

CANADA WEST FOUNDATION POWERING UP FOR THE FUTURE INITIATIVE

Green Expectations

WESTERN CANADIAN OPINIONS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

APRIL 2011 Robert Roach, Senior Researcher & Director of the West in Canada Project

Canada West
FOUNDATION

40
years



Powering Up for the Future Initiative

The Powering Up for the Future Initiative focuses on public policy challenges at the interface of the economy, the environment and energy. Powering Up is driving informed discussion on policy choices shaping our energy future, for the benefit of western Canada and all Canadians.

Funding support for the survey component of the Powering Up for the Future Initiative was provided by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

This report is part of the Attitudes to Energy and Environment project under Canada West Foundation's Powering Up for the Future Initiative. The report was prepared by Canada West Foundation's Senior Researcher and Director of the West in Canada Project Robert Roach. The author wishes to thank the respondents for taking the time to be part of the survey and Environics Research Group Vice President-Public Affairs Keith Neuman for his expert management of the survey process. The opinions expressed in this document are those of the author only and are not necessarily those of Canada West Foundation's Board of Directors, advisors or funders. Permission to use or reproduce this report is granted for personal or classroom use without fee and without formal request provided that it is properly cited. Copies may not be made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage. This report is available for download from Canada West Foundation's website (www.cwf.ca).

© 2011 Canada West Foundation
ISBN 1-897423-80-6

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion



FOREWORD BY BARRY WORBETS

We Can Do Better

I've worked at the interface of business and the environment for over 30 years and I can say with pride that we have come a long way from where we started. Industry, citizens, and governments have worked together to ensure that environmental considerations are an integral part of the economy. There have been successes and failures along the way, but overall, we have been moving in the right direction.

With that said, we know that we can, and must, do better. During my first tenure with the Canada West Foundation, we focused on popularizing the concept of natural capital. The goal was to break down the false division between the environment and the economy that sees them as two opposing forces and highlight how the full range of environmental assets contributes to our economic well-being and our quality of life.

Viewed from the old perspective, a forest's value was based entirely on how much the timber would fetch in the market. The natural capital approach understands this, but also includes the value of the ecological goods and services the forest provides, its recreational and aesthetic value, and how it is linked to other natural and working landscapes. The "assets" are seen as part of a system that is subject to cumulative effects rather than as mere commodities to be harvested.

At the Canada West Foundation, we are proud of our Natural Capital Initiative because it not only helped kick start Alberta's Land-Use Framework, but more importantly, helped the western provinces dedicate more of their resources to water and land policy. I have had the pleasure of attending the Foundation's Honourable James A. Richardson Roundtables in the four western provinces this spring, and I am excited by the new and innovative work being done by industry academia and government on water stewardship—what a change in the last decade!

That's the good news. The bad news is that we are only part way along this new path.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by Province

Environmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

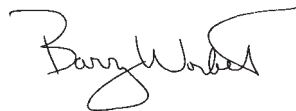
→ 4. Conclusion

As the results of the survey summarized in this report show, western Canadians see a lot of room for improvement when it comes to how government, businesses and themselves as consumers address environmental issues. The public is bang on; we need to keep at what's working and we need to find new ways of addressing what's not.

This task is at the heart of a new mandate I have from the Canada West Foundation as its first Max Bell Senior Fellow. My job is to consult far and wide to identify opportunities for improving environmental decision-making and environmental performance.

This survey documents what many of us know: our environmental decision-making processes are in need of reform; evidence-based debates are too often hijacked by narrow thinking; and we have to do a better job of recognizing what the trade-offs are rather than digging the trenches deeper and not budging.

We can do better and we will.



Barry Worbets
Max Bell Senior Fellow
Calgary, April 2011

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

I. Introduction

Canadians understand the value of a healthy environment that is not only beautiful to look at, but able to provide us with clean water, sufficient food and a host of other benefits. No one wants cities engulfed in smog, rivers full of toxic muck or wild areas turned into barren wastes. We don't always take the actions that keep our environment healthy, but the *idea* has great appeal. As a result, governments, businesses, nonprofits and individuals have responded by trying to reduce environmental impacts and increase environmental sustainability.

These attempts rub up against other human actions such as riding in cars and buses that produce smog, using bodies of water as handy places to get rid of stuff, and cutting down, paving over, tramping through or otherwise disturbing wild areas. We dig up, burn, reshape, ship and throw out stuff and this is integral to our economy and the modern comforts to which we have become accustomed. Hence, there is often a tension between protecting the environment and using it. Many argue that we can reconcile the two, but the reality is that we are not there yet.

It is easy enough to stop pouring toxic waste directly into rivers—the benefits are plain to see and the cost of stopping the practice is relatively low. It is not, however, so easy to stop relying on large-scale agriculture to feed the world or to do without all the stuff that producers produce and consumers consume.

