so.

In addition to announcing its decision to potentially defer logging of some of the province's remaining old-growth forests, the government must:

- End these subsidies.
- Fully account for the additional trees that have fallen since the credit scheme began.
- Firmly say no to more pellet mills in BC until an independent review is conducted by a professional with no ties to the industry. This review must quantify exactly how much forest the pellet industry is consuming each year.

*Ben Parfitt is the resource policy analyst with the CCPA-BC.*

## CCPA in the news in 2021

2021 was a big year for the CCPA-BC in the news headlines. From the need for permanent paid sick days to the state of the oil and gas sector in Canada, the work of staff and research associates was featured extensively in mainstream media coverage and commentary.

Alex Hemingway's work on billionaire wealth and the need for a wealth tax was both our most-read blog post and an in-demand topic for reporters. Alex did dozens of interviews with radio and TV, while his research was also cited in online news articles across the country.

Marc Lee's extensive work on the climate file remained a popular subject in the media as well, including a look at why net-zero policies may in fact be a dangerous distraction from the emissions reductions we should be focusing on instead. And Ben Parfitt's investigative research on water, forestry, the impacts of the LNG industry in BC, not to mention the devastating floods late last year, resulted in hundreds of news stories around the province.

Iglika Ivanova's look at the unequal impacts of the pandemic on workers, particularly on front-line workers who are disproportionately racialized women, also gained traction with journalists around the province.

Corporate Mapping Project research was covered across the country—like Donald Gutstein's report on the role of Canadian banks in financing fossil fuels, along with a report looking at fossil fuel investments by Canada's largest public pension plans.

We know it's not enough to come up with robust solutions to the challenges we face as a society—we must also share those ideas so they can take hold and help shift the public conversation. We appreciate the hard work of our communications team and research staff in doing just that!



# LNG exports will doom BC's emissions reduction goals

BY DAVID HUGHES

When the provincial government announced its CleanBC Roadmap to 2030 on October 25, conspicuously absent was any mention of BC's LNG export aspirations, which will increase emissions and likely doom any chance of meeting BC's emissions reduction targets.



In order to meet the feed gas requirements of the LNG Canada project slated for completion in 2025, gas production is projected to increase 76 per cent, according to the Canada Energy Regulator's most conservative forecast. This will add substantial new emissions that were not addressed in the CleanBC Roadmap. Instead of reducing emissions from 2007 levels as required, the LNG Canada project will increase oil and gas sector emissions by 49 per cent by 2050.

With LNG Canada, even if all other sectors of BC's economy met the CleanBC Roadmap targets, total emissions would be down only 58 per cent by 2050, instead of the required 80 per cent. In 2050, the 16.5 million tonnes of emissions from the oil and gas sector alone would exceed BC's total allowable carbon budget of 13.2 million tonnes. Meeting the Roadmap's targets with the LNG Canada project would mean even more drastic cuts in other sectors.

The BC government claims that LNG exports will reduce global emissions by displacing coal burning in places like China. In fact, due to the much higher climate impact of methane in the early years after release compared to carbon dioxide, LNG-powered plants in China would have higher emissions than coal over their first few decades of life. The Roadmap pledges to significantly reduce methane emissions but without a plan for

how it would be accomplished.

Government emissions reduction ambitions have a history of failure: BC's 2008 climate action plan stated emissions would be down 33 per cent from 2007 levels by 2020—instead they are *up* 4 per cent—and BC emissions are up 6 per cent since the Paris Agreement was signed in 2016.

Government claims of a revenue bonanza from LNG exports are also contradicted by the hundreds of millions it provided as incentives for LNG and industry as well as the decline in government revenues from royalties and taxes over the past two decades despite increased production.

BC has most of what is left of Canada's low-cost gas, and what remains would best be used to help fill our domestic energy needs. Gas can provide a valuable backup for intermittent renewables, as well as a source of high-grade heat; exporting it as fast as possible for questionable climate benefits makes no sense.

