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EDITORIAL

Emissions for sale

Psst! Wanna buy a ton of carbon emissions?

The Adirondack Council has come up with ingenious way for the public to get involved in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. For \$25, you can "purchase" the equivalent of three tons of carbon dioxide from polluting power plants. In exchange, you will receive an inscribed certificate from the council -- complete with moose emblem -- certifying that "your" emissions never will be spewed into the environment.

Today is the next quarterly auction by the RGGI, in which power plants bid for pollution "allowances" that keep them in business. RGGI's goal is to lower power-plant emissions in the 10-state compact area -- from Maine to Maryland -- by 10 percent in 2018. With a shrinking number of allowances each year, prices are sure to rise, increasing the incentive to curb pollution.

The Adirondack Council's goal is to reduce the supply of allowances even further, speeding up the timetable and protecting the flora and fauna of the Adirondacks. Power plant operators aren't thrilled, but RGGI's chief administrator reportedly likes the idea, and thinks it could spur public support for the federal version, familiarly known as "cap-and-trade."

Since the first auction last September, allowances have brought in some \$120 million, which has gone to New York's Energy Research and Development Authority. NYSERDA uses the money to support clean and efficient energy projects.

By the way, your \$25 to the Adirondack Council is tax-deductible, and goes to help the council buy more allowances.

The Adirondack Council's John Sheehan says his group plans to purchase 2,000 more allowances at today's online auction, bringing its total to date to 7,000 tons. With millions of allowances in circulation, doesn't this praiseworthy initiative by the council amount to little more than a publicity stunt? "We like to think of it as a symbolic gesture," Sheehan says.

To be part of this initiative, go to the Adirondack Council's Web site; or call 518 432-1770 for more information.