All of this applies in spades to the issue of climate change (a.k.a. global warming). Ice ages and warm periods have shaped and reshaped life and geography on earth and will do so again. What has come to the fore in recent years is the fear that humankind's burning of fossil fuels will cause a shift in climate that is preventable and, if left unchecked, detrimental to our environment and its ability to sustain us. Some argue that stopping the flow of greenhouse gases that is believed to be causing a new cycle of climate change is paramount and trumps economic concerns because the devastation that will result will make the economic costs seem inconsequential. Others believe that we have—if not lots, then enough—time to make gradual adjustments such that we can tackle the problem while minimizing the economic disruption. Still others say that greenhouse gases are not causing climate change at all so there is no reason to make radical changes. Despite this, the public policy momentum is in favour of taking some sort of action.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by ProvinceEnvironmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

Environmental challenges other than greenhouse gases remain, but we now have climate change to contend with as well. Policy-makers are trying to balance the perceived need for change with the perceived costs of that change. Because these policy choices are being made in the name of the public interest, it is essential to check in with the public to get its take on things.

As part of this checking in process, the Canada West Foundation commissioned a survey of western Canadians that included a series of questions about the environment and the public policies aimed at its protection.¹ The results are outlined in this report and reveal a public that is concerned about a wide range of environmental issues, unimpressed by how governments, businesses and themselves have addressed environmental challenges, and broadly supportive of action on climate change either right away or once the economy recovers.

¹ The survey also included a series of question regarding energy production and use. These results are discussed in a companion report entitled *Reading the Meter: Western Canadian Opinions on Energy Issues*.

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

2. Methodology

The survey field work was conducted by Environics Research Group Limited as part of its November 2010 Canadian Environmental Barometer and a special survey of western Canadians commissioned by the Canada West Foundation. The results from the Canadian Environmental Barometer are used with the permission of Environics Research Group Limited.

The Canadian Environmental Barometer was conducted by telephone between November 24 and December 2, 2010 and the results are based on a representative sample of 2,008 Canadians 18 years and older. The results are accurate for the full sample to within +/-2.2 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

The special survey commissioned by the Foundation was conducted by telephone between November 24 and December 8, 2010. The results are based on a representative sample of 1,202 western Canadians (300 per province) 18 years and older. The results are accurate for the full sample +/-2.8 percentage points 19 times out of 20. Data are weighted by province, age and gender.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by Province

Environmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Western Canadians, like Canadians in general, are concerned about a broad array of public policy issues. Reading about government deficits raises the issue of responsible public spending; seeing someone pushing a cart full of bottles highlights the ongoing challenges of homelessness and poverty; visiting a loved one in the hospital triggers thoughts about public health care. The list goes on. How heavy any one issue weighs on the minds of Canadians depends on a complex set of factors.

In order to gauge where the specific issue of *environmental protection* currently sits relative to other key issues, we asked survey respondents about seven public policy hot potatoes: improving the health care system; creating jobs; reducing poverty and homelessness; reducing crime; reducing taxes for working Canadians; reducing government deficits; and protecting the environment. Respondents were asked to say whether each issue was a “top priority,” “important but a lower priority,” or “not too important.”

A perennial concern—improving the health care system—stands out as a top priority among 68% of western Canadians. A 30 percentage point gap exists between the proportion of western Canadians who see improving the health care system as a top priority and the proportion who see reducing government deficits as a top priority (38% say that reducing deficits is a top priority).

Keep in mind here that the question does not limit the number of issues that can be ranked as top priorities. Indeed, all seven topics could have been identified as top priorities by all respondents. The fact that this didn't happen indicates that some issues are of greater importance to a larger segment of the public than others. This does not mean that western Canadians who do not consider an issue to be a top priority think that it is unimportant, as the percentage of respondents who say these issues are “not too important” is small in all cases.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental Issues by Province

Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers

Who do you trust?