BC's 2008 climate action plan stated emissions would be down 33 per cent from 2007 levels by 2020—instead they are *up* 4 per cent.

It's not surprising that LNG isn't even mentioned in BC's CleanBC Roadmap to 2030 given its impact on the province's emissions reduction targets. Canadians deserve viable strategies that provide long-term energy and climate security—not ill-conceived resource extraction projects for illusory gains represented by LNG exports.

*David Hughes is an earth scientist who has worked in the energy industry for more than 40 years. He heads Global Sustainability Research and is a research associate with the CCPA-BC.*

# Updated CleanBC plan falls short on industrial emissions

BY MARC LEE

In the wake of negotiations in Glasgow to push forward global climate action, and a year of floods, fires and other extreme weather, it is clear that rich countries and jurisdictions like BC are not doing enough to cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The province's updated CleanBC climate plan does not align with the urgency demanded by climate scientists. The BC Climate Emergency Campaign (of which the CCPA-BC is a part) is calling for a 60 per cent reduction in GHG emissions by 2030—compared to the province's current target of 40 per cent and 100 per cent by 2040 (all below 2007 levels).

Even on its own limited terms, there's good reason to be skeptical of the BC government's claim that the province will now exceed its 2030 GHG target. There are indeed some positive steps forward in the CleanBC update. The timeline for zero-emission new buildings has been advanced from 2032 to 2030. In transportation there are accelerated requirements for zero-emission vehicles (90 per cent zero-emission cars by 2030, 100 per cent by 2035) and improvements in the low-carbon fuel standard. The province will cap emissions for natural gas utilities, and it will match the federal minimum carbon price of \$170 per tonne by 2030.

But in the crucial area of industrial emissions, which constitute a third of the provincial total, commitments are vague. BC has taken a light hand to date out of concerns that climate policy will affect "competitiveness" and thus lead to the loss of economic activity and jobs. Currently, a portion of BC carbon taxes paid by industry is rebated to companies that meet certain GHG intensity markers, and another portion is put into a fund to support emission reduction projects proposed by industry.

/// The reality is that growing oil and gas production is baked into the BC plan.

The BC government is now seeking to align its industrial emissions policies with the federal government by 2023. In the federal large emitters carbon pricing regime, big polluters may only pay pennies on the dollar when compared to households. Aligning with the federal government could also provide another loophole for industry through the proposed federal GHG offset system, which would allow those large emitters to buy offsets in lieu of paying carbon taxes.



It's hard to know whether these moves will shift the needle on industrial emissions. Civil society won a small victory in pressing the government for sectoral emissions reduction targets, but they feel like the same old policy in BC of setting a target and not having a plan to meet it.

The reality is that growing oil and gas production is baked into the BC plan. LNG Canada will open its doors in 2025 and its Kitimat facility will become the largest point-source emitter in the province. The BC government has not said a clear "no" to new LNG plants and continues to subsidize fracking operations in the northeast.

A climate emergency mindset would mean taking meaningful action to challenge the oil and gas industry in BC, and the failure to do so is perhaps the biggest hole in BC's climate plan.

*Marc Lee is a senior economist at the CCPA-BC.*



These articles are part of the Corporate Mapping Project, a research and public engagement project investigating the power of the fossil fuel industry in Western Canada, led by the University of Victoria, the CCPA's BC and Saskatchewan offices and the Parkland Institute. This research is supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

# Five lessons from BC's horrific wildfire season

BY MARC LEE

In BC, climate change is no longer abstract. The late-June heat dome event—which claimed 500–600 lives—and the wildfires that followed confirm that climate change is a clear and present danger that's not going away soon.

By October, some 867,000 hectares of land had burned, making 2021 one of BC's worst ever wildfire seasons. The record is 1.35 million hectares burned in 2018. Prior to 2000, wildfires did not happen at this scale.

