



PPEC Factsheet

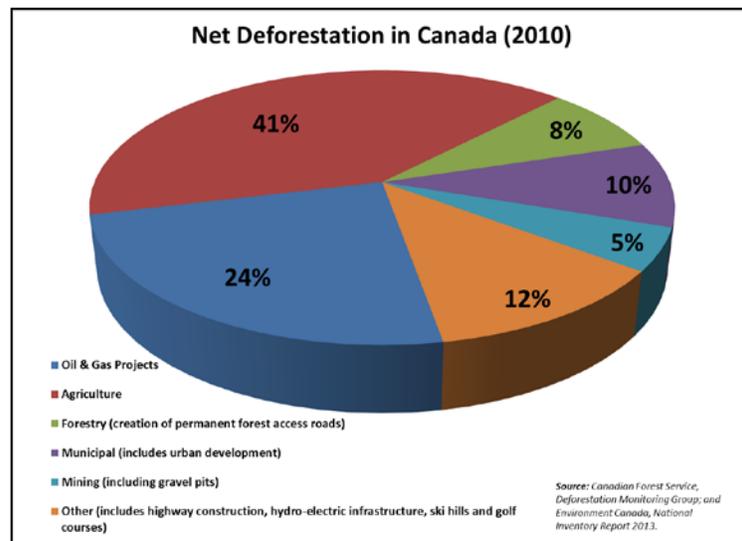
Setting the record straight on deforestation

During the recent plastic bag debate in Toronto, one individual stood up and said all you need to know about the alternative (paper bags) was deforestation. The word conjures up images of wanton and needless destruction. And if you happen to be selling or defending plastic bags, it's a potent barb to throw at your competitor.

Deforestation is clearly not a good thing since removing forest cover deprives the earth of its ability to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Trees act as a giant set of lungs: *inhaling* the carbon dioxide that people, animals and decomposing matter produce, and *exhaling* oxygen, which sustains all living organisms (including us). Forests purify water, provide erosion control, conserve soil and water, and also act as net sinks of carbon.

So deforestation¹ is to be avoided if at all possible. And in Canada, it basically is. Environment Canada estimated deforestation in Canada at 46,000 hectares of a total 348 million hectares of forest, wooded, and tree-covered land in 2010². That's just 0.01 per cent. The deforestation we all hear about is primarily of the world's *tropical* forests, not forests in Canada, and not where Canadian paper bag material is sourced.

And this is where it gets interesting. Because when you dig into the Canadian details, it turns out that the extraction of oil and gas (the raw materials from which plastics are derived) is responsible for *three times* the deforestation in Canada than the forest industry³. Not quite the image that most Canadians have. While plastic bags are a small component of both overall plastic production and the use of natural gas, *paper* bags are not responsible for any *net* deforestation because



¹ Deforestation is defined by Natural Resources Canada as "the long-term conversion of forests to other land uses. In Canada, deforestation is mainly the result of forest land being converted to use for agriculture, industrial development, resource extraction and urban expansion. Harvesting, when followed by regeneration, is not deforestation." Natural Resources Canada, [The State of Canada's Forests](#), Annual Report (2014), page 19.

² *ibid.* [The State of Canada's Forests](#), pages 6 and 19.

³ *ibid.* [The State of Canada's Forests](#), page 19. Oil and gas projects (11,100 hectares compared to the forest industry's 3,800 hectares, resulting from the creation of permanent forest access roads).



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the forest industry actively regenerates forest by replanting and seeding the equivalent of what it harvests.

So hopefully that plastic lobbyist who launched the D-word at paper bags will pause next time and check out his own industry's record on deforestation first. Somehow we doubt it. But *you* can check out these and other facts about paper bags on a new website we've put together at www.paperbagscanada.org.

In fact, the latest data from National Resources Canada indicates oil and gas projects now cause three times the net deforestation of the forest industry