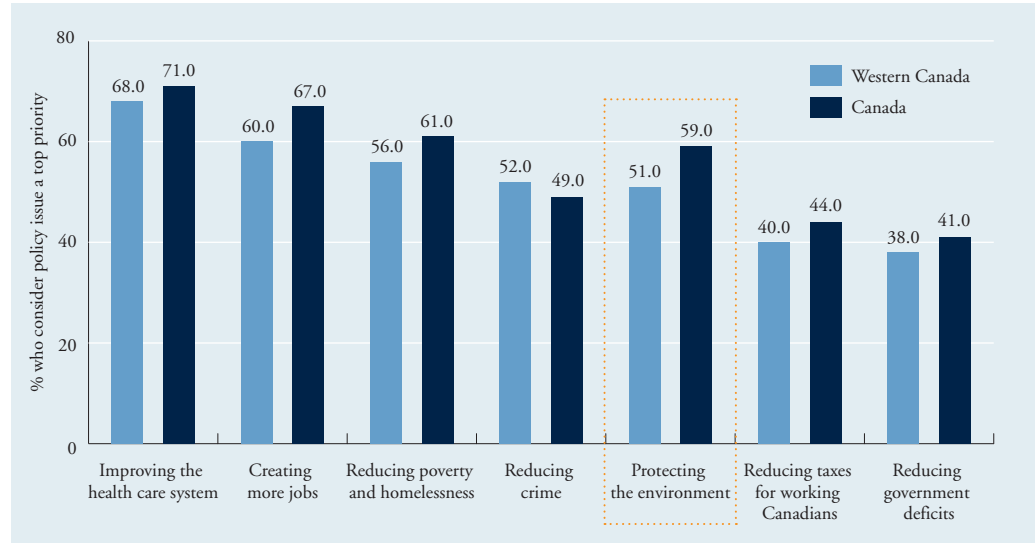
Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

FIGURE 1: ISSUE IS A “TOP POLICY PRIORITY” – WESTERN CANADA AND CANADA (%)



Survey question: I'd like to ask you some questions about priorities for the country this year. As I read from a list, tell me if you think the issue that I read should be a top priority, important but lower priority, or is not too important?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation, National results are from Environics Research Group Limited's Canadian Environmental Barometer and are used with permission.

Protecting the environment is considered to be a top priority by just over half (51%) of western Canadians. This is less than the percentage of westerners who rank improving the health care system, creating more jobs, and reducing poverty and homelessness as top priorities, but higher than the percentage who consider reducing taxes and deficits top priorities. (Protecting the environment and reducing crime are separated by only one percentage point among western Canadians.) The percentage of westerners who rank protecting the environment as a top priority is lower than the national average of 59%. It is down somewhat from March 2010 when it was sitting at 54%.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by ProvinceEnvironmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

FIGURE 2: ISSUE IS A “TOP POLICY PRIORITY” – WESTERN PROVINCES (%)

	BC	AB	SK	MB
Improving the health care system	66	73	64	61
Creating more jobs	64	58	53	58
Reducing poverty and homelessness	58	52	53	64
Reducing crime	50	48	55	64
Protecting the environment	52	47	57	54
Reducing taxes for working Canadians	43	37	40	38
Reducing government deficits	41	36	29	38

Survey question: I'd like to ask you some questions about priorities for the country this year. As I read from a list, tell me if you think the issue that I read should be a top priority, important but lower priority, or is not too important?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation.

When the results are broken down by province, it is clear that certain issues are more pressing in some provinces than in others. For instance, improving the health care system is particularly important in Alberta, with 73% citing this as a top priority compared to 61% in Manitoba. Similarly, a larger percentage of British Columbians rank creating jobs as a top priority than in the other western provinces and Manitobans are more likely to see reducing poverty, homelessness and crime as top priorities. Saskatchewan residents are the least likely to rank reducing government deficits as a top priority at 29% compared to a high of 41% in BC.

Looking specifically at the issue of protecting the environment, there is a continuum within the West with Saskatchewanians most likely to cite this as a top priority (57%) and Albertans least likely (47%). This does not mean that Albertans do not care about the environment, but it does mean that fewer of them see it as a *top priority* than in the other western provinces. We also don't know why people decide not to rank an issue as a top priority. It could be because they feel it is already being addressed or because they feel other issues take precedence at the moment. Either way, it is clear that protecting the environment resonates with a large number of western Canadians.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by Province

Environmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

Interestingly, younger people (age 18-29) and older people (age 60+) are somewhat more likely to rate protecting the environment as a top priority (59% and 58% respectively) than are those 30-34 (44%) and those 45-59 (46%). Those who make less than \$20,000 a year are more likely than those who make more than \$80,000 to rate protecting the environment as a top priority (67% and 43% respectively).

Most Important Environmental Issues by Province

When asked what they think is the most important environmental issue facing their province, western Canadians identify a wide range of issues from water and air to climate change and waste management. Many of the issues raised by respondents relate in some way to how we produce and use energy (e.g., air pollution and car pollution are linked to the burning of fossil fuels as is climate change). Indeed, when the issues with a connection to energy are lumped together, we find that over a third of western Canadians see energy-related environmental issues as the most important environmental challenge facing their province.

Looking at the individual provinces, Alberta stands out as a place where people are particularly concerned about energy-related environmental issues with 50% identifying an energy issue as the top environmental concern and 32% pointing to the oil sands, the oil industry more generally or fossil fuels as the chief source of environmental challenges in Alberta.