Cooler and wetter weather by late August probably prevented 2021 from setting the new record. Here are some lessons from the 2021 wildfire season.

## 1. Climate change is costing us

Our horrific summer of wildfires points to the large and growing financial costs of climate change. The February 2021 BC Budget allocated \$136 million for firefighting. In the first quarterly update, that estimated cost was raised to \$881 million—a new record, topping \$615 million in 2018/19 and \$649 million in 2017/18.

Until the 2018 budget, the annual allocation for fighting wildfires was a mere \$64 million. After the 2017 and 2018 wildfire seasons, it was raised to \$136 million. Yet, firefighting costs have vastly exceeded \$136 million in every year but one since 2014 (in 2016 the cost was \$129 million).

Going back to 2008, the average cost of fighting fires in BC is \$301 million annually, which should be reflected in the February budget. Budgeting only one-third of the real costs in recent years is a budgetary form

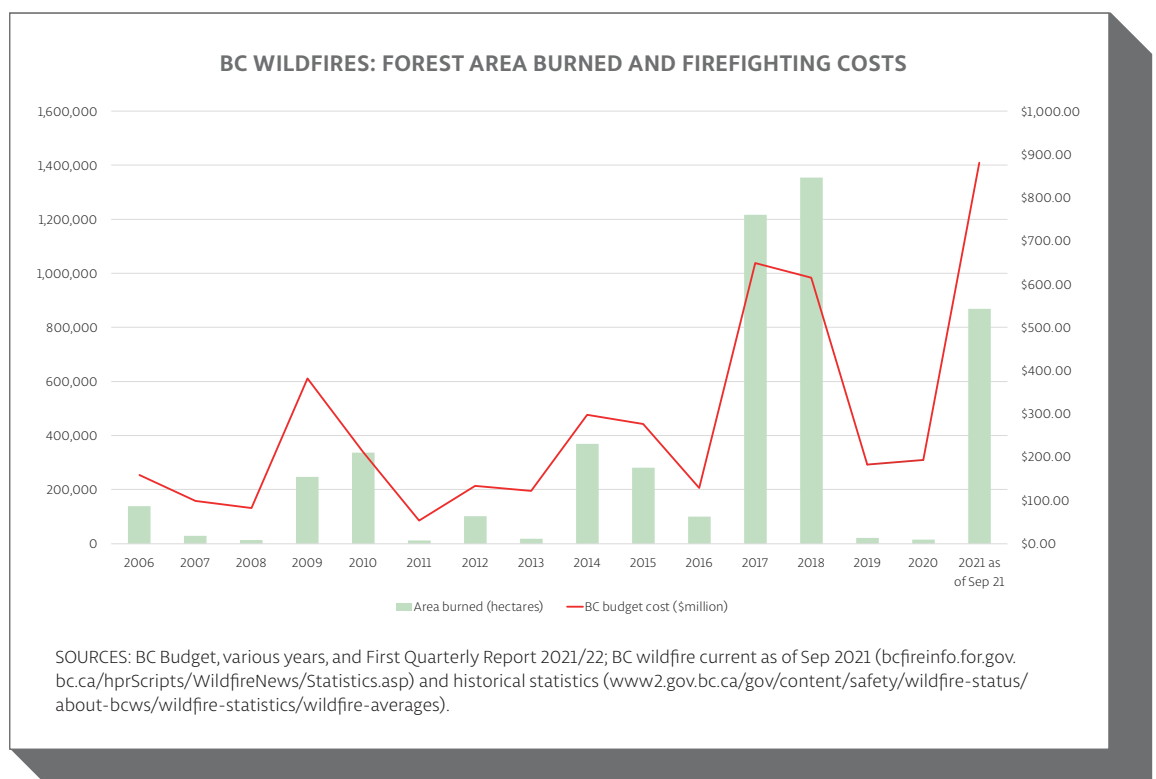
of climate change denial—a belief that extreme wildfire seasons only happen rarely, rather than being a “new normal.”

