

## **Spring resilience and fossil carbon taxes**

**Alan Betts** (<http://alanbetts.com/writings>)

Spring was cool until the end of April and beginning of May, when maximum temperatures rose into the mid-70s with two weeks of bright sunshine. When there are no clouds in spring, the daily range of temperature between maximum and minimum reaches 35F. Night-time temperatures fell sharply under clear skies, but only to around 40F so we got no frosts. I planted my peas, lettuce and more spinach – since we had eaten all the spinach that wintered over under glass.

Then a slow moving vortex came up from the south, with a sudden shift to clouds and rain. This coincided with the spring transition that occurs when the burst of transpiration from the leaf-out of the forests cools the local climate. With more cloud cover reflecting the sun, daytime temperatures fell and there was less cooling at night. As a result, the daily range of temperature dropped to 20 degrees. We had a couple of light frosts in mid-May – so I covered the two cherry tomatoes I had planted.

Summit meetings have been popular this spring. Since it is politically incorrect to change our way of life and slow the pace of climate change, discussions have shifted to talking about adaptation and building communities that are resilient to climate change and weather-related disasters. This is absolutely necessary after our experience with tropical storm Irene.

For two decades, despite signing the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change, our country has postponed reducing our fossil carbon emissions. The argument is that we have always dumped our emissions at no cost into the atmosphere and oceans, so it is unfair to start charging for this now.

This policy has committed the Earth to a more extreme future climate. But the future has arrived, and the costs are mounting. Society is wondering how the costs can be paid — preferably by someone else — and whether we can avoid the worst consequences with better planning.

The frame of reference at one recent summit I attended was that we must do our best with the limited resources that are available and within the political constraints. Yet the Earth is not listening to what is politically correct, nor following economic models that discount the future. Essentially by burning the fossil carbon removed from the air by plants long ago in the Carboniferous Era, we are returning the climate this century to the tropical hothouse that existed 350 million years ago.

In the dark days of the Second World War, Winston Churchill said: “It is not enough that we do our best; sometimes we must do what is necessary.” We are not close to doing what is necessary. We are not having an open and honest discussion of the need to tax fossil carbon, both as an incentive for change and to build a fund to pay for the deferred costs. We consider that our way of life has been grandfathered in, that the Earth will somehow absorb all our waste streams. We consider it acceptable to discount the future — the future of the Earth and our grandchildren.

We create the future by our collective choices. Climate change is not an Act of God — it is the future we are choosing through our policies. If we reengineer our society to be more compatible with the Earth’s natural cycles, our communities will become more resilient. Every spring the Earth bursts into life, soaking up fossil carbon dioxide. But it is not enough to absorb all our current emissions.

Plant a garden to build local resilience in our food supply. The new solar farms are a step in the right direction for our electrical supply. But we need to demand a tax on the billions that Vermont pays for fossil fuel to pay for the deferred costs of increasing severe weather, and to nudge our economic system in new directions.