Alberta and Saskatchewan have a lack of hydro-electric options so they both rely heavily on coal-fired power plants. It is not, however, clear if respondents were considering coal-fired power plants when they mentioned things like fossil fuels and electric power generation. Interestingly, less than 1% of Albertans cite “energy/electric power generation/consumption” as the most important issue whereas 6% of Saskatchewanians consider this the number one environmental issue facing their province.

We cannot say from the results if the concern expressed regarding oil and other fossil fuels is a reaction to external pressure (i.e., “if we don’t clean up the oil sands, the world will shun us”), rooted in a desire to ensure the health of the environment, or both. Regardless of the rationale, Albertans, and to a lesser degree Saskatchewanians, see a strong link between their fossil fuel endowments and pressing environmental challenges.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by ProvinceEnvironmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

FIGURE 3: MOST IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE FACING PROVINCE (%)

	BC	AB	SK	MB	West
Energy-related issues:					
Oil sands, fossil fuels, oil industry	4	32	13	–	14
Air quality, air pollution, smog	12	9	10	6	10
Climate change, global warming, greenhouse gases, carbon emissions	8	6	6	6	7
Car pollution	3	3	1	3	3
Energy/electric power generation/ consumption	1	–	6	3	1
Nuclear energy/waste	–	–	2	–	–
Total for energy-related issues	28	50	38	18	35
Non-energy-related issues:					
Water quality, drinking water	10	10	5	31	12
Waste management, garbage dumps, incinerators	5	6	5	10	6
Natural resources	7	4	5	4	6
Pine beetle, forestry	8	2	1	–	4
Loss/damage to trees/vegetation, habitat depletion	5	2	1	3	3
Industrial pollution	3	2	1	1	2
Ground contamination, erosion	2	1	–	3	1
Over-development, too much building, too many people	2	–	–	–	1
Agriculture, pesticides, cattle	–	1	1	1	1
Toxic chemicals	1	–	–	–	–
Flooding	–	–	–	2	–
Other	7	5	2	6	6
Don't know	19	14	38	20	19

Survey question: What would you say is the most important environmental issue facing [province] today?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation, Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Note: The "Total for energy-related issues" line item is an approximation for illustration purposes and may contain responses that were not intended to be related to energy (e.g., air pollution caused by farming) and may miss responses that were intended to relate to energy (e.g., water quality concerns raised by oil sands tailings ponds). – indicates less than 1%.

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

Despite a barrage of media attention, “climate change” (a.k.a. global warming, greenhouse gas emissions, carbon emissions) does not emerge as a dominant category of concern with just 7% of westerners naming it as the most important environmental problem facing their province. Of course, concern about climate change may be embedded in other categories (e.g., fossil fuels, car pollution) and, as may be the case with all of the issues, it may still be a concern for many western Canadians, just not the *most important* one. Nonetheless, it is revealing that the dominant environmental buzzwords of the last few years do not receive more “most important” mentions.

Water quality—a longstanding environmental concern—was mentioned by almost a third of Manitobans. This is likely due to ongoing concerns about the health of Lake Winnipeg and the subsequent consequences for water quality and ecosystem health in Manitoba. Awareness of the damage to BC’s forests caused by the mountain pine beetle and the economic importance of forestry to BC explain why 8% of British Columbians cited the pine beetle and forestry as the most important environmental issue while they barely register in the other provinces. (The migration of the pine beetle into Alberta may increase the importance of this issue in future surveys of Albertans.)

It is important to note that almost 1 in 5 western Canadians do not feel comfortable identifying the most important environmental issues facing their province and select “don’t know” as their response. The “don’t knows” range from a high of 38% of Saskatchewanians to a low of 14% of Albertans. This suggests that a large section of the public does not feel informed enough to make this judgment. This highlights the complexity of environmental issues and the need for honest brokers who can supply the public with objective information and analysis about the environment. This, along with the variety of issues that are mentioned, indicates that, as far as the public is concerned, the environment and the public policies aimed at protecting it should address a diverse set of concerns rather than focus too much on any one issue.

With that said, energy production and consumption are implicated in many of the environmental concerns mentioned by western Canadians (concerns that include, but go beyond carbon emissions). This points to the critical importance of integrating energy policy and environmental policy to ensure that the two work together to ensure both a healthy environment and a healthy energy sector.

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers

There are many players involved in protecting the environment including individuals (as consumers, as voters, as advocates, etc.), families, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and governments and their agencies. To assess how western Canadians view the environmental efforts of three key groups—consumers, governments (federal and provincial in this instance), and businesses—survey respondents were asked to rate how well each of these groups is doing to address the environmental issues for which it has responsibility. Is one group seen as the villain or is praise and blame more evenly spread?