There are also personal costs of deaths and smoke-related illness that are hard to put into dollar terms (not to mention impacts on wildlife).

## 2. Wildfires are carbon bombs

Wildfires are a massive pulse of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and affect BC's overall carbon balance. We do not yet have a good estimate of emissions from the 2021 wildfires, but the 2017 wildfires released an estimated 163 million tonnes (Mt) of CO<sub>2</sub> and 200 Mt in 2018.

In comparison, BC's official greenhouse gas tally—which does not account for wildfire emissions—was 68 Mt in 2018,







meaning wildfires led to almost three times the emissions from powering our homes, vehicles and industries.

Wildfires are not “acts of God.” They represent climate change in action—the consequence of human use of fossil fuels for energy.

### **3. Wildfires show us the folly of “net-zero” strategies that emphasize tree planting and other forest offset schemes**

Both the federal and BC governments have engaged in creative carbon accounting with our forests. In the name of net-zero emissions, a new federal Greenhouse Gas Offset System is in the works to create opportunities for large industrial emitters to buy credits instead of reducing emissions.

Carbon offsets have been much criticized as snake oil—providing credits against ongoing fossil fuel emissions by paying others to reduce their emissions or protect forest lands. But forests can burn down, be killed by insects or logged for wood.

The federal government has sought to use forests as a commitment to action on climate change. For example, Canada claims 27 million tonnes of carbon towards its 2030 GHG target by alleged better stewarding of managed forest lands (forests and parks).

### **4. We need to protect old growth forests**

Summer 2021 was dominated by protests of old-growth logging at Vancouver Island’s Fairy Creek watershed. Current logging practices mean BC’s logged forests are a source of carbon emissions rather than a carbon sink. Forests are more than the carbon they store. They support intact ecosystems and wildlife habitat, and should be managed consistently with other climate actions.

To meet our Paris commitments, we must stop burning fossil fuels as quickly as possible and we need tree planting, forest conservation and better management practices to suck up excess atmospheric carbon.

BC plans to cut Northern Boreal forests for wood pellets to export as a “carbon neutral” fuel source. BC exports pellets to jurisdictions like the United Kingdom to displace coal for generating electricity. Shipping pellets made of waste wood halfway around the earth is of dubious benefit, but cutting trees is contrary to global climate action.

### **5. Other costs of climate change need to be better understood**

On the heels of a summer from hell, flooding devastated a number of communities in the Fraser Valley and the Interior. At the time of writing we are still trying to understand the full extent of damages and costs of rebuilding.

For the foreseeable future, we will have to contend with heat waves, wildfires and floods. With good planning we can be better prepared. Some 500–600 people didn’t need to die during the heat dome event, which we saw coming many days in advance. Based on heat waves in other places it was clear that seniors in homes without air conditioning, among others, were vulnerable. We failed them and need to do better next time.

We need to respond to this new normal by planning for worst-case scenarios, investing in better infrastructure and adopting adaptation plans rooted in climate justice.

*Marc Lee is a senior economist at the CCPA-BC and the author of Dangerous Distractions: Canada’s carbon emissions and the pathway to net-zero, available at [policyalternatives.ca/net-zero](http://policyalternatives.ca/net-zero).*



# Want BC to be fiscally responsible? Invest in people, communities and our future

BY ALEX HEMINGWAY

What does it mean for governments to be fiscally and economically responsible today and in an eventual post-pandemic world?

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During the initial phase of the pandemic, there was a brief period of cross-party agreement on the need for large-scale emergency public spending. This temporary agreement, however, obscured a pre-existing problem: long-term underinvestment in key public services and infrastructure—a shortfall that is economically and socially destructive.

As just one example, the recent catastrophic floods in British Columbia show the urgent need for massive public investment to strengthen and adapt our infrastructure in response to climate change.

For decades, “fiscal responsibility” has been too often equated with cutting or constraining public spending. From this view, some have insisted that even though we might like more robust social investment—think bolder action on climate change, poverty, affordable housing and child care—we can’t afford it, or we need to move slowly.

