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Reprint from Volume 21 Number 11

June 4, 2009

Washington State Governor initiates climate action

Faced with a state legislature that refused to pass legislation authorizing a cap-&-trade system for greenhouse gases, Governor Chris Gregoire of Washington State has made an Executive Order directing state agencies to take specific actions to reduce GHG emissions, increase transportation and fuel-conservation options for state residents, and to protect water supplies and coastal areas.

Specifically, the Order directs all state agencies to:

- continue work on the Western Climate Initiative (WCI) with six other states and four Canadian provinces (including BC) to develop a regional emissions reduction program design;
 - work with the US federal government to help design a national emissions reduction program that is strong, and reflects state priorities;
 - develop emissions reduction strategies and industry emissions benchmarks to meet the state's 2020 reduction targets;
 - work with TransAlta to reduce emissions from the company's coal-fired power plant near Centralia by more than half (this is the state's only coal-fired generating plant.);
 - create financial incentives for the forestry industry to ensure that the state has enough trees to capture carbon;
 - work on low-carbon fuel standards to reduce carbon emissions from the transportation sector;
 - with other west coast states and the private sector, develop and implement a west coast highway accessible to electric and alternative fuel vehicles;
 - address rising sea levels and the risks to water supplies;
- and
- increase transit options, such as buses, light rail, and ride share programs.

All this action is in advance of expected US federal government legislation to establish a national cap-&-trade system. President Obama set a target for such a system in his budget, but the resultant *Waxman-Markey American Clean Energy and Security Act* has been, and is still, subject to a great deal of negotiation in the House of Representatives, the Senate, and a number of their committees, and its eventual shape is still uncertain. Obama had proposed that all greenhouse gas allowances be auctioned, yielding many billions of dollars to finance other government initiatives, but congress has moved

to allocate many of these allowances at no cost to major energy producers.

Meanwhile, several coalitions of states, and some provinces (including the WCI), have proposed cap-&-trade systems, and these will undoubtedly have some influence on the eventual federal design. Canada's federal government appears to be waiting to see what the US adopts before joining in or mandating an equivalent Canadian program.

British Columbia is almost unique on the continent in having implemented a carbon tax (Quebec has a very much weaker version). BC has also passed enabling legislation for cap-&-trade.

The initiatives proposed by Gregoire can be achieved by administrative action, and would not require new legislation. ☞

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This article was published (June 4, 2009) in 'Island Tides'. 'Island Tides' is an independent, regional newspaper distributing 17,500 print copies throughout the Gulf Islands and the Canadian Strait of Georgia from Victoria to Campbell River to Howe Sound.

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