Clearly, the public sees room for improvement across all three groups with each of the groups garnering excellent job ratings from only 2% of the public. There is, moreover, no single villain identified by the public. One might expect to see a villain given the vitriol aimed at corporations and governments by protestors/rabble-rousers at, for example, meetings of the G-8, but the results are almost the same for each group. Around a quarter of western Canadians feel that the federal government, their provincial government, industry and consumers are doing a good job on the environment, about half feel that they are doing a fair job, and about a fifth say that they are doing a poor job. As far as the public is concerned, *everyone* is to blame and could be doing a better job when it comes to environmental performance.

FIGURE 4: RATING ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE – WESTERN CANADIAN RESPONSES (%)

	Federal Government	Provincial Government	Canadian Businesses and Industry	Canadian Consumers
Excellent job	2	2	2	2
Good job	24	27	25	22
Only fair job	51	47	48	53
Poor job	20	22	22	19
Don't know/depends	4	2	3	3

Survey question: How would you rate the efforts of each of the following in addressing the environmental issues for which they have a responsibility? Would you say the federal government, your provincial government, Canadian businesses and industry, Canadian consumers is/are doing an excellent job, a good job, an only fair job, or a poor job?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation. Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by ProvinceEnvironmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

There is modest variation across the four western provinces. However, it is worth noting that Albertans are the most likely to give the federal government an excellent/good rating (30%), followed by Saskatchewan (29%), Manitoba (26%) and finally BC (22%). Calgarians are also more likely to see the federal government in a good light than Edmontonians (36% versus 24%).

When it comes to provincial government performance, Saskatchewanians are the most likely to give an excellent or good rating at 43% compared to 31% for Albertans, 29% for Manitobans and 24% for British Columbians.

Western Canadians with a university degree are more likely to be critical of Canadian businesses and industry with only 19% giving the private sector an excellent/good rating and 32% saying it is doing a poor job. Other variations across sub-groups are minor with no clear pattern emerging.

Who do you trust?

Trust is the grease that keeps the machinery of democracy from jamming. Citizens have to trust that their governments are working in their best interests, that they understand what those interests are, and that they are at least somewhat effective at carrying out what they say they will do. If the level of trust falls too low, voter support and community cooperation will fall too low as well and the system will breakdown. The private sector also has to be trusted enough so that it can maintain its social license to operate.

Generally speaking, there is enough trust in the Canadian context for governments and businesses to operate. But who does the public trust *the most* to address environmental challenges? The survey results show that the western Canadian public is once again of differing minds. A plurality of westerners (38%) trust their provincial government the most to address the environmental challenges facing their province, 23% feel the federal government is most trustworthy, 18% trust industry the most and 13% don't trust any of them.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by ProvinceEnvironmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

FIGURE 5: WHO DO YOU TRUST MOST TO ADDRESS ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES? (%)

	BC	AB	SK	MB	West
Provincial government	34	35	55	48	38
Federal government	24	26	12	22	23
Businesses and industry	17	19	21	14	18
None	19	12	4	5	13
All equally	2	2	4	2	2
Don't know/depends	5	6	5	8	6

Survey question: Who do you trust most to address the environmental challenges facing [province]?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation. Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Looking at the results by province, the provincial government does relatively well in Saskatchewan where a majority (55%) say that they trust it the most. This is followed by just under a majority in Manitoba (48%) but only 35% in Alberta and 34% in BC. Saskatchewanians are the least likely (12%) to say that they trust Ottawa the most and Albertans are the most likely (26%).

A general sense of distrust of government and industry is highest in BC where 19% say that they do not trust the federal government, their provincial government or industry. This is followed by Alberta at 12%.

Bias in the System?

Along with the perceived effectiveness of different groups on environmental issues and where the most trust is placed, there is the public's sense of how balanced public policy is when it comes to the contest between businesses and environmental groups. Like it or not, this is the dichotomy that has formed in Canada and, although the reality is much more complex and not necessarily a dichotomy at all, it is useful to see how the public interprets the battle between development and the environment.

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

To get a sense of this, western Canadians were asked if they see a bias built into the environmental assessment process in their province. More westerners see the deck stacked in favour of business (49%) than see it stacked in favour of environmental groups (35%) but, as with so many other environmental issues and situations, one perspective does not dominate the others. However, the fact that only 4% of westerners feel that the system is fair to both sides suggests that public confidence in the environmental assessment process is low.

Within the context of this question, it does not matter whether the environmental assessment process is in fact fair or not; the point is that the public *perceives* it as slanted in favour of one group or another. This is a problem and, even if there will always be some level of suspicion, stakeholders need to work harder to counter the impression of bias so that public confidence is restored.

