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Rain Rain Go Away

Have you ever noticed that many of us do not react to an issue or problem until it impacts us personally? The reality is that we pay more attention to education issues when we have children in school; or pay more attention to cancer when someone close to us is affected. It is human nature.

That said, recently we have begun to experience climate change firsthand in Fredericton. Yes, I am talking about all of the rain in the past month or so. One of the realities of our rapidly changing climate is that many places in the world are seeing increased precipitation, while others are seeing much less.

Climate change is impacting weather patterns to create increased variability within regions and across the globe when it comes to precipitation, storms, and other occurrences of the natural world. One winter may see mountains of snow (like this past winter!); and the very next winter may be dry. The same is true for rain – some summers will be dry and others (like this one) may see our rain barrels filling up every other day.

Just last year, our city saw some of the worst flooding in decades, while on the flip side, places like Georgia, Australia and Iraq have recently experienced drought conditions of a very critical nature.

According to the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), our region may well see an increase in precipitation of 10 to 15 cm by the end of this century. Locally, this may result in a number of negative economic impacts such as potential decrease in tourism revenue, golf revenues and increased flooding relief claims. These changes will impact the livelihood of some New Brunswick residents and business.

But as much as we may be complaining about the rain, please keep the following in mind. I recently read an article about the dwindling water level of the Euphrates River in Iraq. A number of issues have contributed to this problem, including mismanagement of the resource over many years, coupled with reduced rainfall amounts. The resulting potential civil unrest and conflict could dwarf the existing violence in Iraq. To quote a colleague from Harvard University about the likely conflict over water versus oil: “You ain’t seen nothing yet”.

We need to water to survive. Though there is a fine balance - too much in one place at one time is costly and deadly (flooding, disease), and not enough can have similar negative outcomes (drought, famine, wars).

The mismanagement of local resources, like the Euphrates River, should give us a warning sign. It is sad to think that the river that was so critical to the birth of civilization will soon be ‘running on empty’. And mismanagement of natural resources on a global scale may take us all to the same place if we are not careful.

Now, back to the nuisance of summer rains! My family recently spent four nights at a campground in Maine, it rained for three days. It's a good thing they had cable. The campground and adjacent golf course certainly lost revenue due to all of the rain. But what struck me was the number of things the campground could do to lower their carbon footprint. The amount of waste generated from using plastic cutlery and disposable plates in the dining areas (this was a fancy campground); and the lack of attention paid to energy efficiency and water consumption was striking. Here we were, 'going back to nature', and contributing to the very problem that is causing more climate related incidents. Talk about chasing our collective tail.

The moral of the story is this: the choices we make in our everyday lives will impact the planet for years to come, and in fact, each day we are affecting the world in which our children and grandchildren will live when they are older. The term 'think globally, act locally' has never been more important than it is today, and it will become even more important as each day, month and year go by.

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