But a growing body of evidence tells us that public spending comes with major economic benefits including higher productivity and growth, spurring private investment and adding more jobs. That’s in addition to the benefits of providing immediate economic stimulus in recessions.

This evidence includes a wide range of research, such as a recent analysis by economists from the International Monetary Fund examining 17 OECD countries (including Canada) that finds public investment “raises output in both the short and long term, crowds in private investment, and reduces unemployment, with limited effect on the public debt ratio.”

An academic meta-analysis of 68 studies on the productivity of public investment arrives at a similar conclusion, finding that “public capital is undersupplied in OECD economies.”


The case for increased public investment is also clear in specific policy areas. For example, creating a universal public child care system would not only save families thousands of dollars per year, but also increase economic growth and tax revenues by enabling more women to participate in the labour force and by directly creating child care jobs.

Scarce and unaffordable housing drives up costs and limits opportunities for workers and businesses alike, and public investments to help address this problem would have large economic payoffs. Studies show that housing people who are experiencing homelessness is highly cost-effective. More broadly, failure to address poverty comes at a huge economic cost.

Public investment in mass transit boosts incomes and growth by unlocking economic benefits that emerge when many individuals and businesses are located together in cities. Research also shows that each year of delay in action on climate change comes at significant economic cost. Major public infrastructure investments are urgently needed to address both climate change adaptation and mitigation as BC's recent floods have made clearer than ever.

The health care system is another example. Expanding investment in universal public health care can bring major efficiency gains compared to maintaining the wasteful for-profit elements of health care that have gained a significant foothold in Canada. Implementing universal public pharmacare would save billions of dollars per year across the economy. In other areas like primary care, seniors' care and reducing surgical wait times, research shows that for-profit health care yields worse outcomes at higher costs than universal public approaches.

In short, chronic underinvestment in public services and infrastructure hurts our long-term economic productivity and growth and will slow down the pandemic recovery effort.



A growing body of evidence tells us that public spending comes with major economic benefits including higher productivity and growth, spurring private investment and adding more jobs.

To be sure, the BC government has made important new social and environmental investments in recent years. Still, its most-recent budget does not, in the years ahead, plan to reverse the long-term decline in provincial public spending as a share of GDP. In fact, if we returned provincial operating spending to the levels of two decades ago (as a share of GDP), we'd have billions of dollars more available each year to invest in urgent priorities.

BC needs to break out of a budgetary framework that is focused on constraining medium- and long-term public spending. We must invest more together to meet the major challenges of our time—climate change, housing, child care, poverty and toxic drugs, among others—because it is right and because failing to do so would be economically and fiscally irresponsible.

*Alex Hemingway is a senior economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.*

## Recent and upcoming CCPA-BC publications

In case you missed it, here are some recent publications from the BC Office:

### ***An Insecure Future: Canada's biggest public pensions are still banking on fossil fuels***

By Jessica Dempsey, James Rowe, Katie Reeder, Jack Vincent and Zoë Yunker  
*A Corporate Mapping Project report*  
[CORPORATEMAPPING.CA/INSECURE-FUTURE](http://CORPORATEMAPPING.CA/INSECURE-FUTURE)

### ***A Zero Waste Agenda for BC***

By Marc Lee, Belinda Li, Sue Maxwell and Tamara Shulman  
[POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/ZERO-WASTE](http://POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/ZERO-WASTE)

### ***Working for a Living Wage: Making paid work meet basic family needs in Metro Vancouver***

By Iglia Ivanova, Tanyss Knowles and Anastasia French  
[POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/LIVINGWAGE2021](http://POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/LIVINGWAGE2021)

### ***CCPA-BC Office Submission to the BC Royalty Review: Key recommendations***

By Marc Lee and Ben Parfitt  
[POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/PUBLICATIONS/REPORTS/SUBMISSION-BC-ROYALTY-REVIEW](http://POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/PUBLICATIONS/REPORTS/SUBMISSION-BC-ROYALTY-REVIEW)

And keep an eye out for these upcoming publications later this year:

- Marc Lee's research into the role that upzoning low density neighbourhoods could play in increasing housing affordability in Metro Vancouver.
- New analysis from Ben Parfitt on the challenges in water licensing in BC.
- Initial research from the Understanding Precarity in BC (UP-BC) Project—the new major partnership we're co-leading with SFU's Labour Studies Program.