FIGURE 6: ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS (%)

	BC	AB	SK	MB	West
Unfairly favour business/industry	48	52	48	45	49
Unfairly favour environmental groups	38	32	31	33	35
Requirements are not slanted/fair to both sides	3	5	6	5	4
Don't know/depends	10	11	15	17	12

Survey question: Most major resource sector developments in [PROVINCE] require a government-mandated environmental assessment to identify potential environmental damages and how they might be addressed. [Some/Other] people say that the environmental assessment requirements in [PROVINCE] unfairly favour business and industry who are promoting development projects. [Some/Other] people say that the environmental assessment requirements in [PROVINCE] unfairly favour environmental groups intent on stopping development projects. Which view is closer to your own?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation. Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

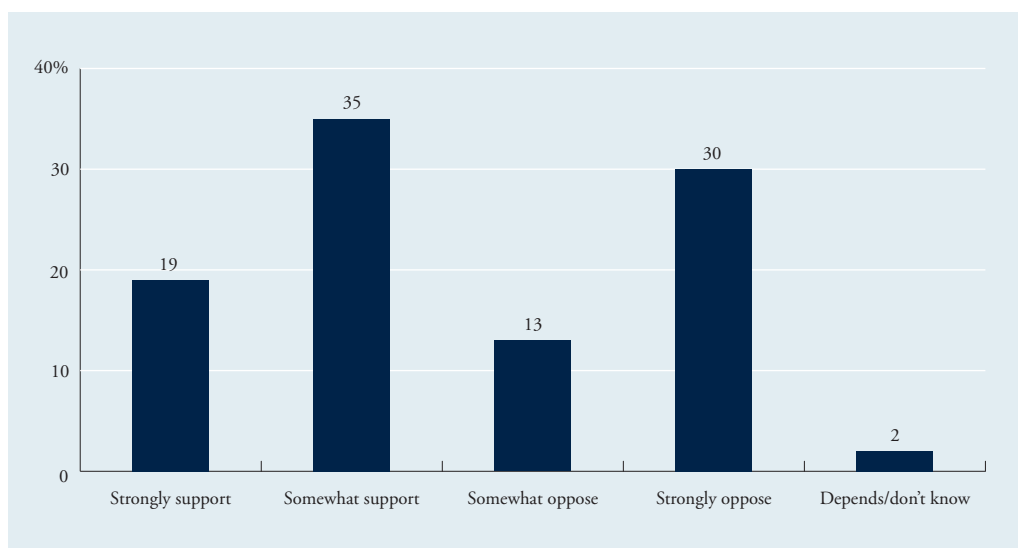
- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

BC's Carbon Tax

Debating what to do about climate change is one of the biggest environmental issues of recent years. The resulting war on carbon led the BC government to introduce a carbon tax in an effort to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions widely assumed to be causing catastrophic climate change. Introduced in 2008, the tax applies to fossil fuels such as gasoline, jet fuel and coal. As of July 1, 2010, the tax adds 4.82 cents to the cost of a litre of gasoline. The tax is revenue neutral in that the same amount raised by the tax is refunded to taxpayers in the form of tax cuts.

Survey respondents from BC were asked if they support the carbon tax.

FIGURE 7: ATTITUDE TOWARD BC'S CARBON TAX (BC RESPONDENTS ONLY) (%)



Survey question: As you may know, British Columbia now has a tax on all carbon based fuels used by consumers and businesses in the province, as a way to encourage reductions in greenhouse gas emissions generated in the province. This tax will be 4.8 cents per litre as of July 1st, and will rise to 7.2 cents per liter by the year 2012. This tax is revenue neutral which means the same amount raised through this tax each year is refunded— by law—to taxpayers in the form of lower personal income and corporate taxes. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this carbon tax for B.C.?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation. Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding. N=532.

Note: 2% of respondents answered "Depends/don't know."

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

Despite being a tax (albeit a revenue neutral one) on a widely used product, 54% of British Columbians either strongly or somewhat support the carbon tax. A significant minority (43%) either somewhat or strongly oppose the tax. Even though the supporters of the tax outnumber those against it, we once again see there are two strong camps with opposing views on the subject as opposed to a clear consensus.

Support is notably stronger among those 18-29 (63%) and those with a university degree (67%).

Climate Change Versus the Economy

Some argue that Canada can reduce its greenhouse gas emissions without harming the economy.² Others argue that economic pain of some sort is inevitable if greenhouse gas emissions are to be significantly reduced.³ This debate raises a key question: if economic pain is a by-product of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, is it worth it? Those who believe that the negative effects of climate change will devastate not just economic growth but life on earth, say yes, it is definitely worth it. Those who think that we can wait a bit longer before we address human-induced climate change, that the negative environmental effects of climate change will be less than some predict, that Canada cannot make a difference since it accounts for only a small fraction of global emissions, or that the theory of human-induced climate change is wrong, say no.

