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PICS News Scan – 19 October 2011

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The PICS News Scan is a weekly summary of the major climate-change related science, technology, and policy advances of direct relevance to the BC provincial and the Canadian federal governments and more generally to businesses and civil society. The News Scan focuses on cutting edge climate issues and solutions gathered by the fellows and faculty of [ISIS, a research centre at the Sauder School of Business](#), in partnership with the [Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions \(PICS\)](#). Access to some referenced articles may require a journal subscription or purchase of the article, and appropriate links are provided for this purpose. To be added to the News Scan distribution list or to provide content feedback and/or suggestions about interesting news items, please email picsscan@uvic.ca.

Complementing the News Scan is the [PICS Briefing Note Service](#). This service provides timely and concise analysis, as well as suggested policy action, on issues related broadly to BC climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Research Theme I: The low carbon emissions economy

Blow to US airlines in EU emissions fight

October 6, 2011. A preliminary ruling has been issued by the European Union (EU) high court in response to a challenge by US air carriers arguing that the EU's emissions trading scheme should not apply to non-EU states. The opinion, issued by the advocate-general for the EU Court of Justice, supports EU legislation, in part citing that the trading scheme "does not infringe the sovereignty of other states or the freedom of the high seas guaranteed under international law, and is compatible with the relevant international agreements." This does not come as a surprise to legal experts, since it was suggested earlier this summer that [US airlines faced a largely uphill battle in this case](#). [Covered in a previous news scan](#), the main claim of the US airline industry is that the regulation would contravene international law and that the cost to airlines would be akin to a charge or tax for entry or exit.

The opinion in support of the EU trading scheme and its applicability to international flights bodes well for other jurisdictions, such as BC, seeking to implement cap-and-trade schemes. One of the US' claims is that the cap-and-trade system is really a 'cap-and-tax', a politically motivated misnomer that compares emissions trading schemes to taxes and tariffs.



Opponents of cap-and-trade programs in the US and elsewhere are attempting to brand the programs as a tax to bolster opposition. The ruling in part supports the EU's and others' assertions that a cap-and-trade system is not a tax, but rather a market-based mechanism for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and other pollutants. Airline emissions are not currently included in [BC's emissions trading scheme](#), but the EU opinion and pending ruling could spark discussions about BC's share of global airline emissions.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/international-news/global-exchange/financial-times/blow-to-us-airlines-in-eu-emissions-fight/article2192942/>

New wireless and sustainability report reveals big cost savings and efficiencies for transportation, energy, agriculture and government sectors

October 11, 2011. [A recent report sponsored by a US wireless association](#) points to the role that technology, particularly wireless technology, can play in achieving significant reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and water use. The report focuses on four key areas - transportation, utilities, agriculture, and public sector services - highlighting case studies and potential scenarios that demonstrate measurable reductions in CO₂ emissions. Other reports, such as [Smart 2020: Enabling the low carbon economy in the information age](#), paint a similar picture, stressing the important role of IT in meeting aggressive GHG reduction targets.

Transportation of goods produces a significant amount of CO₂ emissions, and BC is the main port of entry in Canada for shipments from and to Asia. [Tanker traffic is a focus of the US-based Carbon War Room](#); a website at www.shippingefficiency.org provides efficiency ratings on over 60,000 ships. Earlier this summer, a number of maritime countries [agreed on emissions reductions aimed at the shipping industry](#), and BC also maintains a [website on how to reduce land transportation emissions](#). However, the use of technology to achieve reductions is scarce in many cases, suggesting that a more focused effort to use IT could provide additional gains.

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/new-wireless-and-sustainability-report-reveals-big-cost-savings-and-efficiencies-for-transportation-energy-agriculture-and-government-sectors-2011-10-11>

Research Theme II: Sustainable communities

Deep thinking about the future of food

October 12, 2011. Environmentalists increasingly worry about the ecological damage from agriculture while traditional agronomists are mainly worried about supply — and tend at times to recommend fixes that might worsen the environmental damage. A [new paper](#) looking at the future of the global food system claims that the challenge of doubling global food production in coming decades can probably be achieved, albeit with considerable difficulty. The paper argues that the conversion of forests and grasslands to agricultural use needs to stop; the environmental damage of cutting down the Amazon far exceeds the small gain in food production. Clearing tropical forests is a major source of GHG emissions and is estimated to release around 1.1 billion tonnes of carbon per year or about 12% of total anthropogenic CO₂.

