



Plant Trees to Slow Climate Change – Never a Better Time Than Today **By Rob Keen, CEO of Forest Recovery Canada and Forests Ontario**

Vast, beautiful, healthy forests define Canada, making up 38 per cent of our land, but they are under attack. Wildfires engulf huge swaths of woodlands in British Columbia; smoke from similar infernos in north-west Ontario reaches as far as Toronto, Windsor and Ottawa. We know a main cause of this conflagration: climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) - Sixth Assessment Report, released August 9th, leaves no room for debate on why the Earth is warming, but does leave some room for hope: we can still restore Earth's health.

Soon after the IPCC report appeared, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau set in motion a federal election. As Canadians prepare to vote on September 20th, the climate crisis is one of the top issues in many polls. Voters want to hear what every political party will do to fight climate change.

Study upon study has told us we can cool the planet through a very Canadian activity: planting trees.

Our forests and urban trees solve many problems. Record high temperatures have sparked heat warnings in Montreal; trees provide shade, cooling neighbourhoods by 5°C. When we plant trees, we turn scorched lands into healthy forests. Trees absorb water, helping to prevent floods. Forests filter and purify the water we drink. And of course, forests sequester the carbon that we've released into the atmosphere that is dangerously warming our Earth.

The organizations I lead, Forest Recovery Canada and Forests Ontario, know how to grow new forests. We have planted nearly as many trees as there are Canadians – more than 36 million trees so far. A recent study by Natural Resources Canada shows that over 50 years, the trees we have planted will sequester the equivalent of the carbon emitted by a million cars driving from Montreal to Vancouver – and back.

Canadians are good at planting trees. Ours is the rare organization that fully integrates all the components of tree planting. We carefully select and gather the best seeds of native trees, grow seedlings, then plant the right tree in the right spot, and keep track of new forests' progress with the precision of an accountant. We work to put the right trees in the ground with First Nations, private landowners, non-profits, volunteers, governments and the corporate sector.

Each tree needs years from seed to seedling, from planting to healthy forest. To grow healthy forests that future-proof Canada and Earth requires long-term political commitment.

We, like many Canadians, are keen to learn how each party in this 44th election is incorporating tree planting as a nature-based component of their climate change response plan.