What does the western Canadian public think? On this issue there is a consensus in that 87% say that we should move ahead with actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions either right away or in a year or two when the economy is in better shape. More western Canadians favour waiting a year or two until the economy recovers (47%) than those who feel that there is no time to waste (40%); only 10% of westerners feel that nothing should be done if it harms the economy.

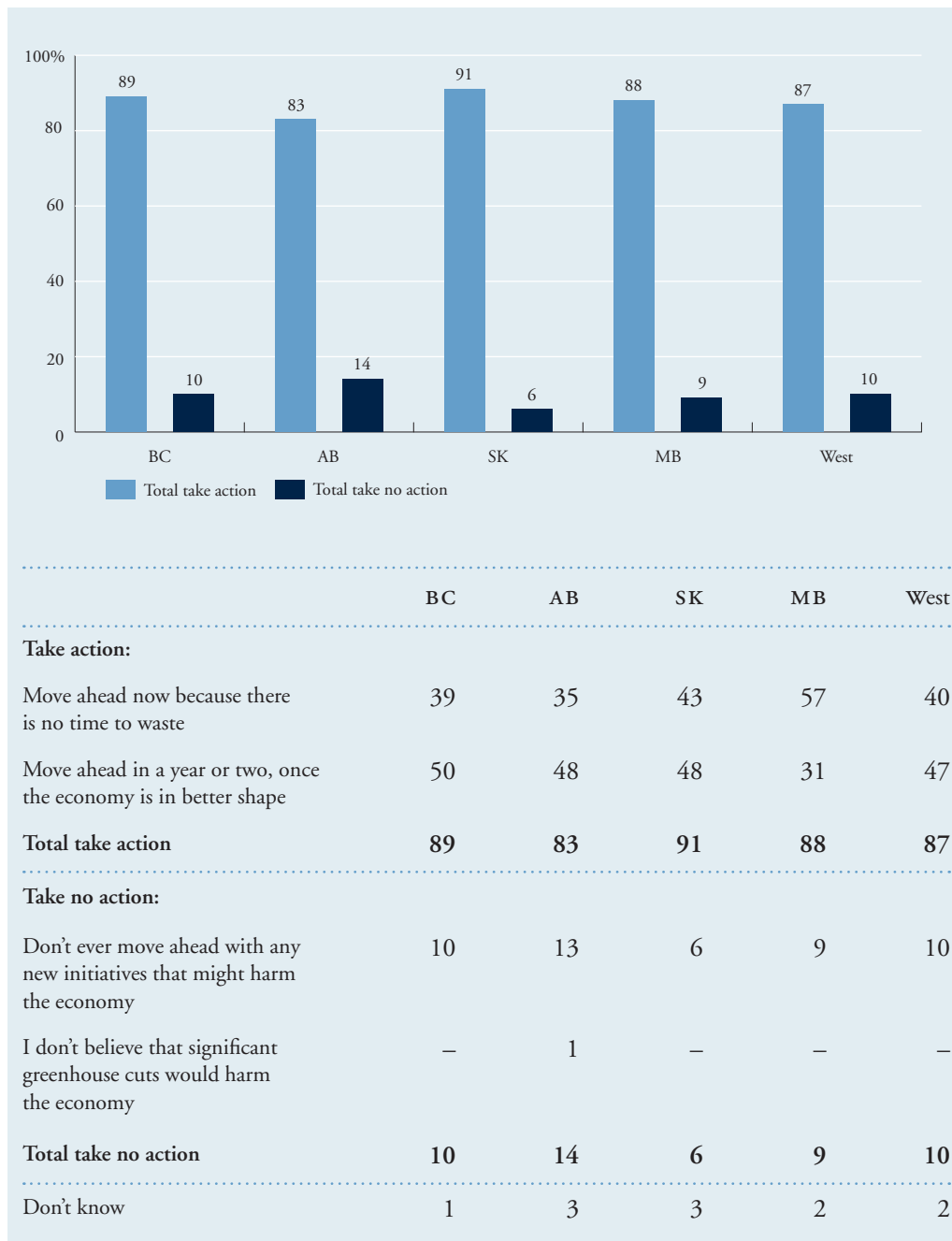
In other words, even when negative economic consequences are pointed out, most western Canadians still want to see action taken. One could argue that people may change their minds if the economic consequences came to pass and personally affected them and/or were worse than they expect, but the point is that people are willing to support action on greenhouse gases even when such action is presented as likely to damage the economy.

