

THE IDEA OF CARBON TITHING

The idea behind Carbon Tithing is simple: The planet is broken, and we each bear a personal responsibility to help repair the damage we each have personally caused.

When Port Townsend Quakers recognized in early 2016 that the government was unlikely to impose a carbon tax anytime soon, we realized that our support for a carbon tax was rooted in a sense of personal responsibility, and that there was nothing stopping us from acting independently of government by contributing what we thought we should into a fund that we could then use as we saw fit to address the climate crisis. As a way to help participants decide what that contribution should be, we decided to call it a tithe—a word that has been used over millennia as that which is owed to the sacred.

But a tithe in old English is also literally a tenth part, which is a helpful guide. Some of our members at tax time have added up what they spent over the previous year for direct fossil fuel expenditures, including gas, fuel oil, and airfares, and then paid ten percent of that amount. Others have gone farther, and used carbon footprint calculators available online to more deeply investigate the impact of their lifestyles, and paid accordingly.

For those who can barely afford to put food on the table, we recognize that actions are perhaps more valuable than money, and that the act of planting a tree, creating a wetland, or composting with biochar is a perfectly valid form of carbon tithing.

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