# Living wage rises across BC due to cost of living, especially housing

BY ANASTASIA FRENCH

In partnership with Living Wage for Families BC, the CCPA-BC published *Working for a Living Wage: Making Paid Work Meet Basic Family Needs in Metro Vancouver* and worked with community partners to release living wages in 13 communities and regions across the province in November 2021. The report helps to educate the public about the affordability struggles of low-income workers and to encourage businesses to become certified as living wage employers.



The living wage for communities across BC increased this year as the cost of living—particularly the cost of housing—continued to rise. Family expenses in Metro Vancouver and Victoria rose by 7 and 6.8 per cent respectively, which is more than the rate of general inflation that was 4.7 per cent over this period.

Calling for employers to pay a living wage voluntarily is not a substitute for policies and investments that make life more affordable for families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the Canadian economy. It has exposed the essential role that many low-wage workers play in our lives and the dangers many face going to work to make ends meet. These workers deserve a living wage. Given that women, racialized workers and new immigrants are disproportionately represented among the lowest paid workers, lifting these workers up is also a commitment to advance equity and justice. Evidence shows that children from low-income families are less likely to do well at school, have lower

literacy levels and are more likely as adults to suffer from job insecurity, underemployment and poor health.

The challenge that many employers are facing to find workers as the economy reopens helps highlight the need for living wages. Workers have pointed out they do not want to return to jobs that do not pay enough to meet their needs while carrying increased health risks, along with added responsibilities to uphold public health orders. Many employers are finding they need to increase wages to attract and retain workers. As Canada begins to rebuild following the impacts of the pandemic, all employers should look to pay their staff and contracted workers a living wage.

The majority (97 per cent) of employers have found a benefit to becoming a certified living wage employer, reporting increased morale, lowered staff turnover and easier staff recruitment.

Calling for employers to pay a living wage voluntarily is not a substitute for policies and investments that make life more affordable for families. Recent government actions, notably significant child care investments, the new BC Child Opportunity Benefit and the elimination of MSP premiums, have helped to prevent an even greater increase in the living wage.

Several other government policies and investments are necessary to improve the living and working conditions of low-income families. These should include strengthening labour standards and further public investment in quality universal public services in child care, pharmacare, dental care and a rapid build out of more affordable housing. Together with fair wages, these are all critical elements of a just recovery.

*Anastasia French is the Living Wage for Families BC Organizer.*

Since our release of living wages this fall we have had a record number of employers sign up to become certified as Living Wage Employers. To date, 322 employers in BC have been certified, meaning they pay all direct and contract staff the living wage rate for their region.

# BC's human rights inquiry into hate incidents better late than never

BY ANGELA MARIE MACDOUGALL

A significant increase in reported hate-related incidents throughout BC since early 2020 has led the BC Human Rights Commissioner (BCOHRC) to monitor incidents of hate and white supremacy. And for likely the first time in Canada, gender-motivated hate and gender-based violence were included in the terms of reference. However, it took a global pandemic for this to happen.

Before March 2020, gender-motivated violence was a problem of global proportions. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, it became glaringly clear that the conditions created by lockdown measures would lead to increased risk for victims while creating difficult conditions for those experiencing gender-based violence to seek help.