² See, for example, *Climate Leadership, Economic Prosperity: Final report on an economic study of greenhouse gas targets and policies for Canada* published by the David Suzuki Foundation and Pembina Institute in 2009: http://www.davidsuzuki.org/publications/downloads/2009/Climate_Leadership_Economic_Prosperty_-_Web.pdf

³ See, for example, *Look Before You Leap: Oil & Gas, the Western Canadian Economy and National Prosperity* published by the Canada West Foundation in 2010: <http://cwf.ca/pdf-docs/publications/look-before-you-leap.pdf>

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Methodology
- 3. Key Findings
 - Top Policy Priorities
 - Most Important Environmental Issues by Province
 - Environmental Performance by Government, Industry and Consumers
 - Who do you trust?
 - Bias in the System?
 - BC's Carbon Tax
 - Climate Change Versus the Economy
- 4. Conclusion

FIGURE 8: OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS (%)



Survey question: Many experts believe that making significant cuts to Canada's greenhouse gas emissions will result in economic impacts that could affect some industries more than others, and lead to job losses in some areas of the country. Given this potential outcome, which one of the following options for moving ahead with actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would you personally support?

Source: Environics Research Group Limited, special survey for the Canada West Foundation. Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

→ 1. Introduction

→ 2. Methodology

→ 3. Key Findings

Top Policy Priorities

Most Important Environmental
Issues by Province

Environmental Performance
by Government, Industry
and Consumers

Who do you trust?

Bias in the System?

BC's Carbon Tax

Climate Change Versus
the Economy

→ 4. Conclusion

Manitobans are most likely to say that they want action now because there is no time to waste (57%) and Albertans are the least likely to hold this position (35%). However, a large majority of Albertans (83%), despite having the most to lose from greenhouse gas emissions reductions, still support action either now or in a year or two.

4. Conclusion

Protecting the environment is a topic that resonates with western Canadians, but the public is currently placing more emphasis on health care, job creation and poverty reduction. No single environmental challenge emerges as a dominant concern, but many of the issues raised by survey respondents are entangled in some way with how we produce and use energy. Addressing the environmental impacts of current energy production and consumption and the ongoing search for alternatives is, and will remain, a central feature of the environmental debate and of environmental policy. You can't address the environment without also addressing the energy system.

The results also show that the public is not overly impressed with the environmental performance of government, business or even themselves as consumers. As far as the general public is concerned, there is lots of room for improvement. There is also a sense of skepticism when it comes to the balance being struck by governments between the interests of business and environmental interest groups with most western Canadians feeling the system favours either one group or the other.

The findings with regard to climate change indicate that westerners want to see action taken to reduce greenhouse gases—*even if there are economic costs*. In British Columbia where there is a carbon tax that has raised the price of gasoline and other fossil fuels in the province, there are mixed feelings with a majority supporting the tax, but only a small one. Counter to popular perception, Albertans are not more likely to vilify the federal government and, while they are a little more likely to say that action on climate change should wait until the economy recovers from the recession, over 8 in 10 want to see action taken to reduce greenhouse gases. By the same token, the results show that British Columbians are not all rabid environmentalists and, in fact, exhibit a range of opinions on environmental issues and policy.

Overall, we find a public mindset that sees the environment as a complex set of issues embedded in an even larger set of complex issues. Western Canadians hold a variety of views on the environment but are clearly on board with greater and more effective environmental protection.

Canada West Foundation is 40 years strong!

In 1971 the Canada West Foundation was established to give the people of the West—British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, a voice for their dreams, interests and concerns. In doing so, the goal was to put the West on the national agenda and be at the forefront of the most important issues and debates.

Since then, the Canada West Foundation has successfully met that goal, proving itself to be one of Canada's premier research institutes. The Canada West Foundation is the only think tank dedicated to being the objective, nonpartisan voice for issues of vital concern to western Canadians.

This year we celebrate 40 years of representing western viewpoints across Canada. We are proud of our accomplishments and know our research and commentary has improved government policy and decision making.

Today the West is in, but we won't stop there. We continue to promote important issues and debates that provide made-in-the-West solutions to national problems and keep the West thriving.

CANADA IS STRONGER WHEN THE WEST IS THRIVING!

HEAD OFFICE:

900 – 1202 Centre St. SE
Calgary, AB T2G 5A5
ph: 403-264-9535
email: cwf@cwf.ca

BC OFFICE:

810 – 1050 West Pender St.
Vancouver, BC V6E 3S7
ph: 604-646-4625

SASKATCHEWAN OFFICE:

KW Nasser Centre
256 – 3 Avenue South
Saskatoon, SK S7K 1L9
ph: 306-966-1251

MANITOBA OFFICE:

900 – One Lombard Place
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0X3
ph: 204-947-3958