



PPEC Factsheet

Setting the record straight on deforestation

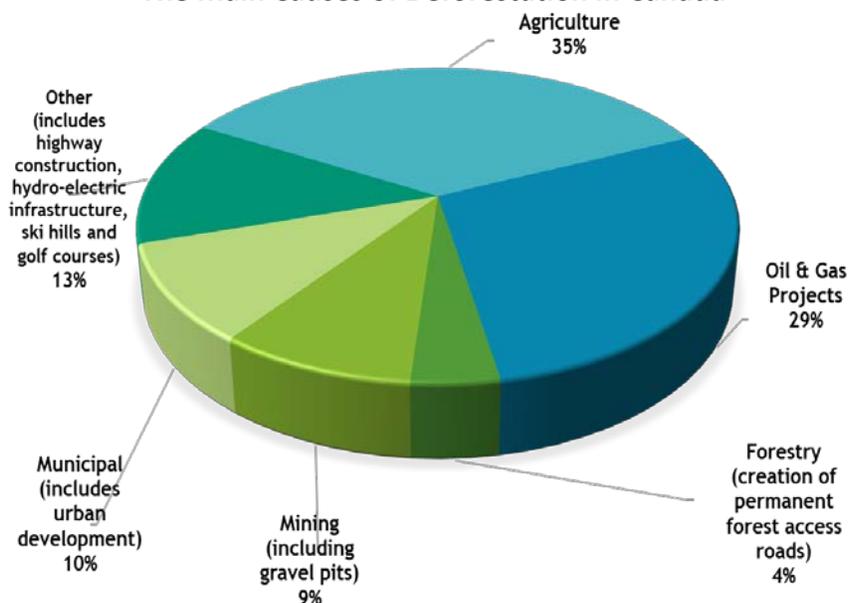
During the recent plastic bag debate in Toronto, one individual stood up and said all you need to know about the alternative (paper bags) was deforestation. The word conjures up images of wanton and needless destruction. And if you happen to be selling or defending plastic bags, it's a potent barb to 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. The National Forest Inventory estimated deforestation in Canada at 34,200 hectares of a total 347 million hectares of forest, wooded, and tree-covered land in 2014². That's 0.00985 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 [*almost seven times the deforestation in Canada than the whole forest industry*](#)³. Not quite the image that most Canadians

The Main Causes of Deforestation in Canada



¹ Net Deforestation in Canada (2014)

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 [The State of Canada's Forests](#), 2016, page 20.

³ *ibid.* [The State of Canada's Forests](#), 2016, page 20. Oil and gas projects (10,000 hectares compared to the forest industry's 1,500 hectares, resulting from the creation of permanent forest access roads).



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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 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 website we've put together at www.paperbagscanada.org.