

NEWS RELEASE

“Guide to Carbon Offsets for Canadian Businesses and Consumers” by the David Suzuki Foundation and Pembina Institute is both Deficient and Biased.

On July 16, 2009, the David Suzuki Foundation and Pembina Institute published the “Guide to Carbon Offsets for Canadian Businesses and Consumers.”

A number of established and experienced carbon offset developers and providers, environmental organizations, and leading academics have identified serious deficiencies in the process and methodology used in developing this Guide and its conclusions.

Because of these deficiencies, the Guide has failed Canadian businesses and consumers, and provided a disservice to the public as it missed a great opportunity to shine light on the essential role of offsets in the fight against climate change.

The Guide has clouded the offset purchase process by creating and applying its own subjective approach to evaluating the quality and efficacy of offsetting. The Guide is at odds with internationally recognized standards established to support scientific rigor and sound risk mitigation, and runs contrary to leading experts in the offsetting business. Because of carbon offsets’ critical role in our fight against climate change, the carbon market demands qualified analysis and rigorous investigation. Unfortunately, the Suzuki Foundation and Pembina Institute did not deliver a credible offsetting guide to Canadian consumers, businesses and organizations.

Flawed and Misrepresented Process

The Report’s characterization and ranking of offset providers appears entirely subjective, and several of the offset firms identified in the report were not interviewed at all, or interviewed only in passing the day before the report was published. Additionally, those that were overlooked, or declined to participate, were not permitted to verify the accuracy of research undertaken.

The authors acknowledged they performed no third party due diligence on either the projects or the offset providers they ranked.

In terms of transparency and process, the Guide claims (page 44) that:

“Just prior to publication, all the vendors that had been identified were sent a summary of the information to be included in their survey, along with a request for more detailed information with respect to certain aspects of their operations and practices. In addition to supplying new information, vendors also had the opportunity to confirm that previously submitted information was still accurate and to make any relevant corrections or updates.”

This statement has not been substantiated by the David Suzuki Foundation, or the Pembina Institute, nor the participants of the survey. It would appear there was no meaningful opportunity to comment on draft findings of the report, as claimed, “just prior to publication”. If this had been the case, the findings of the Guide would have been substantially different.

Interpretation of “Additionality” incorrect

The concept of “additionality” is important, as it represents a determination of whether the carbon benefits of a project would have occurred in the absence of the project, or whether in fact the project represents a non-additional, “business as usual” case.

Every credible standard requires a third party to undertake an assessment of additionality. Oddly, the Guide supports self-applied verification of additionality as being equivalent to the internationally accepted standards when applied to project types, such as renewable energy, that are favoured by the stated policies of the David Suzuki Foundation and the Pembina Institute.

Credible International Standards Organizations and criteria Ignored

The Guide dismissed criteria of internationally accepted standards of carbon reduction project excellence, including those of ISO, VCS, CAR, ACR. Of particular interest to Canadians, the Guide also rejects the standards accepted by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), such as ISO 14064-2, instead developing their own subjective criteria.

False statements about forestry based offsets

The Guide makes two entirely false generalizations about forestry projects that sequester carbon.

The first is that forest restoration projects are not additional. The Guide assumes that left alone, badly degraded landscapes, or areas that have been cleared of trees in the past, will return to their original, natural state if left alone. This is simply not the case, as any qualified forest professional will attest. Because of this incorrect premise, the Guide ranks afforestation and forest restoration projects as not additional, even though they are widely accepted to be 100% financially additional; the most rigorous test of additionality.

The Guide also assumes that forests are inherently impermanent, which is also incorrect. Once a forest ecosystem has been established, and is healthy, it can regenerate itself indefinitely. While fire or insects can disturb the natural forest, this disturbance is a natural process that the forest can recover from. Effective management and conservation practices also minimize this risk. Further, widely accepted international carbon standards have developed mechanisms for managing and insuring against permanence risk.

A misunderstanding of the important role of forests in the fight against climate change

Over 20% of global carbon emissions arise from deforestation, more than the emissions from all vehicles, aircraft and ships combined. As Dr. Faisal Moola, Director of Science with the David Suzuki Foundation has noted “Trees are the only practical way we have to remove CO2 from the atmosphere” (Canadian Business, March 16/09)

Recognizing the importance of forests in climate mitigation, the May 29th 2009 editorial in the New York Times characterized the historical anti-forest positioning of environmental groups as a “colossal blunder” which “the planet has been paying for” since the establishment of the Kyoto Protocol. The Guide perpetuates this anti-forestry “blunder” and is at odds with the expert opinions of numerous authorities on the subject, including Nobel Laureates Al Gore, Dr. Wangari Maathai, and Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, all of whom categorically support forest-based offsets and the role of forests in climate change mitigation.

These leaders are not alone. A broad range of credible environmental, scientific, and humanitarian organizations, such as Conservation International, the World Wildlife Fund (U.S.), The Nature Conservancy, the Union of Concerned Scientists, Care International have thrown their support behind the role that forests have to play in the fight against climate change. Carter Roberts, president of the American branch of the W.W.F. stated, “Unless the world has policies that recognize that value of standing trees and forest, we will have failed. In Kyoto, W.W.F. was pivotal in keeping forests out. We have changed our position.” Mark Tercek, president and CEO of The Nature Conservancy has praised forest protection as a cost-effective way of both protecting biodiversity and fighting climate change. “The idea is to make good fast progress towards US and international carbon policy that promotes forest carbon offsets to protect and restore forests...It's good for climate change, good for biodiversity, and good for economies around the world.”

Conclusion

While the undersigned applaud the initiative of the Pembina Institute and the David Suzuki Foundation in advancing the environmental agenda generally, and carbon offsetting in particular, we call upon the authors of this Guide to retract the publication while the substantive and troubling issues identified above are addressed in a meaningful manner. We the undersigned are fully prepared to support the authors in this effort.

Carbon Friendly Solutions, Inc.
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