Hate incidents are defined as “crime, most commonly violence, motivated by prejudice, bias or hatred towards a particular group of which the victim is presumed to be a member.” Hate incidents are especially harmful because the perpetrator often justifies their violence based on societal prejudice, with the hate act further normalizing violence against the victim.

The combination of misogyny and racism constitutes a potent mix that perhaps until now has been discounted as hate worthy of action.

Those outside cis-white-male communities are hyper-aware they could be targets for crime solely based on characteristics (skin colour, gender, sexual orientation) beyond their control.

Despite the gendered nature of most forms of sexualized and intimate-partner violence, this area of social and legal scholarship has remained distant from the categorization of “hate crime,” which is a glaring omission.

A national survey found that during the height of lockdown in Canada, gender-based violence was more severe and frequent with abusers' tactics becoming more violent, and with a higher risk of lethality.

Opponents of gender-based violence being considered a hate crime have been successful, citing the facts that survivors typically know their perpetrator, that violence against women is too prevalent and that domestic-violence and sexual-assault legislation already exist so there is no reason to add additional legislative layers. These are flimsy citations that overlook the nuances of intersectionality.



A national survey by the Ending Violence Association of Canada found that during the height of lockdown in Canada, gender-based violence was more severe and frequent with abusers' tactics becoming more violent, and with a higher risk of lethality.

Further compounding the impact of gender-based violence are pervasive forms of victim-blaming. Well-worn tropes persist, “What was she wearing?”, “Why doesn't she leave?”, “Why didn't she report to the police?” Many survivors, especially those who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour, won't report to the police due to victim-blaming and distrust of a system that has repeatedly let them down.

Justice for these crimes remains elusive. Out of the relatively small number of people who face prosecution, an even smaller number are convicted.

During the past three decades, three mass killings alone resulted in the deaths of numerous women across Canada. And there have been many more.

Will the inclusion of gender-based violence in BCOHRC's inquiry into hate help “erode” the patriarchal and white supremacist environment that supports the acceptance of gendered violence and perpetuates a culture of victim-blaming? I hope so.

*Angela Marie MacDougall is Executive Director of Battered Women's Support Services Association.*

# Robust wealth tax could raise \$363B over 10 years

BY ALEX HEMINGWAY

Canada is among countries where an annual wealth tax on the super-rich is increasingly popular. Our new analysis shows that a robust wealth tax in Canada could raise well over a quarter trillion dollars in revenue (cumulatively) during the next decade.



PHOTO: CHRISTOPHER PENLER / SHUTTERSTOCK

August 2021 polling by Abacus Data suggests that Canadians favour a wealth tax with 89 per cent support overall, including 83 per cent of Conservative voters.

Prior to the pandemic, wealth inequality in Canada had reached new extremes. In *Born to Win*, the CCPA's David Macdonald showed that by 2016 Canada's 87 richest families each held, on average, 4,448 times more wealth than the typical family. These families held more wealth than the bottom 12 million Canadians combined.

The focus of this analysis is on wealth taxes specifically but a suite of policies is needed to tackle extreme inequality and raise public revenue.

## Taxing extreme wealth: Room to think bigger

How much revenue could be raised by a more robust annual wealth tax higher than the 1 per cent rate proposed in the federal election?

To answer this, I modelled a moderate wealth tax with three brackets: 1 per cent on net wealth over \$10 million; 2 per cent over \$50 million; and 3 per cent over \$100 million. However, even more aggressive wealth tax rates would be needed to make a larger dent in enormous fortunes and begin to truly de-concentrate extreme wealth rather than simply slow its growth

as lower rates would do.

My revenue projection uses the High Net Worth Family Database from the Parliamentary Budget Office and is informed by the latest research from academic economists specializing in wealth taxes.

I estimate that a moderate wealth tax would raise \$363 billion over 10 years. If the tax were in place today it would raise an estimated \$28 billion in its first year, with revenues rising annually to \$46 billion by its tenth year.

For perspective, \$28 billion would pay for universal pharmacare, \$10-a-day child care and eliminating tuition fees for post-secondary education *combined*.

