

CLIMATE TALK

Hope for a Conservation Legacy

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Northern Wisconsin has abundant natural resources and self-reliant people. We enjoy and are known for our rich forests, clear streams, productive farms and Lake Superior.

Over 100 years ago, however, the land was cleared, the waters turned brown and wild fires threatened our ancestors' lives and livelihoods.

How did we get from then to now? I credit the legacies of conservation giants who were courageous enough to give us means to help ourselves. Who are some of these giants?

Nevada Senator Pittman and Virginia Congressman Robertson sponsored Pittman-Robertson Act in 1937. It created a tax on firearms and ammunition that helps fund state wildlife management programs. Many of the species that were nearly decimated by market hunters and habitat destruction are now common.

The Sport Fish Restoration Program was created when outdoor enthusiasts Congressman Dingell of Michigan and Senator Johnson of Colorado co-sponsored and passed the Sport Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act in 1950. It placed an excise tax on recreational sport fishing tackle that also goes to states for fish management.

Reforestation and forest management was embraced by federal, state and county leaders in the early 1900s. Tax reductions created by the Wisconsin Forest Managed Law gave private landowners incentives to manage their forests sustainably.

These programs, along with many others, give us the legacy to enjoy, hunt, fish and help sustain our families. Timber revenue, clean water from headwater streams and recreation are also benefits. Many businesses have grown around these successes in natural resource management.

As a resident of Northern Wisconsin, I remind myself about the importance of these opportunities created by conservation visionaries, which gave the power to the states and local people to be good stewards of the land.

I believe that climate change is our next natural resource challenge that requires visionary solutions. I thought I would not see the effects of climate change in my lifetime. Shorter and warmer winters, and two 500-year floods in three years have made me realize it's affecting us now and that these effects are universal.

The conservation efforts mentioned above, however, will not create solutions to climate change. A Carbon Fee and Dividend program would.

A bi-partisan law called the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend was recently proposed in Congress. A fee on fossil fuels at their source of production would come back to us, not as payment to states, but as payments directly to households. If it passes, every household would receive a monthly rebate directly that will grow over time. The government would only use funds for program administration.

You would choose how you spend your dividend. For some people, it will help meet their heating and other energy bills. It will provide more money in our pockets to spend on our communities, generating new jobs. It will also give us incentives to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels – the fewer \$ we spend on fossil fuels, the greater the value of our dividend.

As consumers, we will have the power to demand better fuel efficiency and cheaper clean energy opportunities such as solar. And businesses that provide clean energy will grow and create jobs.

Carbon reduction instead of carbon growth. Cleaner, healthier air. A slowing of climate change effects.

Now is the time and opportunity for our lawmakers to make courageous decisions like their predecessors did for fish and wildlife, forest conservation and management, clean air and clean water. If they do, I would regain faith that our political leaders really care about our future in Northern Wisconsin.

I support it and hope you can too.

You can learn more at: <https://energyinnovationact.org/>

Pam Dryer lives in Lincoln Township, Bayfield County with her husband Mark. She is a member of the Citizen's Climate Lobby, and loves to hunt, ski and bake bread. She is a retired fish and wildlife biologist.