The paper contends that increases in food supply should come from existing farmland by a process of intensified production in places where yields are low and by improving the efficiency of agriculture in places where yields are already high. The paper essentially argues that high yields can be attained with fewer chemicals and less water, which would not only reduce pollution but in some cases also cut costs for farmers.

As a significant food producer, Canada could play a crucial role in creating a less carbon intensive global food system. The paper recommends changes to the food system that focus on the three goals of increasing supply, reducing environmental damage and improving food security. The barriers are not primarily technical but involve a lack of political will to solve the problems, leading to low public investment in a more sustainable agriculture system. BC can play a role in reforming the Canadian food system. Section 2 of the [BC Agricultural Plan](#) focuses on meeting environmental and climate challenges. The study outlines further recommendations, which could be integrated into future agricultural planning in BC and across Canada.

<http://green.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/12/deep-thinking-about-the-future-of-food/>

UN launches guidelines for eco-efficient and socially inclusive cities

October 10, 2011. City infrastructure planning is vital for the health of the climate, because it locks in consumption and production patterns. This is a key message from a new report entitled "[Guidelines for Developing Eco-Efficient and Socially Inclusive Infrastructure](#)", which is written by several United Nations departments, along with the [Urban Design Lab of the Earth Institute at Columbia University](#). In separate sections, the report outlines what policymakers can do, how to plan infrastructure appropriately, and it provides case studies from around the world. In addition to examples that improve sanitation and other basic infrastructure in the developing world, the report also highlights clean water, solid waste management and urban freight transport innovations in developed world cities.

BC's largest cities have the most sustainable transportation systems in Canada, according to a survey completed by the [Appleton Foundation](#) and Sauder School of Business. Provincial emissions reports indicate that the region has proportionately [high transport emissions](#); however, this is because emissions from other sources, including electricity generation, are so low. [Metro Vancouver's 2040 growth strategy](#) has sustainable, complete, and compact communities as its goal; municipal governments, who must now continue to implement this strategy, may find useful examples and inspiration in this UN report.

<http://climate-l.iisd.org/news/un-launches-guidelines-for-eco-efficient-and-socially-inclusive-cities/>

Research Theme III: Resilient ecosystems

Climate change will show which animals can take the heat

October 13, 2011. Species that can survive relatively short-term fluctuations in climate also stand a much better chance of surviving longer-term climatic shifts, according to a new study

of west-coast amphibians, [published in the journal *Ecology Letters*](#). The authors note that most predictions of species' extinction due to climate change ignore the fact that some species can survive short term fluctuations in climate better than others; they simply ask whether a given species will be able to survive in the new, resultant world. Instead, this study found that survivability of short-term climatic changes can have a dramatic impact on longer-range survival forecasts.

The techniques used in this study will be of interest to researchers forecasting the impact of different climatic paths on BC's fauna. Indeed amphibians are already a closely monitored and vulnerable class in the province. There are around [forty amphibian species in BC](#) and the [Frogwatch program](#) has been set up to track their population health. This research may help inform plans for managed relocation and support for threatened populations.

<http://news.brown.edu/pressreleases/2011/09/species>

Research Theme IV: Social mobilization

Researchers examine impact of 'green politics' on recent national elections

October 12, 2011. A [new study](#) from researchers at Stanford University says candidates' stance on climate change has translated into votes in the past two US national elections. The study suggests that votes can be gained by taking 'green' positions on climate change, while votes can be lost by taking 'non-green' positions. Democrats who took 'green' positions on climate change won much more often than did Democrats who remained silent. Republicans who took 'non-green' positions won less often than Republicans who remained silent. The researchers' analysis took into account the incumbency of some candidates and the partisan leanings of the voters. This makes a strong case for candidates of any party that saying climate change is real and supporting policies aimed at tackling the issue is a good way to woo voters.

This study runs counter to the prevailing thought in Canadian politics regarding the effectiveness of promoting 'green' policies to gain votes. Stéphane Dion's leadership of the federal Liberal Party came to an end after the 2008 election when his 'green shift' platform [failed to gain traction with voters](#). A Canadian study similar to the one conducted by Stanford researchers would be valuable in understanding why Canadians [rank the environment](#) highly in polls, but seem to forget about it on election day. A better understanding of voter habits and tendencies regarding 'green' campaign platforms may help spur further climate action in BC and Canada.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/10/111012185658.htm>



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