

Actual prevention



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By Nate Smelle

Every spring since the first of three 100-year-floods hit cottage country in 2013, communities throughout North Hastings have had to hold their breath in anticipation of the melting snow and rising water. With temperatures still dipping below -20°C on a regular basis, it is fair to assume that spring flooding is likely not the number one topic of discussion around most dinner tables. That is of course unless you happen to be one of the people living in one of the nearly 20,000 homes flooded in Eastern Canada last spring. The Insurance Bureau of Canada, points out on its website that according to Catastrophe Indices and Quantification, "the spring flooding that took place in late April and May across Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick caused close to \$208 million in insured damage." In light of this information, the IBC began advocating prior to the 2019 federal election that all political parties commit to a National Action Plan on Flooding. They also took the time to remind Canadians that it is not only insurers who foot the bill for severe weather damage, because for every dollar paid out in insurance claims, the government, and therefore the taxpayer pays out much more to recover public infrastructure that is damaged by such events.

Driving the point home, the IBC's vice-president of federal affairs, Craig Stewart said "The widespread flooding this spring affected thousands of Canadians in eastern Canada. Whether it be from floods, wildfires or windstorms, the financial risk of climate change is escalating. Any political party that aims to lead Canada into the next decade should lay out explicit measures to protect Canadians from these current threats. Any climate plan without adaptation is only half a plan."

As we continue heating the planet and going about our business as usual, extreme weather events such as flooding are becoming more commonplace each year. Aside from the lip service paid to the climate crisis by all levels of government in Canada and around the globe, so far it appears that our approach in tackling it as a species is piecemeal and reactionary. Important as mitigation is in preventing loss of life and property damage, there is little coordinated effort in actual prevention between neighbouring municipalities, provinces and all levels of government.

When I say "actual prevention" I mean taking steps and making changes in our day-to-day business that actually prevents the climate crisis from worsening beyond the point of no return.

Last week I received correspondence from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Hastings-Lennox and Addington's MP and Conservative Party leadership candidate Derek Sloan regarding the likelihood of dangerously high water levels expected this spring. In his letter, originally addressed to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Sloan acknowledges "that the level of anxiety across [Hastings-Lennox and Addington] from residents, mayors and councils is at an all-time high." He also calls attention to "the serious impact facing many communities," and an "expected catastrophic level of flooding now predicted by most informed experts monitoring the situation."

If the height of the snow banks lining roadsides and parking lots in North Hastings is also any indication of what might

be in store for us over the next few months, the time to prepare for the rising water is now. With every extreme weather event that comes to pass we learn how to better mitigate the impacts of global heating. Along with this onslaught of annual disasters the climate crisis is also becoming more and more tangible.

What we do with this knowledge is up to us. But, one thing is certain ? if we are going to move beyond mere mitigation to ?actual prevention? we cannot expect to reduce global heating as long as we continue to fan the flames with fossil fuels.