## Taking back wealth to fund the public good

Would Canada's super-rich flee the country to avoid a wealth tax? Some may, but a well-designed wealth tax wouldn't allow them to dodge tax obligations. For example, a steep "exit tax" should be applied to discourage flight and to recognize Canadian society's contributions to these fortunes. This is the approach taken by Bernie Sanders' and Elizabeth Warren's wealth tax proposals, which are backed by leading economic experts on wealth taxes and tax havens. A growing body of research on wealth taxes shows that key barriers to wealth taxes are not technical or economic, but political.

A growing body of research on wealth taxes shows that key barriers to wealth taxes are not technical or economic, but political.

Canada is rich enough to meet our major challenges: unaffordable child care, the climate crisis, scarce and unaffordable housing, millions living below the poverty line and major deficiencies in seniors' care, among many others.

The wealthy will fight to block such a tax policy. It is, however, not inevitable that they will succeed if people organize from below to take on the power of organized money.

*Alex Hemingway is a senior economist and the public finance analyst at the CCPA-BC.*





Matthew Norris - UNYA



Hayden King

MATTHEW NORRIS AND HAYDEN KING.

## 2021 annual gala with Hayden King

We had an excellent turnout to our virtual gala featuring Yellowhead Institute executive director Hayden King in conversation with Matthew Norris, president of the Urban Native Youth Association and a CCPA-BC steering committee member. Hayden and Matthew discussed the Land Back movement and other transformational ways Indigenous scholars and activists are challenging ongoing colonization. Mary Point of the Musqueam Nation opened with a welcome and singer-songwriter Desirée Dawson gave a moving musical performance.

Many thanks to Hayden, Matthew, Mary and Desirée for sharing their words and songs with the CCPA-BC community.

We are also grateful for the support of our presenting sponsor Vancity, patron sponsors BCGEU, BC Federation of Labour, BCTF, HSA, Unifor, VESTA, Victory Square Law Office and organizational sponsor Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC.

And most of all, thank you to all of you who were able to attend and support the BC office in our continuing work.

A recording of the conversation can be viewed at [tinyurl.com/vimeo-gala2021](https://tinyurl.com/vimeo-gala2021).



MARY POINT, MUSQUEAM NATION.



SINGER-SONGWRITER DESIRÉE DAWSON.



# Dr. Cornel West

FEBRUARY 16, 2022

5:00-6:00 pm PST

Free online event. Register at:

[POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/CORNEL-WEST](https://POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA/CORNEL-WEST)

The CCPA-BC Office and the BC Black History Awareness Society are pleased to co-present an online event with Dr. Cornel West this February.

Dr. West is an American philosopher, political activist, social critic and public intellectual. He is the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair at Union Theological Seminary. Dr. West teaches on the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as courses in Philosophy of Religion, African American Critical Thought and a wide range of subjects—including but by no means limited to the classics, philosophy, politics, cultural theory, literature and music.

Dr. West is the former Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University. Cornel West graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard in three years and obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton.

He has written 20 books and has edited 13. He is best known for his classics, *Race Matters* and *Democracy Matters*, and for his memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*. His most recent book, *Black Prophetic Fire*, offers an unflinching look at 19th and

20th-century African American leaders and their visionary legacies.

Dr. West is a frequent guest on CNN, C-Span and Democracy Now. He has a passion to communicate to a vast variety of publics in order to keep alive the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.—a legacy of telling the truth and bearing witness to love and justice.

Dr. West is a provocative thinker and a highly compelling speaker. We look forward to seeing you online at his talk.

*If you miss this free online talk, we will be sharing a recording at a later date.*

Co-presented by:



**BC Black History Awareness Society**  
OUR ROOTS RUN DEEP

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News and commentary from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' BC Office

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The CCPA-BC is located on unceded Coast Salish territory, including the lands belonging to the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətaʔ/Səlilwítlh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

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